

# Sonia O'Sullivan

## Sonia's Early Years

Sonia was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1969 in Cobh, County Cork. She first started running when she was in secondary school. At first, she joined the Ballymore Athletics Club because her friends heard that, if you were part of the club, you got to go away on weekends!

Sonia was always interested in sports at school. She was spotted by many teachers for her talent and was encouraged by teachers to progress in sport. Sonia trained both with her athletics club and individually. Her coach, Sean Kennedy, helped Sonia with her training.



## Getting on Track

Sonia competed in her first ever Olympic Games in Barcelona in Spain in 1992. Sonia came fourth in the 3000 metre race.

In 1992, O'Sullivan improved her personal bests in a number of distances between 800 and 5000 metres. She set an amazing six Irish national records in this time! Five of these records were broken in the space of eleven days after the Olympics in Spain.

## Breaking World Records

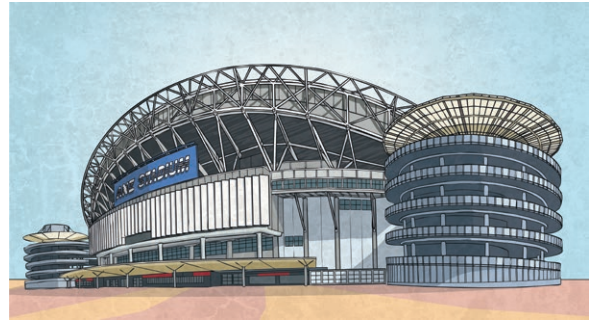
In 1993, Sonia ran in the World Championships and impressed the world, even though she did not win first place. Five days later, Sonia earned the title of third fastest female runner on the All-Time World List at an event in Berlin.

In 1994, Sonia continued to break many records, including:

- Setting the fastest time of the year in four events: the 1500 metres, 1 mile, 2000 metres and 3000 metres.
- Breaking the 2000 metre world record, setting a new time of 5:25.36. This record was left unbroken until February 2017!

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Like every athlete, Sonia had her setbacks. She was disappointed with her performance in the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta when she was badly affected by stomach ache and unable to finish the race. However, she made her comeback in the 2000 Sydney Olympics where she won a silver medal. Sonia declares this the greatest triumph in her career.



## An Irish Hero

Sonia was a true hero in the eyes of the Irish nation, battling on running several competitions. Sonia later retired in 2007.



Today, she spends her time encouraging young people to get involved in professional sporting careers. She has also

written two books 'Running to Stand Still' and 'Sonia, My Story'.

### Did You Know?

Sonia's face was printed onto the Irish postal stamps in 1997.

Sonia has certainly made her mark on Irish history as one of the most successful Irish athletes of all time.

# Questions

1. Where was Sonia O'Sullivan born?

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2. When was Sonia O'Sullivan born?

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3. Who was Sonia's coach?

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4. Where and when were Sonia's first ever Olympic Games?

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5. How many Irish national records did Sonia O'Sullivan break in the year 1992?

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6. Tick 'true' or 'false' for the following statement.

Sonia retired in 2009.

True

False

7. What two books has Sonia O'Sullivan written?

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8. What did you find most interesting about Sonia O'Sullivan?

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# Answers

1. Where was Sonia O'Sullivan born?  
**Sonia O'Sullivan was born in Cobh in County Cork.**
2. When was Sonia O'Sullivan born?  
**Sonia was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1969.**
3. Who was Sonia's coach?  
**Sonia's coach was Sean Kennedy.**
4. Where and when were Sonia's first ever Olympic Games?  
**Sonia's first ever Olympic Games were in Barcelona in Spain in 1992.**
5. How many Irish national records did Sonia O'Sullivan break in the year 1992?  
**Sonia O'Sullivan broke six Irish records in 1992.**
6. Tick 'true' or 'false' for the following statement.  
Sonia retired in 2009.  
 True  
 False
7. What two books has Sonia O'Sullivan written?  
**Sonia O'Sullivan has written 'Running to Stand Still' and 'Sonia, My Story'.**
8. What did you find most interesting about Sonia O'Sullivan?  
**Answers will vary.**



# Sonia O'Sullivan

## Sonia's Early Years

Sonia was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1969 in Cobh, County Cork. She first began running when she was in secondary school. She joined the Ballymore Athletics Club with her friends because they heard that, if you were part of the club, you got to go away on weekends!

