

Love Keeps Glenda Moody on Track

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Glenda Moody helps exhausted runner out of his shoes

Washington -- Into the back door of Eastern High School, into a jiving mass of black teenagers, comes Glenda Moody, a white tornado.

"Hey, cut that out," she yells at two scuffling kids, pushing her way down the hall. "Hey, track teacher, hey track," they yell back, and are immediately enveloped, as is everyone else in proximity, in a huge Moody hug, complete with back slaps, hand slaps, kisses and sass. Glenda Moody is at home.

Upstairs on the third floor, the Eastern track team is doing what it does on all rainy days, running do\|n the endless figure eight halls, past the peeling walls, the grey lockers, the wooden doors, around and around, like trapped creatures trying to escape.

In an unofficial capacity, Glenda Moody is there to help. A dynamo, a force of nature, she roams the halls, exhorting, yelling, pushing, pushing. "C'mon you guys" she screams, pounding a bannister. "Let's get up here, c'mon, I see you, let's go, let's move. I wanna see your form, I wanna see how you're doing."

A laggard tries to sneak in, but Glenda grabs him, literally, twisting his sweatshirt and pushing him against a locker. "Where you been?" she asks. "Lifting weights" is the grinning reply. "Lifting weights, huh? You're jiving, shucking and jiving, that's what."

If there is a problem, Glenda wants to know about it. "There's something up you're not telling me. What's up, what's the deal? Is it 'something I should know?'"

When it comes to timing sprints Glenda is there with a stopwatch, yelling, prodding, and, when it's over, smiling proudly. "Whoohoo," she says. "Not a bad time. Not a bad time at all."

When people are asked about Miss Moody, the first thing they do is take a deep breath. "One doesn't hardly know what to say about Glenda," says Charlie Stout, doyen of Washington track observers. She is so -- overwhelming. Here is this very large white woman functioning as a track coach for young black men, and succeeding very well, thank you. Some people were upset.

Even Glenda's most resolute supporters admit to being nonplussed the first time they saw her in action. "She rubbed me the wrong way," says Tracy Sundlun, who now handles the technical aspects of coaching for the D.C. Striders, the track club Glenda started and runs.

"When I first met her she bothered me. I didn't know which direction she was coming from, says Maurice Peoples, who went on to be one of two Striders to go to the Olympic Games. "But that's just Glenda."

She came to Washington in 1967 at age 21 and went to work for the D.C. Department of Recreation. Her father was an All-America football player, her brothers are "God huge hunks, 6 foot 7, 230 pounds," and she herself threw the javelin, discus and shotput in college and claims a black belt in Bo Hoi, a Korean variety of karate. So turning to athletics seemed natural.

What seemed unnatural was that most of the District of Columbia's high-school-age runners had no organized competition, no place for them to go during the summer. Glenda Moody took it upon herself to end all that. With a puny nucleus of three runners she founded the D.C. Striders in 1968.

Today the membership is over 200. Says coach Brooks Johnson of Sports International, "this chick performs a fantastic service." She gets her team to major track meets across the country, gaining exposure for her runners and enhancing the chance that some college coach will like something he sees and come through with a scholarship offer. And to make sure they don't forget, Glenda sends information sheets on her boys to more than 1,000 coaches a year.

Her accomplishments include placing nine men on last year's All-America high school track team, taking the D.C. AAU meet title from the University of Maryland with a largely high school team, and, Miss Moody claims, placing 175 men into college on full, four-year athletic scholarships worth a total of close to \$1 million. All of which make her one of the most important women on the coaching side of American sports today.

Still and all, few laurels grace Glenda's door. "I'm resented very much in this city," she says. "Other coaches call me everything from slut to bitch to so and so. They have it in for me."

What do people have against Glenda? Some say it is her endless exuberance, which she does not keep hidden under a bushel, an exuberance that caused one coach to say, "she's big and obnoxious and loud in that order." Others point to her direct way of saying things, and Glenda admits "I lay things on the line, I come right to the point."

Then there are those who say she exaggerates, claims credit for runners others have influenced too, for college kids others have helped toward higher education. "Perhaps she leaps to accepting too much credit" says Tracy Sundlun, her fellow coach. "Perhaps she jumps a little overboard."

But these are quibbles, small carpings that one might think would fade away in the face of the sizable amount of good she accomplishes. Somehow, they do not.

For Glenda Moody has shaken things up good and proper. She has entered what was an exclusively black male preserve and done better than most of the regulars. She has become a kind of gadfly, reminding others what could be done. To use a phrase she applied to someone else, Glenda raises more hell than Carter has pills.

"You'll never find any of her troubles coming from the kids. Her troubles come from jealous coaches," says Sundlun. "They consider it a black world, and she isn't black. They think she's working on some kind of guilt complex or something. They can't understand it."

