

Family Affair

How many 4x100 relays teams have the anchor leg run by a 2-year-old?

That's not a typo. Molly Hendrickson is 2 years old, and she ran the final 100 meters of a relay race that could only happen at an event such as the Virginia Commonwealth Games track meet at Liberty University.

"She had a smile on her face the entire way," said Allison Hendrickson, Molly's mom. Molly might be brand new to the sport of track and field, but she knew her teammates. Her sisters Aubrey, Emily and Riley ran the other three legs. Aubrey, 8, is the oldest. Emily is 7 and Riley is 5.

"I'm very thankful for the 4x100 relay and so thankful the meet director allowed them to do that," Alison said.

Since Aubrey is still young enough that she is not classified in an age group, the family got to form a team to cap off the day. It was an event that complimented the other events. They competed in long jump, javelin, and various dashes with Molly and Riley running 50 meters, Emily ran 100 while Aubrey participated in the 400.

Allison's father, Mark Jakubowski, was as thrilled as anyone to watch the relay.

"They'll never be able to run in the 4x100 again," Jakubowski said. "That was once in a lifetime."

Jakubowski was not mere fan; he participated in four events – the discus, long jump, 100m hurdles and 50m dash. He's the catalyst that prompted Alison to bring her girls from their Northern Virginia home to take part in the Commonwealth Games.

A track athlete in high school, Jakubowski, 64, wanted to stay active once he was in the corporate world. Among a myriad of activities (boxing and power lifting are among his former pursuits), he found track were being organized for amateurs.

Mark first asked Allison to enter a meet when she was 10 years old. She agreed as long as he would also be part of it. That sparked a love in the sport that took Allison to a college scholarship as a javelin thrower at Central Michigan University.

When Allison and family moved to Virginia, Mark was quick to mention the Commonwealth Games.

“We were stationed in Okinawa until earlier this year. When we got back stateside Dad told us about the Commonwealth Games. We drove down and made a weekend out of it,” Allison said.

When the girls competed, Mark was a fan and a proud granddad. When he competed, he had a family cheering section. The entire event was more special to all three generations because of the shared experience.

“The events were all on the same day, which we liked,” Allison said. “They were all competing throughout the day. The kids got to cheer grandpa and he got to see them compete.”

Mark stays active in the track world, competing around the country. A resident of Indiana, he learned he could compete in the Commonwealth Games because Indiana does not have a State Games. Mark first competed in the Virginia event in 2017 and enjoyed the experience. He returned once again in 2019 when Virginia Amateur Sports was the host to the State Games of America.

Knowing what the event would be like, he knew Allison would love being a competitor. Recent knee surgery and being in charge of four young girls enticed her to stick to the mom role this year. Still, she got to meet other families and other competitors of all ages.

“There was another family we met who competed – a dad and two daughters,” Allison said. “It was nice to connect with them and see other families compete. That was our favorite part.”

Given the enthusiasm Mark, Allison and the girls have for track, combined with the positive experience at the recent Games, look for one three-generational family to be regular fixtures in Lynchburg each July.