Sonia was always interested in sports at school. She was noticed by many teachers for her talent and was encouraged to progress in sport. Sonia trained both with her athletics club and individually. She contacted coach Sean Kennedy to help her make a training timetable. Her performances later earned her an athletic scholarship to Villanova University, Pennsylvania, in 1987.

She worked very hard to find a balance between her studying and training while she was in America. Her dedication paid off as she earned a degree in accountancy and was ready to return to Ireland to pursue her career as a track and field athlete in 1991.



## Getting on Track

Sonia trained day and night, in all weather conditions when she returned home to Ireland. A year later, she competed in her first ever Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain, 1992. Sonia gained fourth place in an elite field in the 3000 metres.

In 1992, O'Sullivan improved her personal bests in a number of distances between 800 and 5000 metres. She set an amazing six Irish national records in this time! The most impressive part of this was that five of these records were broken in the space of eleven days.

## Breaking World Records

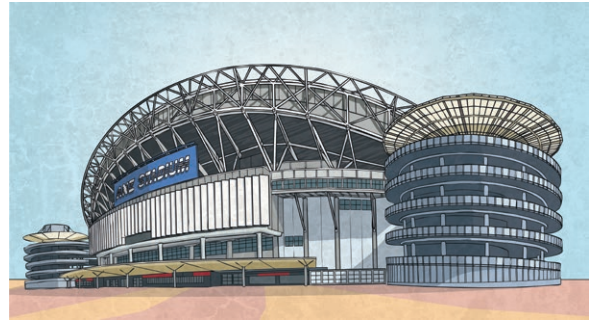
1993 was a very important year for Sonia. She earned herself a high ranking as one of the top female middle-distance runners in the world. She ran in the World Championships although her desire to win first place was not fulfilled. Five days later, at the ISTAF meet in Berlin, Sonia recorded the season's best time (14:45.92)

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over 5000 metres. This earned her the title of third fastest female runner on the All-Time World List.

In 1994, Sonia continued to break many records, including:

- Setting the fastest time of the year in four events: the 1500 metres, 1 mile, 2000 metres and 3000 metres.
- Breaking the 2000 metre world record, setting a new time of 5:25.36. This record was left unbroken until February 2017!



Sonia continued to be admired and set more world records. However, like every athlete, Sonia did have her setbacks. She was disappointed with her performance in the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta where she was affected by stomach ache and did not finish the race. However, she made her comeback in the 2000 Sydney Olympics where she won her silver medal in the 5000 metre race. Sonia declares this the greatest triumph in her career.

### Never Giving Up

Sonia suffered from a hamstring injury in 2007 which held her back. Sonia was a true hero in the eyes of the Irish nation, battling on with running competitions. Sonia retired later that year.



Sonia has managed to pursue an extremely impressive running career representing Ireland whilst also raising her two daughters with her husband in Melbourne. Today, she spends her time encouraging young people to get involved in sport. She has also written two books 'Running to Stand Still' and 'Sonia, My Story'. Sonia has certainly made her mark on Irish history as one of the most successful Irish athletes of all time.

### Did You Know?

Sonia's face was printed onto the Irish postal stamps in 1997 which would have been the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Irish Free State.

# Questions

1. Where and when was Sonia O'Sullivan born?

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2. Why did Sonia and her friends originally join the local athletics club?

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3. Who was involved in helping Sonia train in her early career and what did they do to help her?

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4. Where did Sonia go to study after secondary school and what did she study there?

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5. Where did Sonia rank in her first ever Olympic Games?

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6. How many Irish national records did Sonia O'Sullivan break in 1992?

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7. What world record did Sonia break during 1994? What was her time on this record?

