

THE MAGAZINE FOR CANADA'S COACHES

VOL 23 NO1  
WINTER 2016

COACHES

# plan

**THE YEAR  
OF SPORT**

HOW IT MADE  
A DIFFERENCE

**7 SECRETS  
OF TOP COACHES**

**SHOOTING  
TO WIN IN RIO**

CANADIAN WOMEN'S  
BASKETBALL TEAM —  
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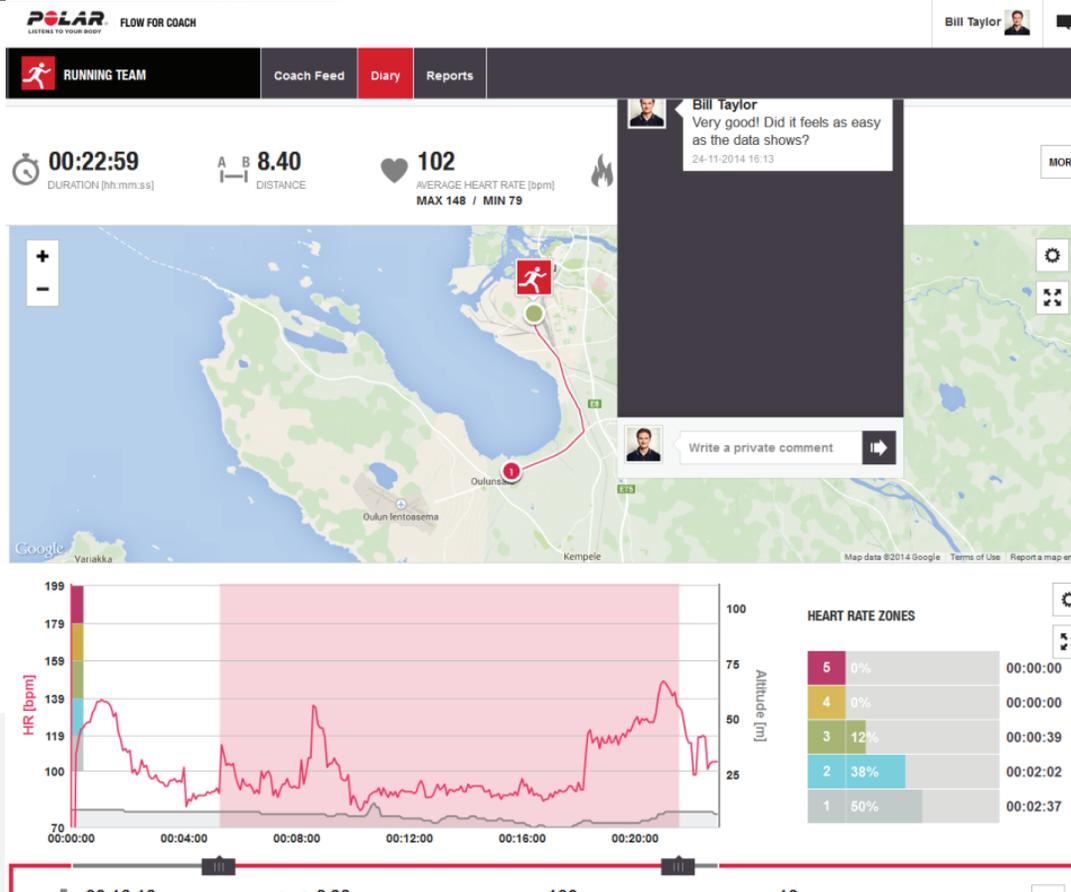
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# Oh, what a year it was!

On October 16, 2014, Governor General David Johnston proclaimed 2015 as the Year of Sport in Canada. What followed was a year filled with chest-pounding, inspiring, passionate, and proud-to-be-Canadian sport moments. To name just a few, Canada was home to the FIFA Women's World Cup, the Toronto 2015 Pan Am and Parapan American Games, the IIHF World Junior Hockey Championships, and the Canada Winter Games. Internationally, Canadian athletes competed to countless podium finishes and personal bests. Some of my favourite moments for 2015 included watching Team Canada win the men's baseball gold medal in dramatic fashion at the Pan Am Games, reclaiming gold at the IIHF world juniors, and the record-setting performance of our athletes at the Parapan Am Games. What were your favourite moments of the #YearOfSport? Take a moment to reflect on these and share them loud and proud!



In this issue, our feature story, The Legacy of the Year of Sport, looks back at the year that was. Having successfully hosted world-class events in 2015, what does it mean for our Canadian sport system and how does it shape and position our athletes and coaches for future success? We spoke with individuals who played a leadership role at these events and asked them how they expect the Year of Sport will benefit athletes and Canadian sport for years to come.