"It all depends on how one sees how a female should act," says Adrian Dixon who coaches the all-women D.C. Pioneers. "Very few people like to see a female curse and be outspoken. She's very boisterous, out there yelling and cursing. If a male does it it's okay. If a female does it, people look down on it." But again, this is not the whole problem. There is yet another side to Glenda Moody, apart from the yelling, the screaming, the prodding.

The side that reads spiritualist Kahlil Gibran, the side that is intensely religious and causes Maurice Peoples to say, "I don't think of her like a coach; she's a beautiful person." For Glenda Moody runs a different kind of track club than most. "It sounds corny and everything," admits Sundlun, "but she runs the club pretty much on love." Some people have found that hard to stomach.

The impetus for it comes largely from the Unification Church, which Glenda joined in 1965. She moved to Washington at its request and now lives in a church community. A Judeo-Christian based interfaith movement, it was founded by a South Korean, Sun Myung Moon, in 1954.

It aims, say its members, to create an international family of man under the fatherhood of God, and it inspired Glenda to "deeply believe in love. I believe that man is the most important and precious thing. Each man and woman and child is responsible for mankind. If the world is going to be improved, it has to start somewhere, and it might as well be with me."

She turned to the black high school kids she coaches because "I saw that these men had a drive within them, an incentive. They wanted to express themselves, to build. I respected their drive so much." The athletes, however, were not too sure what was happening.

"My first year was very negative. I almost gave it up," Glenda says. "Being white, from an all-white area I made a lot of blunders, and the kids took it kind of hard. They weren't used to a white woman hugging and kissing them. Oh brother, that was taboo, they didn't know what to do, how to react. They thought I was a phony."

But Glenda persevered. "I was persistent. If was a test of sincerity, I would lend them money, buy them things. They couldn't believe it. They would make me cry, but I kept on. Because I started loving them more than I loved myself."

"Year after year, I never changed. And they saw that, God, she's really sincere about this thing. We had a meeting once, and I laid my feelings out on the line. 'If you can't stand me,' I said, 'get the hell out of the club. I've made a lot of mistakes, but you can't say I don't really love you.'"

Jim Rudasill, who ran for the Striders and is now one of the East's top sprinters as a sophomore at Brown, adds, "The psychology was either she's crazy or she's real. And she was sober and serious enough to prove she was concerned."

Glenda Moody is a great believer in community. Her life revolves around the Unification Church commune she lives in in one of two houses the group owns in Washington. She eats her meals in the communal dining area and has only a smallish, almost monastic room on the main floor to call her own.

Beside the Department of Recreation, she used to work as a telephone switchboard operator, but now she devotes all her time to the Striders. She works without salary, the club running on contributions. The church also helps out and is not overly demanding if Glenda is late with the rent.

She runs the club, she says, like a family. "I'm a mother to 'em, I hug' em, smile, fuss a little bit, raise hell," the idea being "to show them 'man, she's enthusiastic about me, she cares.' Because I'm a woman, I can get into guys, find you their insecurities."

And she works at it all the time, sometimes even getting weepy-voiced calls in the middle of the night saying, "Oh, Miss Moody, do you think I'll ever make it?"

She doesn't coach women, she says, because usually "they're not willing to endure pain, to discipline mind and body." She is careful to be hard and professional while there is coaching and training to be done, but the softer, near-visionary side comes through when she wants it to.

Complaints crop up that her interest is too pervasive, even smothering, like a third parent. But, says sprinter Clarence Musgrove, now at Catholic University in Washington: "It's not 'run track for me and then you go home.' She cared for me as a person" the latter a phrase used by every Glenda-coached runner contacted.

Olympic alternate Maurice Peoples, perhaps Glenda's most successful protege to date, calls her the largest influence in what he's accomplished. "I used to be scared of names," he said at last summer's track and field trials at Eugene, Ore. "I had no confidence during college. But Glenda tore me down and rebuilt my mental outlook on the race. Now I'm not nervous. I have a lot of confidence in myself. These guys are beatable. They're not superhuman."

"She loves you like a child, like family," he added some months later. "She's a square woman. I really trust her."

When Glenda hears things like that she beams all over. "It's so beautiful," she says, "so exciting. The track team is like a lover to me. It's given me so much. It's so deep, so personal, I can't explain it. It's a feeling, it's a power, it's just emotion.

There's so much intensive love it's something that words can't describe. I think words would destroy the beauty. I just kind of love 'em."

There are those who sneer at these expressions of love. "She's often mistaken and misunderstood, her affection is often misjudged," says Sundlun angrily. "There are a lot of people running around Washington who only want to attack her, to cut her down, largely because she's a woman and because of her displays of emotion."