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8. What setback did Sonia have in 1996?

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9. What does Sonia declare as the biggest triumph in her career?

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10. What did you find most interesting about Sonia O'Sullivan? Explain your answer.

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# Answers

1. Where and when was Sonia O'Sullivan born?  
**Sonia was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1969 in Cobh, County Cork.**
2. Why did Sonia and her friends originally join the local athletics club?  
**They heard that, if you were part of the club, you got to go away on weekends!**
3. Who was involved in helping Sonia train in her early career and what did they do to help her?  
**Sean Kennedy was involved in helping Sonia train in her early career and drew up a timetable for her training.**
4. Where did Sonia go to study after secondary school and what did she study there?  
**Sonia went to Villanova University in Pennsylvania where she studied accountancy.**
5. Where did Sonia rank in her first ever Olympic Games?  
**Sonia came in fourth place in an elite field in the 3000 metres.**
6. How many Irish national records did Sonia O'Sullivan break in 1992?  
**Sonia O'Sullivan broke six Irish national records in 1992.**
7. What world record did Sonia break during 1994? What was her time on this record?  
**She broke the 2000 metre world record, setting a new time of 5:25.36.**
8. What setback did Sonia have in 1996?  
**In the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, she was badly affected by a stomach ache and was unable to finish the race.**
9. What does Sonia declare as the biggest triumph in her career?  
**Sonia declared the silver medal she won in the 2000 Sydney Olympics, her biggest triumph.**
10. What did you find most interesting about Sonia O'Sullivan? Explain your answer.  
**Answers will vary but children should explain their answer.**



# Sonia O'Sullivan

## Sonia's Early Years

Sonia was born on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1969 in Cobh, County Cork. She first began running when she was in secondary school. Initially, she joined the Ballymore Athletics Club, as she and her friends heard that, if you were part of the club, you got to go away on weekends! Sonia was twelve years old at the time.



Sonia was always interested in sports and athletics at school. She was recognised by many teachers for her talent and was kindly encouraged to progress in sport. Sonia trained both with her athletics club and individually. She contacted coach Sean Kennedy to help her make a training schedule every two weeks.

Her performances later earned her an athletic scholarship to Villanova University, Pennsylvania, in 1987.

She worked hard to find a balance between her studying and training while she was in America. Her dedication paid off as she earned a degree in accountancy and returned to Ireland to pursue a career as a track and field athlete in 1991.



## Getting on Track

Sonia trained day and night, in all weather conditions when she returned home to Ireland. A year later, she competed in her first Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain, in 1992. Sonia achieved fourth place in an elite field in the 3000 metres.

In 1992, O'Sullivan improved her personal bests in a number of distance races between 800 and 5000 metres. She set an amazing six Irish national records in this time! The most impressive part of this feat was that five of these records were broken in the space of eleven days.

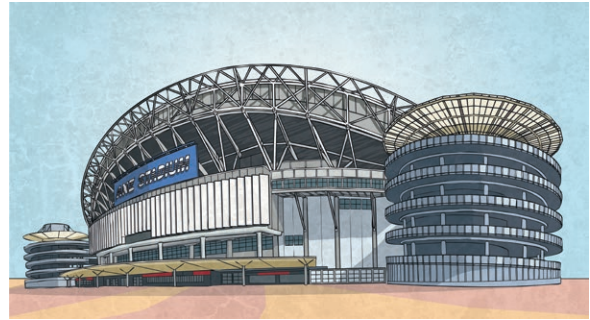
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## Breaking World Records

1993 was a very significant year for Sonia. She earned herself a high ranking as one of the top female middle-distance runners in the world. She ran in the World Championships and impressed the world, despite having her hopes of first place dashed by three other athletes who beat her. Five days later, at the ISTAF meet in Berlin, Sonia recorded the season's best time (14:45.92) over 5000 metres. This earned her the title of third fastest female runner on the All-Time World List.