Perhaps one of the most impressive performances from 2015 was delivered by the Canadian Women's National Basketball Team. In the span of just a few weeks, the team captured gold medals at the Toronto 2015 Pan American Games and at the 2015 FIBA Americas, clinching a berth to the Rio 2016 Olympic Games in the process. In our cover story, we chat with Lisa Thomaidis, ChPC, head coach of the national team, to gain



*What was your favourite sport moment of the Year of Sport?*

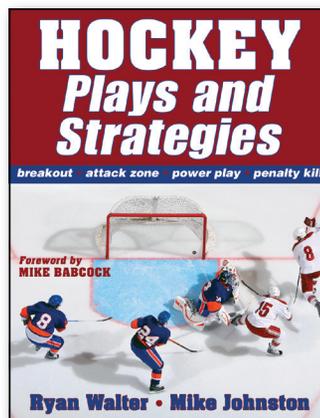
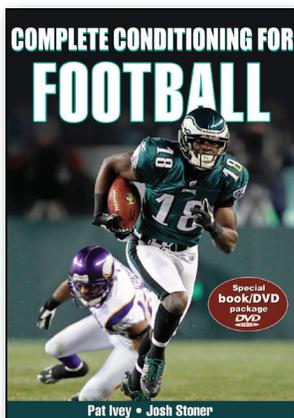
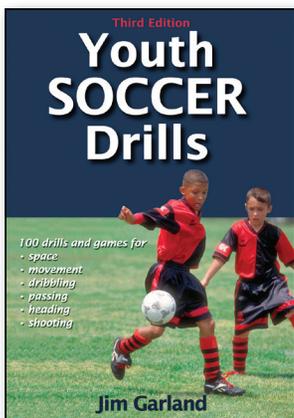
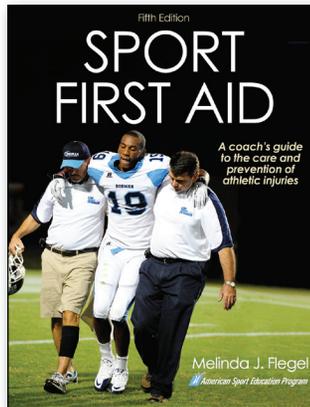
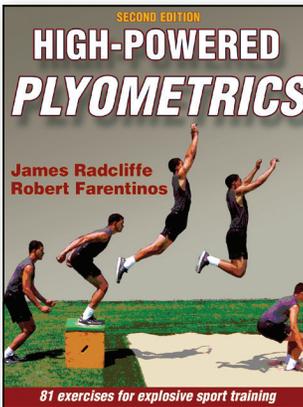
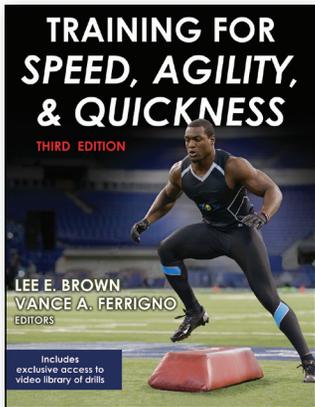
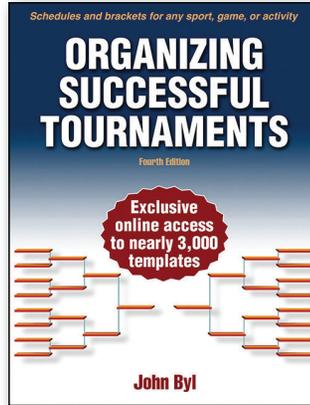
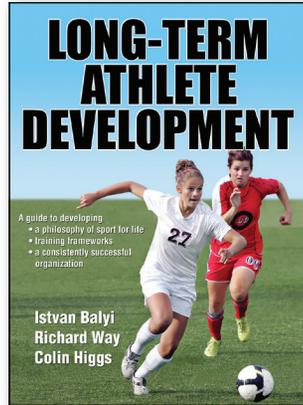
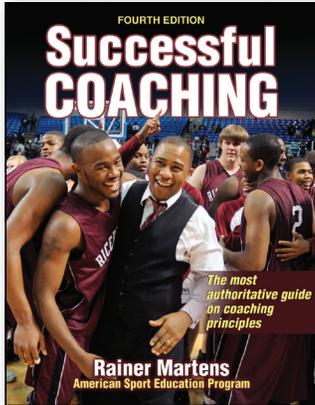
insight on what made her team so successful. Coach Thomaidis shares best practices and lessons learned along the team's journey that have positioned her players perfectly for Rio.

Lastly, ever wonder what makes a good coach great? In 7 Secrets of Stellar Coaches, we take a closer look at the results of The Serial Winning Coach, an International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) study on the key traits of top coaches. Whether you're a high performance coach or just starting out, this article offers practical recommendations on how to advance your coaching career.

Happy reading!

Michel Hachey  
Manager, Communications  
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# COACHES plan

WINTER 2016



## columns

- 6 **News**  
Updates from the Coaching Association of Canada
- 8 **Performance: 7 secrets of stellar coaches**  
Results from the ICCE's serial winning coach study reveal key traits of top coaches
- 10 **Psychology: 3 ways to boost confidence in your athletes**  
Start by encouraging them to examine their core beliefs about themselves
- 12 **All-Star Advice: Improve your coaching by not coaching**  
Too many coaches over coach. Here's what you can do about it

## features

- 14 **Winning Ways**  
Dr. John Hogg, 2015 recipient of the CAC's Geoff Gowan Award, reflects on his 30-year coaching career and offers some advice to coaches
- 16 **High hoop dreams for Rio**  
Lisa Thomaidis, the head coach of Canada's women's basketball team, says her players are perfectly positioned for the Rio 2016 Olympics
- 20 **The legacy of the Year of Sport**  
Canada makes its mark as a world leader on the sports stage

ON OUR COVER: LISA THOMAIDIS  
PHOTO BY JOSH SCHAEFER/GETMYPHOTO.CA

NEW FROM THE *CANADIAN JOURNAL FOR WOMEN IN COACHING*

## Advancing women in coaching: Shifting from mentorship to sponsorship

In the most recent issue of the *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching*, authors Gretchen Kerr and Jenessa Banwell dissect existing mentorship programs and conclude that, while laudable in intent and [often] in outcome, they have not solved the perennial, troubling dilemma of declining numbers of women coaches in Canada and elsewhere. While mentorship is arguably an adequate development not to be discarded, an additional approach is needed if women are to advance to the highest levels of coaching. They argue persuasively for sponsorship which, by definition, goes beyond traditional mentorship and ensures “a more influential and specific professional relationship.”

