

Jo-Anne Williamson



Current club(s) where you coach

At present I'm coaching in three clubs in Cork. Ballinlough, Monkstown and St Michaels where I started in September 2020. Having been a head coach for the last 18 years, its been a breath of fresh air taking a step back and putting all my energy into the on court side of things, which I love. I also coordinate and lead a schools programme in 6 national schools in different areas of the city.

What is your background in tennis? (playing, coaching, committees etc.)

I grew up in Dublin and so represented Leinster for my junior years. I travelled to the Nick Bolletteri tennis academy in Florida aged 16 and represented Ireland in the Junior World Championships that year. It was an amazing experience and even got asked to partner Top 10 player Wayne Ferreria in mixed doubles. I've been coaching for the last 30 odd years and still play provincially (although for Munster), am a Premier grade player and have played for Ireland in the Four Nations & the team World Championships. I was due to travel to Croatia last year but Covid put a stop to that unfortunately!

What are your favourite things about tennis?

Friendship. Fun. Growth. Personal development. Exercise. Can I say all those?! Tennis gives the player all these things in abundance! I'm still close friends with the players I trained with and competed against at junior level. I love that whether I'm in a good or a bad mood, the tennis court is the place that makes everything just right! I love watching players develop their skills, learn about the game and gain a lot of confidence along the way.

How did you get into coaching?

When I had returned from the states, my coach had broken his leg so he asked me to assist him in coaching his groups, Leinster squads and individuals by hitting with them. I wasn't long discovering

that I loved it and that I was a lot better at communicating than I thought. I assumed coaching was an easy job until I saw how much goes into it. At the time I was due to return to the states on a full tennis scholarship but I enjoyed coaching so much, that I put my studies on hold for 6 months. After I'd worked and been trained by my mentor Jimmy Mc Donagh it was a no brainer to let my scholarship go, sit my coaching exams and I've haven't looked back since!

As a coach what is the most valuable lesson you have learned?

Its a hard question as I've learnt so much and I'm happy to say I'm still learning! I think that having a player centered approach to coaching is an invaluable philosophy. One size does not fit all. A lot of coaches over coach technique but I think now more so then ever, if a player can successfully play a shot in their own way and as long as it won't cause any physical injury down the line then let them do it. Also allowing the player to become involved in their own sessions, leading them to the answers not simply giving them the answer straight away. Its like the saying "Tell me and I forget, show me and I may remember, Involve me and I understand"

As a coach, what are your aspirations, and have you set any goals for the year?

I would hope to see more clubs getting on board with the "Women in Sport" campaign. Tennis Ireland and Grainne O Neill have done a great job of getting the ball rolling (sorry I couldn't resist the pun!) but there are still so few female tennis coaches. The child protection guidelines recommend both male and female coaches present where possible, which proves very difficult for a lot of clubs and with tennis becoming more popular and child protection getting more restricted – it's a must! I coach a lot of players who simply prefer a female coach and choose not to have a male coach so every club should strive to have both in place but this will only come about by promoting women in tennis and encouraging their participation. I always set objectives and I think having a mixture of short, medium and long term goals is key because you need to be flexible in how and when you achieve them. My main goal right now is getting back on the court!

Any advice for girls looking to get into coaching?

Yes! Do it! It's a common fact that females can be more empathetic. I've always asked teens (male and female) from club groups to assist in camps, mini tournaments, charity events etc. I've found over the years that having a female present gives all kids especially any nervous ones, a sense of ease. I've really enjoyed mentoring teens through the Tennis Ireland "Play and Stay" which is a great assistant course and I would recommend every girl in Transition Year in particular to do it. Tennis Ireland have waived the fee for this course at present so it's a great opportunity for girls to go and try it.

How do you or your club encourage more girls to play tennis?

In St Michaels we have a few groups that are solely made up of girls. They are all aged between 11 years and 14 years and are decent club players. They love the fun element of the coaching and as well as learning new skills, they use it for fitness and social reasons. I'd be lying if I said there weren't several TikToks per session.

I think also as a woman, it's easy for me to encourage females to play, as they can see my passion for tennis and how much I enjoy all aspects of the game. I encourage girls and women to practice and play matches together as the male and female game can differ hugely.

I'm very grateful to tennis for giving me so much in my life, friends, fun, travel far and wide, along with a career I love.

Girls rule the world now let's get lots more playing!