

2-B Tuesday, Dec. 24, '74 DETROIT FREE PRESS

## BETTYE ROBINSON BUILDING CHARACTER

# Motor City Track Club: Labor of Love

BY NANCY WOODHULL  
*Free Press Sports Writer*

Bettye Robinson asks for no accolades, and gets none. Only a handful of people in the sprawling inner-city of Detroit know she exists. But to 120 boys and girls in the Motor City Track Club she's their coach, and the reason they are running in organized meets and not in the streets.

"I believe a lot of kids would be out robbing cars if it weren't for sports," she says. For city kids, crime sometimes is the only diversion that exists, she explains. They know nothing but the wab of alleys that weave through the city.

But Ms. Robinson set out to change that in 1967 when she organized the club which will take in any kid of any age. On a budget usually no bigger than Ms. Robinson's pocketbook, they have traveled to AAU track meets throughout the state and country.

**TO HER, SPORTS** can be a vehicle to a better life.

But Ms. Robinson differs from the traditional coach. To her, winning isn't as important as the opportunities competition offers "the kids to see other cities, to meet kids from other backgrounds, and to learn there are even poor kids in the suburbs."

She despises parents who force their kids to run so that they can relieve their own lives through their children. And she despises coaches who force kids to win so the coaches can make a name for themselves.

"I never want a kid to say that he's going to win a race for me. I explain that he has to win for himself," Ms. Robinson says. "I don't pamper the kids. Some coaches massage their runners after each race, pamper them when they collapse at the finish line. My kids get up by themselves. They have to learn that. They'll get no sympathy from me."—Bettye Robinson.

don't pamper the kids. Some coaches massage their runners after each race, pamper them when they collapse at the finish line. My kids get up by themselves. They have to learn that. They'll get no sympathy from me."

Ms. Robinson admits she has the "raggedest club around." She depends on use of poor public school facilities of which only two have all-weather tracks.

Money? The club has none. Ms. Robinson is not paid, but volunteers her time daily after teaching at the Oakman School for Crippled Children. A few dollars are donated, and parents pay for some things. But mostly it comes out of Ms. Robinson's or other coaches' pockets. Annually, Ms. Robinson dishes out \$2,000 to help cover \$40,000 in expenses.

**SOMETIMES** THE team has uniforms, and sometimes it doesn't. Ms. Robinson has purchased a discus, javelin and made a makeshift high-jump pit from foam rubber and tennis nets. High school coaches deliber-

ately forget to put away hurdles so they'll be available when Ms. Robinson's boys and girls arrive for practice.

"But lack of money never stops us from running," she says. "When we go to out-of-town meets, we usually put 10 kids in a room in sleeping bags and look for the cheapest restaurants."

And, sometimes, like at a recent out-of-state meet, the best laid inexpensive plans go awry. Reservations at an inexpensive motel were fouled up by the management, forcing the team to stay at a place out of its price range. Again, Ms. Robinson paid the freight.

**THE CLUB HAS** collected its fair share of championships, considering its budget. Linda Blakeley won the 220 and Rochelle Collins broke the national 880 record at the AAU Junior Olympics this year.

But Ms. Robinson never sets the children's sights high for national meets.

"We just can't compete with clubs who have enough money to pay good runners to race for their teams," she says.

"I guess if I knew somebody I could get some more for the kids. But who wants to spend three or four weeks begging for help. I'd rather be with the kids and spend my money. Once it's spent, I don't worry about it."

"I tell the kids that they never have to pay the money back. But one day, when they're finished with school, no matter where they are, they can pay me back by donating their time to children."



Free Press Photo by JIMMY TAFOYA

**Real champs don't need fancy uniforms at Motor City Club**

Clipped By:



liam320  
Fri, May 19, 2017