The *Journal* acknowledges that this article derives from a joint project between the Coaching Association of Canada and the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS), funded by Status of Women Canada. We thank the partners for permitting the publication of this important and timely article. May the discussion continue.

—Sheila Robertson, Editor, *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching*



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**RICHMOND OLYMPIC OVAL**

Photo: Larry Nalzaro

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REACH HIGHER

# The CAC honours top coaches

Canada's coaching stars were celebrated at the 2015 Petro-Canada Sport Leadership Awards Gala on November 13<sup>th</sup> in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Gala recognizes Canada's most dedicated, inspiring, and successful coaches. Annually, award recipients are honoured for exemplifying the values and competencies of the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) and for their influence in positively shaping the Canadian sport community.

## GEOFF GOWAN AWARD – in recognition of lifetime contribution to coaching development.

2015 recipient: **Dr. John Hogg** – For over 30 years, Dr. John Hogg has successfully coached at the club, university, and international levels and has guided many athletes to world-class competition. He led Canada's National Swim Team at the '76 Summer Olympics. In 1990, Dr. Hogg was appointed a full Professor at the University of Alberta, teaching sport psychology and performance enhancement both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. [MORE INFO HERE.](#)

## JACK DONOHUE “COACH OF THE YEAR” AWARD – in recognition of a coach who exemplifies the great qualities of the legendary Jack Donohue, including honesty, integrity, and a positive attitude.

2015 recipient: **Lisa Thomaidis, ChPC** – Lisa Thomaidis is head coach of the Senior Women Basketball National Team and led it to a gold medal performance at the 2015 Toronto Pan American Games and to a first-place finish at the 2015 FIBA Americas tournament, clinching a Rio Olympic Games berth in the process. Off the court, Lisa is an advocate of long-term athlete development. [MORE INFO HERE.](#)

## INVESTORS GROUP NATIONAL NCCP COACH DEVELOPER AWARD – in recognition of an outstanding individual who has gone above and beyond to inspire and develop NCCP coaches in their community.

2015 recipient: **Sherry Robertson** – Sherry Robertson is a certified Level 4 NCCP synchronized swimming coach and has placed athletes on the national team, including the 2000 and 2004 Olympic Games. Now a committed Coach Developer, Sherry is a Master Learning Facilitator and Master Evaluator who trains synchronized swimming coaches across the country, encouraging and inspiring up and coming coaches. [MORE INFO HERE.](#)



From left to right: Gabor Csepregi, Chair of the CAC Board of Directors; Jules Martens, Investors Group; 2015 award recipient, Sherry Robertson; Lorraine Lafrenière, CEO of the CAC

## SHEILA ROBERTSON AWARD – in recognition of a sport organization that demonstrates a consistent approach in valuing and recognizing the role of the coach within the organization, the media, and the public.

2015 recipient: **Canada Basketball** – Canada Basketball's Coach Education Program is exemplary and the organization has done tremendous work in building and executing the NCCP. Coach Schools, Mini-Basket, and their coach education website are all non-traditional and creative pieces that have provided unique opportunities for coaches to learn. [MORE INFO HERE.](#)

## PETRO-CANADA COACHING EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Sixty-two coaches from across the country received a Petro-Canada Coaching Excellence Award. These prestigious awards recognize coaches whose athletes have excelled at World Championships, Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the Special Olympics World Games. [The full list of recipients is available HERE.](#)

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# 7 secrets of stellar coaches

RESULTS FROM THE ICCE'S SERIAL WINNING COACH STUDY  
REVEAL KEY TRAITS OF TOP COACHES

Pierre Trudel, a full professor in sport pedagogy/psychology at the School of Human Kinetics of the University of Ottawa, weighs in on the findings

**WHAT MAKES A GOOD COACH GREAT? WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO WIN** repeatedly at the top levels of professional sport? Finding the answers to these questions is the focus of [The Serial Winning Coach](#), a study commissioned by the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) and supported by leading sport organizations keen to recruit and develop winning coaches. The study involved interviewing 14 serial winning coaches (those who have succeeded repeatedly at the highest levels of competition) and 21 of their athletes from nine countries and 11 sports. Between them, these coaches' athletes have won more than 130 Olympic gold medals and major championships over the past four decades.

While each coach is unique, the study's findings, released in 2015, reveal seven key personality traits and dominant behaviour patterns that winning coaches share. Coach Developers would do well to consider these qualities in the identification, recruitment, and development of high performance coaches.