In 1994, Sonia continued to break many records, including:

- She set the fastest time of the year in four events including the 1500 metres, 1 mile, 2000 metres and 3000 metres.
- She broke the 2000 metre world record, setting a new time of 5:25.36. This record was left unbroken until February 2017!
- She broke the European record for the 3000m, setting the year's fastest time of 8:21.64.
- Sonia O'Sullivan continued to hold the world's admiration that she had earned in 1994 and proceeded to set more world records. However, like every athlete, Sonia had her setbacks. She was particularly disappointed with her performance in the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta. She was badly affected by stomach ache and was unable to finish the race in the final. However, she made her comeback in the 2000 Sydney Olympics where she won her silver medal in the 5000 metre heat. Sonia declared this the greatest triumph in her career.



## Never Giving Up

Sonia went through more years of highs and lows after the Sydney Olympics. She suffered from a hamstring injury which prevented her from reaching her potential.

Sonia was a true hero in the eyes of the Irish nation, battling on with running several marathons and competitions. Sonia later retired in 2007.

Sonia has managed to pursue an extremely impressive running career representing Ireland whilst also raising



her two daughters with her husband in Melbourne. Today, she spends her time encouraging young people to get involved in sport and professional sporting careers. She has also written two books 'Running to Stand Still' and 'Sonia, My Story'.

Sonia has certainly made her mark on Irish history as one of the most crowned sportswomen and admirable, successful Irish athletes of all time.

### **Did You Know?**

Sonia's face was printed onto the Irish postal stamps in 1997 which would have been the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Irish Free State.

# Questions

1. How did Sonia O'Sullivan first get involved in running?

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2. Who was involved in encouraging Sonia to focus on running?

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3. What evidence do we have to show that Sonia was a determined athlete from early on in terms of her training?

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4. How do you think Sonia felt about her performance in her first ever Olympic Games? Explain your answer.

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5. What information are we given about the records Sonia broke in 1992? How many of these were broken in 11 days?

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6. For how many years did Sonia hold the world record for the fastest time in the 2000m category?

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7. What setback did Sonia have in 1996? How do you think this might have affected her, in your opinion?

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# Questions

8. Sonia has 'made her mark on Irish history.' What do you think this phrase means?

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9. What are some of the other ways that Sonia has promoted sport apart from her participation in athletic competitions?

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10. What did you find most interesting or surprising about Sonia O'Sullivan? Explain your answer.

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# Answers

1. How did Sonia O'Sullivan first get involved in running?  
**Sonia started running in secondary school and joined the Ballymore Athletics Club with her friends.**
2. Who was involved in encouraging Sonia to focus on running?  
**Sonia's teachers in secondary school encouraged her to focus on running.**
3. What evidence do we have to show that Sonia was a determined athlete from early on in terms of her training?  
**She trained both individually and with her athletics club.**
4. How do you think Sonia felt about her performance in her first ever Olympic Games? Explain your answer.  
**Children's own responses, such as: Sonia came in fourth place which is a great achievement.**
5. What information are we given about the records Sonia broke in 1992? How many of these were broken in 11 days?  
**She set six Irish national records in this time. What was most impressive was that five of these records were broken in the space of 11 days.**
6. For how many years did Sonia hold the world record for the fastest time in the 2000m category?  
**She held it for 23 years (1994 – 2017).**
7. What setback did Sonia have in 1996? How do you think this might have affected her, in your opinion?  
**In the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, she was badly affected by stomach ache and was unable to finish the race in the final.**
8. Sonia has 'made her mark on Irish history.' What do you think this phrase means?  
**Accept answers such as: Sonia has made a significant contribution to Ireland's success in athletics; Sonia will be historically renowned for her dedication to promoting sport.**
9. What are some of the other ways that Sonia has promoted sport apart from her participation in athletic competitions?  
**Sonia has spent time encouraging young people to get involved in sport and professional sporting careers. She has also written two books, 'Running to Stand Still' and 'Sonia, My Story'.**
10. What did you find most interesting or surprising about Sonia O'Sullivan? Explain your answer.  
**Answers will vary but children should explain their answer.**