

Georgia TF XC Collective Interview with Coach Lee Gower

Coach Lee Gower is a member of the Georgia Track and Field and Cross Country Hall of Fame, the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association Hall of Fame, the Walton High School Hall of Fame, and then McEachern High School Hall of Fame. As you'll read below, he had varied experiences in coaching, but he spent most of his time at Walton and McEachern. His teams won a combined 10 State Cross Country and Track titles and he coached numerous State Champions.

What made you want to get into Coaching?

Coach Gower: I always knew I wanted to get into coaching, since junior high school. When I didn't pan out as a college athlete, I was asked to become a student manager and then later on became a Graduate Assistant for the track program at MTSU from 1968-73. During that time I had the opportunity to work with one of the great legends of our sport, Coach Dean Hayes. He was the track/cross country coach at MTSU for over 50 years. While working with him, I learned to love the sport.

What lessons you learned early on in your coaching career?

Coach Gower: The best lesson I learned was that you never stop learning. I attended every coaching clinic, work shop, and "Learn by doing" clinic that I could attend. I also learned that many times, listening to your fellow coaches over an adult beverage, you can learn much more about how they improved their high school athletes.

Who are some of the coaches you coached against that you always respected and admired?

Coach Gower: My high school coach Vic Varallo at East Nashville HS, Dean Hayes MTSU, Mel Rosen Auburn, Lewis Gainey UGA, Cook Holiday Winder-Barrow, Jerry Arnold Carrollton/Brookwood/Mill Creek, Karl Bostic Parkview, the entire staff at SWD (great program), Bill Sheskey Pope, just to name a few. There are so many.

What were some your favorite things about coaching?

Coach Gower: There are so many. Starting the program at Walton HS in 1975 and watching it become a factor in track and cross country, winning 4 Boy's and 3 Girl's State XC titles in the state of Georgia. Having the chance to coach at McEachern High School, bringing home 2 Women's and 1 Men's State Track title. Being able to watch the kids get better, to improve with either a personal best, school record, championship, Wall of Fame performance. Just to see them grow in the sport.

What were some of the areas that you think you improved in later in your career?

Coach Gower: Hopefully I became a better listener and was able to become more patient with my athletes.

What do you think about the state of track and field/cross country now compared to when you started coaching?

Coach Gower: I think the athletes are better prepared now than when I started 50 years ago. I see more "track" coaches now, not just someone getting a paycheck to be out there. The technical aspects of our sport have greatly influenced training, injury recovery and meet management.

Now that you are retired what comes to mind when you look back on your career?

Coach Gower: Opportunities that I was given. Working with hundreds of athletes that enjoyed and loved the sport as much as I. Traveling across the USA with teams and individual athletes to compete. Given the chance to coach on the college level, but realizing that high school track/cross country was where I belonged. Meeting and making coaching friends along the way, many of those that I still stay in touch with. For many years I was a part of the Foot Locker/Kinney National Cross Country Championships. Seeing the best XC athletes compete was a great opportunity. Being able to work on the field, performing event set up and take down, during the Olympic Trials and Olympic Games in 1996 Games in Atlanta was also a great opportunity and experience I shall never forget.

Any advice for Track and Field/Cross Country Coaches who are early in their careers?

Coach Gower: Just make the most of this opportunity to work with the young athletes. You will be greatly rewarded. As I said earlier, take the time and effort to go learn about your sport. Attend clinics, talk with coaches you respect and admire their programs, watch videos, whatever it takes to make you a better prepared coach.