We've outlined these seven traits and behaviours below and asked Dr. Pierre Trudel, a professor in sport pedagogy/psychology at the School of Human Kinetics of the University of Ottawa and a former chair of the research committee at the Coaching Association of Canada, for his take on the study's findings:

- 1. They have a solid educational grounding:** Formal training accelerates on-the-job training. Organizations should encourage, facilitate, and support engagement in the process of formal education.

*Trudel's take: "When a sport federation wants to train a large group of coaches, say at the recreational level, there are many advantages to having a well developed coach education program. For coaches at the elite level, formal coach education programs still have a place but should be used with caution. Because of their irregular working schedule, it's difficult for many coaches to attend classes. Using new technologies can help coaches access teaching material when they need it."*

- 2. They are always learning:** Coaching courses should support the acquisition of new knowledge. But for coach education to fulfil its role, coaches must be provided with the time and opportunity to take stock of current knowledge, and look for ways to translate it into practical applications.



**Dr. Pierre Trudel** received his PhD from the Faculty of Education at Laval University, Québec. He is now a full professor in sport pedagogy/psychology at the School of Human Kinetics of the University of Ottawa. Since 2005, he has been a member of the research committee at the Coaching Association of Canada. His research activities have been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) since 1994. Dr. Trudel's main research interests are related to coach education and youth development through sport.

*Trudel's take: "The new knowledge has to be appropriate. I see a lot of coaches, for example, going on the Internet and finding information that isn't necessarily adapted to their athletes. Coaches need to reflect on the knowledge they need in their coaching context. What is it they really need to learn and understand? What do they specifically need to improve?"*

- 3. They had mentors:** Top coaches benefit greatly from the mentoring process – although they should retain decision-making capability and power in order to develop accountability and accelerate learning.

*Trudel's take: "Informal mentoring has always existed, but with formal mentoring it's important to find a way to make sure every coach who wants a mentor has access to one. And the role of the mentor should vary depending on where the coach is in their career. At the beginning, the mentor might share their 'secrets,' but as the coach becomes more experienced, the mentor will need to play the role of 'devil's advocate,' in order to help the coach reflect on their practice."*

- 4. They could benefit from a 'coach loan' program:** Emerging high performance coaches can benefit from being loaned out to other organizations where the coach could gain added experience and learn on the job until they are ready to go back to their institution of origin.

*Trudel's take: "In practice, this is very difficult because there aren't that many opportunities to move coaches around. In theory, this is good but it can be challenging. There is work to do to make it possible for sport organizations to make this happen."*

- 5. They have opportunities to develop their program management capabilities:** The management of large operations and groups is a key feature of modern coaching and this will become an even more important aspect of coaching in the future.

*Trudel's take: "You are only as good as the people around you. Coaching is becoming more complex and it's impossible for a coach to know everything. There are many different specialists that contribute to the success of a team. That's why it's essential for a coach to develop their interpersonal abilities."*

- 6. They have high emotional intelligence:** Supporting coaches in understanding what makes them who they are and why they behave the way they do, can help foster self-awareness. Mindfulness training, a technique that revolves around the development of present moment awareness, can improve emotional control, reduce stress, and help build better coach-athlete relationships.

*Trudel's take: "There's no doubt coaches should practise mindfulness. But this isn't just about 'being in the moment.' I like the definition provided by author and executive coach Scott Eblin: 'Mindfulness is about waking up and being aware of what you are thinking so that you can assess the impact of your thoughts and then make an intentional choice about what to do next. Mindfulness is about managing that gap between your thoughts and your actions.'"*

- 7. They maintain work-life balance:** Achieving this elusive balance helps coaches remain fresh and energetic and allows them to cultivate better relationships with their families and their athletes. Serial winning coaches prioritize time with family and friends, exercising, hobbies, and anything that allows a bit of normality into their lifestyle.

*Trudel's take: "Coach burnout and work-life balance are rarely addressed in training programs. Because of the type of work they do, sport coaches can find it particularly difficult to find time for themselves and their families. Studies on coach burnout can help sport organizations recognize the need to create environments where coaches are better supported so that if they are going through a rough time and need, for example, the services of a psychologist, this is made available to them." ■*



**"You are only as good as the people around you. Coaching is becoming more complex and it's impossible for a coach to know everything."**

# 3 ways to boost confidence in your athletes

START BY ENCOURAGING THEM TO EXAMINE THEIR CORE BELIEFS ABOUT THEMSELVES

By Shaunna Taylor, PhD



**Shaunna Taylor, PhD**, is a sport leader at PacificSport Okanagan and co-chair of the managing council of the Canadian Sport Psychology Association, as well as an adjunct professor at the University of British Columbia in the Masters of Coaching program. She has been consulting with coaches and athletes from the grassroots level to the Olympic/Paralympic level for 15+ years.

**EVERY COACH HAS STRUGGLED WITH BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN THEIR** athletes and team, and yet, there are surprisingly few resources that help address this important challenge. While every athlete has their own individual profile and history, there are some important foundational theories that apply to all.

Confidence really begins with the idea of belief. It emanates from an athlete's core beliefs and is combined with the effect of real-life evidence. Core beliefs are formed throughout childhood and are integral to how we operate in our lives. They are foundational and affect the way we view the world – many of these beliefs are set by the time we reach the age of ten. They tend to drive our actions and the way we navigate life.

