

# Jen Puiia Castonguay

Title: Student-Athlete: Track & Field

Year: 1999



Between 1995 and 1999, **Jen Puiia** established herself in the track community as one of the best runners and long jumpers in the state. Over the course of her career, she competed in a variety of individual events: 55m, 100m, 200m, 300yd, 400m, 600yd, high jump, and long jump and accumulated an astounding seven individual state championship titles and eight individual Eastern Maine Indoor Track League (EMITL) championship titles. At the time she graduated, she was widely regarded as the greatest long jumper in the history of Maine track and field.

Puiia began her track career her freshman year. After playing field hockey in the fall, she was convinced by a group of talented male runners to join the indoor track team during the winter season. Unbeknownst to her she had a level of talent that was remarkable. Although she had no experience running track, she was a gymnast in her formative years and her natural athletic ability allowed her to quickly develop into one of the top athletes on the team. From her first high school workout, when she tucked in behind the boys and ran with them, she set a standard that was incredible. Based on her workouts during that first indoor season, it was decided Puiia would begin competing in the 600 yd run. She clearly flourished in the event as she was undefeated during the regular season, won the EMITL Championship and earned the silver medal at the 1996 State Meet. Puiia also took first place in the 600 yd run at the EMITL Championships her sophomore year. When the event changed to 400m, she won that event her junior and senior years setting not only the EMITL record in the 400m but the 200m dash as well. In Puiia's 400m record setting performance at the 1999 EMITL Championship, she became the first female in Maine history to break the 60 second barrier (:59.98). She also set a state record in the 400m dash her senior year.

During her first track season, Puiia also developed into a talented high jumper, setting the school record, at that time (5' 0") and surprisingly earned second place at the Class A State Meet as a freshman. Although this was Jen's first big meet, she nonetheless established herself as one of the best in the State of Maine at a young age. She also demonstrated that when the stakes were the highest she would perform at her best, a quality she displayed throughout the rest of her track career.

The spring of her freshman year, Puiia began competing in the long jump an event in which she would fall in love and which ultimately would become her best event. She won the Eastern Regional Championship, setting a school record at 16'11". In the next four years, she would go on to establish school records in both indoor (17' 6.25") and outdoor (17' 5.25") track and set the EMITL record (17' 4.25"), as well as set the indoor state record (17' 6.25"). To put the magnitude of that indoor track state record into perspective, her state record in the long jump would stand for 12 years before it was broken. In the indoor and outdoor track seasons, Puiia won four consecutive long jump state championships during her junior and senior years.

As a result of Puiia's phenomenal performance during her senior indoor track season (EMITL records in the long jump, 200m and 400m dash, gold medals in all three events at the state meet and state records in the long jump and 400m dash), Jen Puiia was selected as the Maine Sunday Telegram's Athlete of the Year for indoor track, at that time, the only Brewer athlete to ever receive the award. In addition, she won the Top Performer Award at the EMITL championships an unprecedented three consecutive years (1999, 1998, 1997).

Puiia also ran on the cross-country team her junior and senior years. Although distance running was not her forte, when injuries of other runners moved her up to the important 5<sup>th</sup> runner position, she helped the girls' cross-country team win the Penobscot Valley Conference Championship her senior year.

From her first experience with track as a freshman, the *team* concept was immensely important to Puiia. As individual as the sport of track and field is, Puiia only felt like she was doing her part to help the teams be successful. During Puiia's freshman year, the girls' indoor track team, consisting of a lot of young talent, won the EMITL Championship and finished a surprising second place in the state meet, losing by only four points to a veteran Thornton Academy team. That group of Brewer girls, led by Puiia, would go on to win four straight EMITL Championships; in fact, they never lost an indoor track meet in eastern Maine in four years. Puiia's teams won consecutive Indoor Track Class A State Championships in 1998 and 1999. Their overall record for four years in indoor track was 216 – 5. In outdoor track, Puiia and her

teammates were PVC Champions in 1996 and 1997, runners-up in 1998, 1999, Eastern Regional Champions in 1997, and runners-up in 1996 and 1998. Puiia, a great relay member as well, was on the school record 4x400m relay that secured the team's state runner-up title in 1996. It was Puiia's incredible finish in the 4x400m relay that earned second place and propelled the Brewer team to state runner-up in 1998. During her career, she competed in 116 individual events in indoor and outdoor track and placed first 80 times. Puiia's freshman to senior year was a time of unprecedented success for the Brewer High School girls' track program as there has never been a four year stretch of excellence like that in school history. Clearly Puiia's contributions individually and as a relay member were instrumental to the success of those teams.

Puiia went on to compete in track and field at the University of Maine in Orono where she continued to compete in the long jump, 400m, and 4x400m relay. Puiia graduated in 2003 with a bachelor's degree in Social Work. She went on to earn a master's degree in Clinical Counseling at Southern New Hampshire University. She is currently working in private practice with a focus on children and families. Jen Puiia Castonguay resides in Colchester, Vermont with her husband Josh, a UMaine engineering graduate, son Garrett and daughter Ella.