Belief is the “director” that often runs the entire production. Early in life, we are heavily influenced by the people who cared for us, and the early experiences that formed our worldview. Our core beliefs involve such things as whether we believe most people are essentially good (or bad), whether we are capable and powerful (or incapable and powerless), or whether life can be satisfying and joyful (or a struggle and full of sadness). Beliefs are the lens through which we determine if the glass is half full or half empty.

Although beliefs are forged at a young age, they do not have to dictate our destiny. In fact, when we re-evaluate them later in life, we can come to see that many core beliefs aren't based on fact. But unless we examine and critique the core beliefs that drive our actions, they will continue to run the production, and we may find ourselves limited (versus being set free) to make the necessary choices that can move us in new, positive directions in life.

In light of this, here are three concrete steps coaches can consider to help athletes increase their confidence:

## 1. Help them become aware of – and challenge – their core beliefs:

Some of the athletes you are coaching will have very positive and empowering core beliefs. When mixed with a strong work ethic and a solid base of skills, this can be a potent combination. But you may also have athletes with a strong base of skills who also have negative core beliefs. As a result, the confidence levels – and performance record – in this second group may often be more inconsistent and volatile.



Setting the bar high will drive everyone – athletes and coaches included – to rise up and feel confident when it comes to aiming for their goals.

One way to help athletes put their core beliefs to the test is to challenge them with evidence. For example, show athletes (through videos, storytelling, recalling past performances as a group or individually) that they are capable of overcoming adversity, or achieving past positive performance outcomes. Create a highlight reel, or encourage them to come up with one of their own. Show them the evidence of their past accomplishments.

If your athlete has a generally negative self-view, or you observe negative body language, it can help to offer up evidence of their capabilities. Talk about your belief in them, and provide them with goals to override their defeatist perspective. This can serve to build competency which, in turn, can lead to greater confidence over time.

### 2. Build a confidence and evidence inventory:

One form of irrefutable evidence that can demonstrate an athlete's capability is examples of past wins and strong performances. But sport is a dynamic and often heartless arena, and wins come and go. Coaches need to build a steady bank of strong past performances, and include current examples of how the athlete's strong work ethic is paying off – as well as evidence of skill progression and mastery – in order to challenge an athlete's negative core beliefs.

Athletes can also incorporate visualization while reviewing techniques and tactics through mental rehearsal. Coaches can also encourage them to engage in constructive self-talk that involves optimistic, evidence-based statements.

### 3. Keep your standards high:

Coaches who maintain high expectations for their athletes and teams should also follow up with constructive and encouraging actions. If you believe an athlete can reach their goals and you have faith they can improve, then be sure to act like this is the case. Expect hard work and commitment, factors that are within your athlete's control and have nothing to do with outcomes. This will translate into a greater probability of encouraging a self-fulfilling prophecy in the athlete.

The belief we have in ourselves drives our actions and our ability to strive for positive performance. Don't compromise or lower your work ethic, be sure to create a positive environment, and incorporate a relentless pursuit of daily improvement and mastery. Setting the bar high will drive everyone – athletes and coaches included – to rise up and feel confident when it comes to aiming for their goals. ■

# Improve your coaching by not coaching

TOO MANY COACHES OVER COACH. HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

By Wayne Goldsmith

**YOU READ THAT RIGHT – IMPROVE YOUR COACHING BY NOT COACHING.**

Coaching improves performance. But too much coaching – over coaching – can have a negative influence on performance.

## Who over coaches?

Typically five types of coaches over coach:

1. Young, inexperienced coaches who are trying too hard.
2. Coaches who lack real belief in themselves and who try to make up for it by giving too much information. These coaches often want to be liked, and feel the more coaching they do, the more the athletes will like them.
3. Coaches who lack belief in their athletes and feel the need to control every element of preparation and performance.
4. Coaches who are being evaluated or assessed and aim to impress by being seen to control every element of the training session, i.e., they believe that great coaching is talking more.
5. Ego-driven coaches who see athletes/players as a vehicle to promote themselves and their reputations.

There are many problems associated with over coaching. Here are 10:

1. All sports require athletes to take responsibility for decision-making and problem-solving in competition. A coach who allows athletes to make decisions in training is setting them up to succeed in competition.
2. All sports require athletes to drive their own performance in competition. A coach who allows athletes to take responsibility for their own performance in training has prepared them to win in competition.
3. Over coaching assumes athletes have nothing to contribute to the performance. In reality, most of what we learn as coaches is from working with, listening to, and observing athletes.
4. Over coaching says, “This is my team, my performance.” Whereas, most successful teams are ones where the coach leads but the athletes drive the performance. Ownership of the performance is shared.



**Wayne Goldsmith** is an Australian coach and coaching consultant who is a widely recognized writer, speaker, and thought leader in swimming.



“Coaching is a performance partnership. The more faith and belief you place in your athletes, the more you can both grow and improve.”

5. Giving too much information at inappropriate times can confuse athletes, causing them to make errors and bad decisions.
6. Coaching is about giving athletes independence. Over coaching creates a dependence on the coach for decision-making and problem-solving which is performance suicide.
7. Over coaching stifles on-the-field creativity. Quality coaching provides opportunity for creativity and genius to be expressed through great performances.
8. Over coaching creates frustration in the athletes and assistant coaches, staff, etc. Everyone on the performance team can contribute to the success of the group if given the right opportunity.
9. Over coaching can create anxiety and pressure, particularly when athletes are over coached in the final few days before a big competition. As a general rule, coach less as the competition gets closer.
10. Over coaching can send negative messages of panic to the athletes, e.g.: “We have not done the preparation we need to be successful, so I am going to keep coaching until the last minute.” Quality coaches lead by example and their confidence through words and actions.

### So how can you avoid over coaching?

- Believe in yourself. All great coaching flows from self-confidence and self-belief.
- Be selfless – the opposite of selfish. Put the athletes first and your own ego in your back pocket.
- Coaching is a performance partnership. The more faith and belief you place in your athletes, the more you can both grow and improve.
- Empower athletes to make decisions, make errors, solve problems, learn and grow in training. Provide them with a wide range of training experiences to teach better decision-making.
- Accept that all coaches, regardless of their level of performance and experience, are learners. It does not matter if you have coached athletes to five gold medals at the Olympics, coaching is lifelong learning and a career of ongoing development. Accept this, and the humility that comes with it. ■

# WINNING WAYS

Dr. John Hogg, the 2015 recipient of the CAC's Geoff Gowan Award, which recognizes lifetime contribution to coaching development, reflects on his 30-year coaching career and offers some advice to coaches



**Q: How does it feel to win this award?**

A: "To be honest, I'm always a little embarrassed about awards. I always think there are much more important people who deserve this than me. It's ironic because it was Geoff Gowan who first put the bug in my ear about moving to Canada to coach. I was at the height of improving my national team in Great Britain and felt obligated to stay on with them. But the Olympic Games were coming up in Montreal in 1976 and Geoff indicated things would be much more interesting and challenging for me in Canada."

**Q: Tell us about a mentor who was important to you.**

A: "Here's an admission: I was never a swimmer before I became a coach. When I became a national coach at the age of 29, Geoff Dyson, Great Britain's national track and field coach and the author of *The Mechanics of Athletics*, took me under his wing. He said it didn't matter if you played the sport. What counted was that you understood the sport, and in understanding it, your job was to teach it. The athlete's job is to learn and you, as the coach, have to be a great teacher."

**Q: Where else did you get support in your career?**

A: "In addition to mentors, the other most important person in your career is your partner — I can't stress that enough. Your partner has to understand what it is you are trying to do as a coach. My wife Sally was always athletically minded and always had a tremendous understanding for what I was trying to do. She has been a great support. Without her, I'm not sure how I would have managed."

**Q: What's the most important skill an athlete needs from a psychological point of view?**

A: "I used to start with goal-setting to get an athlete on the right path. But I changed that — because how the heck can you start with goal-setting if the athlete isn't self-aware and doesn't know what it is they are capable of? If one thing sticks with athletes, I want them to know themselves,

to be aware of the way they think and feel and why they do what they do. If they can be conscious of these things in the sport performance setting, they have a better chance at success.”

**Q: Why is post-performance debriefing so important?**

A: “Because that’s where all the emotional and mental garbage gets rooted. If an athlete doesn’t download their performance properly, they carry that baggage into the next performance. In the post-performance setting, athletes have to ask themselves four questions: What did I do well? What did I not do well? What can I do better? What can I take into the training setting going forward? Athletes and coaches often start with what they did not do well. They need to start with what they did well.”

**Q: What do coaches need to keep in mind about debriefing?**

A: “Debriefing needs to be subjective and objective. Subjective is when the athlete examines their performance and objective is when the coach does it. If it’s all the coach’s analysis, then how does the athlete build heightened self-awareness? What the coach has to do is first ask the athlete what they think. It doesn’t matter what I think as a coach. It’s what the athlete thinks that’s important. If they are thinking negatively, it’s our job to get them to think more positively. It’s our job to show them they can do it and where they need to go.”

**Q: Are athletes becoming more comfortable about talking about the mental aspect of sport today?**

A: “Mark Tewksbury was a forerunner in breaking down the mental and emotional areas. He was one of the first to admit weaknesses and we would talk about it. When I worked with national coaches on mental performance, I sometimes found that quite stressful because athletes would say things to me but didn’t want their coach to know. I sometimes found myself in an awkward position as a result. Athletes need to be able to share things and talk in the open without any kind of discrimination.”



**Q: How can coaches help athletes deal with losing?**

A: “I remember working with a university volleyball team that had won six championships. They lost the final at the next national championship and the coach asked me to go and talk to the athletes. I told them I wanted them to remember this moment for the rest of their lives, to absorb the disappointment and think about what they could have done better. And then I asked each of them to share one memory of their season. We moved around the room and every one of those girls said something positive, even though I hadn’t specifically asked them to do that. They talked about what was great for them and what they wanted to achieve the next season. They acknowledged their loss tearfully and that was OK. The coach was crying too and it took all my effort not to — I was choked up. The coach dealt with the loss in an empathetic way. We have to remember there’s nothing wrong with losing. We’ve all failed at one time or another. Often we learn more from our failures than our successes. So what if you failed. The important thing to consider is what did you learn?” ■

This interview has been edited for brevity.

## AN IMPRESSIVE COACHING CAREER

For over 30 years, Dr. John Hogg has successfully coached at the club, university, and international levels, and has guided many athletes to world-class competition. He coached the Scottish and British National Swim Teams before being recruited to Canada in 1974. In 1976, he was appointed coach to Canada’s Olympic Swim Team and coached several national teams. He was also appointed Head Swim Coach at the University of Alberta and worked with many successful teams from 1975 to 1988. In 1990, John was appointed a full Professor at the University of Alberta, teaching sport psychology and performance enhancement both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Hogg is the author of seven books on competitive swimming and mental skills in sport. The 79-year-old lives with his wife, Sally, in Salmon Arm, B.C.



# HIGH HOOP DREAMS *for Rio*

After having their best year ever, Lisa Thomaidis, the head coach of Canada's women's basketball team, says her players are perfectly positioned for the Rio 2016 Olympics

By Lori Ewing

**IT WAS AN IDEA THAT MAY HAVE SOUNDED** simplistic, a small piece of a much larger plan. But it was a coaching strategy that paid big dividends over a summer of historic wins for Canada's women's basketball team in 2015.

Head coach Lisa Thomaidis, ChPC, led Canada to victories at both the Pan Am Games in Toronto, and then the FIBA Americas Olympic qualifying tournament in Edmonton, which clinched the team a berth in this summer's Rio Olympics. The Canadian women never flinched under an unfamiliar spotlight, rolling, in workman-like fashion, to one win after another.

Thomaidis partly credits a strategy put in place just prior to the Pan Ams. Before every game, each player was assigned a very specific and physical task — something like: "If you see a switch on a ball screen, you're going to use a pullback dribble," she says. Each player was also assigned a specific coach to report to. After the final buzzer, players and their assigned staff members would meet. A successfully completed task earned the player a sticker that was posted on a chart — like you'd see on a classroom wall. "We ended up calling it a 'sticker program,'" says Thomaidis. "It

was pretty funny, we laughed about it, but you'd be surprised . . . you're dealing with professional athletes who after the game, were fighting to get their sticker. A sticker. But then you'd see others who were so hard on themselves, and they'd say 'Nope, I don't deserve a sticker.' The strategy was funny, but in the end it proved to be very, very valuable."

Leading up to the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, where the Canadians could find themselves on the podium, this strategy was a valuable takeaway on several levels, says Thomaidis. "What it did was force some communication right after the competition, which was really, really positive," she says. "Sometimes, with athletes at this level, they're so perfectionistic that even though we may have won the game or they actually played well, they're dwelling on things they maybe didn't do so well. And when you facilitate the ability to communicate with a coach right away, it really puts things back in perspective," she continues. "The other thing that it did was help to narrow their focus, and not have a million things that they're thinking about or stressing about, but something that they could really hone in on."

Their Pan Am victory marked the first gold medal for a Canadian basketball team at any major international tournament. Their victory at the FIBA Americas tournament was their first since 1995. As a result, Thomaidis, who was the lone female head coach in the 10-country FIBA Americas tournament, calls 2015 the most important year in the history of the women's game in Canada, both because of the thrilling victories and the exposure the sport enjoyed on home soil. "You can't have a better forum to do that than what we had this past summer," she says.

## **Optimizing and preparing for media exposure**

Women's basketball has largely toiled in the shadow of other teams, such as women's soccer, and so Thomaidis prepared her players for the unfamiliar media scrutiny. They underwent media training, studying everything from how much the media knew about their team, to which players would be most in demand. They won't fly under the radar any longer, and the training will prove useful in the months leading up to Rio. "[The media training] was a great piece that we did, because a lot of players gained



In the spotlight: the Canadian women's basketball team

perspective on what impact that would have on our team," she says. "For the longest time we were just starved for any kind of media attention. We want the Canadian public to get to know us. We have these fabulous women and we're doing great things, but no one really knows. That was pretty consistent up until Pan Ams, and now it's like 'wow, this is fantastic, we've been waiting for this for so long.'"

The players were also prepared for how to deal with family and friends, and planned how to limit the distractions that come from being tugged in several directions. "We planned for: OK, when am I going to see them? What's going to happen?"

The Dundas, Ontario, native played five seasons with McMaster University in Hamilton, where she was an OUA All-Star before pursuing a professional career in Greece. Thomaidis, who's also the women's head coach at the University of Saskatchewan, joined the Canadian program in 2001 as an assistant to Allison McNeill who retired after 16 years as head coach after the 2012 London Olympic Games. Thomaidis was hired to fill the vacancy. She is the 2015 recipient of the Coaching Association of Canada's [Jack Donohue Award for Coach of the Year](#).



Terrific trio: Shawnee Harle, Lisa Thomaidis, and Bev Smith.

### Learned from "two of the best coaches"

Thomaidis says she feels "very fortunate" to have worked with McNeill. "I've said quite often that I feel like I had an 11-year coaching clinic working with her and with Mike (McNeill's husband and a member of her coaching staff). I was able to learn from two of the best coaches in this country, and was really fortunate to further my development and keep learning new things every year and stay fresh."

Thomaidis credits her NCCP coaching education as being very important, especially early on in her career. She continued her education after being hired by Saskatchewan, completing her Level 4. "It was really key because it gives you a chance to chat with other coaches who were more experienced than you," she says. "And the training included coaches

from a whole bunch of different sports, which gave you an appreciation for what other sports were doing and what other coaches were doing. There was certainly a lot of crossover from sport to sport in terms of some of the issues that we needed to be aware of and that was very beneficial."

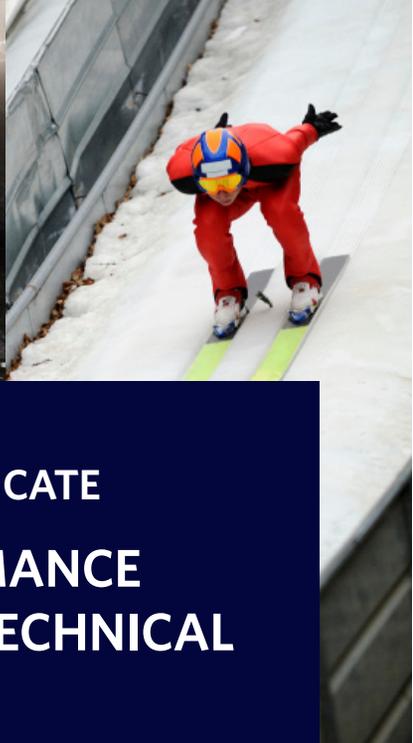
She's also a Chartered Professional Coach (ChPC), a designation she says has helped legitimize the profession. "If anyone asked what you did and you said 'I coach basketball,' they say, 'What else do you do?' It wasn't really deemed as much of a profession, it was seen as more of a hobby you did in your spare time. The way things have changed, especially in the last 10 years, coaching is now seen as more of a profession."

### A team approach to coaching

Thomaidis's staff includes assistants Bev Smith, ChPC — considered one of Canada's greatest players, and a former head coach of the team — and Shawnee Harle, ChPC, an NCCP Level 5 coach who coached the University of Calgary for 18 years.

Harle and Thomaidis are as far apart as two coaches can be in style and personality, Thomaidis says. Harle is the passionate motivator that McNeill had been. "Shawnee really pushes me that way and she fills that void on the team, that's the more passionate, demonstrative piece. She's also very complementary to me in basketball tactics and styles."

Smith, on the other hand is "focused more on the defensive side but also brings that whole perspective of being one of the best players in the world at her time, along with her extensive experience and her passion and her drive. The impact she has on the athletes is at a whole other level, something that Shawnee or myself couldn't bring, even if we tried. We think differently but yet we're a completely unified group and we work very well together and yet still have complementary styles. It's taken some time to get the details ironed out and get our best system in place, and be able to be a very synergistic group. But we continue to improve each year. The proof is in the pudding." ■



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# *The legacy of* **THE YEAR OF SPORT**

## Canada makes its mark as a world leader on the sport stage

By Rosalind Stefanac

**"NEXT YEAR PROMISES TO BE A TRULY** memorable sporting year for Canadians," said Canada's Governor General David Johnston during the ceremonial lighting of the torch for the Prince George 2015 Canada Winter Games. He wasn't off the mark. As the official Year of Sport, 2015 marked a slew of successful national and international sporting events held on home turf that many say proudly showcased this country as a leading sport nation worldwide. Canadians, perhaps more than ever before, recognized the powerful role of sport in their own lives and in Canada's cultural identity.

Take the FIFA Women's World Cup, which was hosted in six cities across the country and drew 1.35 million spectators. "This was the largest attended FIFA event in history, outside of the Men's World Cup," says Peter Montopoli, CEO of the National Organizing Committee for FIFA Women's World Cup Canada 2015. "We've never had the opportunity before to engage the country from coast to coast in quite this way."

For coaches, Montopoli says it was an opportunity to "see the best athletes from around the world, competing on the highest stage possible." The fact that the event was organized successfully over five time zones also reflects well on Canada's

ability to host other major sporting events in the future. "It proves that Canada is a sporting and hosting country," he says. "We've heard from FIFA what great hosts we are and when we go to bid for other international competitions, it puts us that much higher in the pecking order."

The Pan Am and Parapan Am Games are another example of Canada's ability to deliver a world-class sporting experience. As the largest multi-sport event Canada has ever hosted, the Games brought together some 7,000 athletes from 41 countries, and were the impetus for 26 new or reconditioned sporting facilities used for the competitions. "The journey to and during the Games couldn't have gone any better. From the Opening Ceremonies, to throughout the Games, it was a great performance by our athletes," says Curt Harnett, the Chef de Mission for the Pan Am Games. "It really was a very exciting year for sport events in Canada."

### **An Olympic- and Paralympic-level experience**

Harnett says it was especially exhilarating to see all the athletes and fans come together during those 16 days of Pan Am Games events in July, held throughout the Greater Toronto Area. "The organizers really delivered an Olympic-level

experience for all the countries participating," he says, adding that there were 51 sport organizations involved in the Games. "From an athlete's perspective, it just gave our sport heroes that greater sense that Canada cares."

The fact that the Government has invested in sporting facilities that so many athletes are using post Pan Am Games is further evidence of its commitment to Canadian sport. "This is a significant legacy that I believe started having an impact on our athletes and coaches well before the Games even began," says Harnett, pointing to the Velodrome, which opened in January 2015 in Milton, Ontario. "This is a truly magical place, rated as one of the top cycling facilities in the world, and it will have a profound impact on the development of sport and coaching opportunities."

Erin Hartwell, ChPC, national track sprint coach with Cycling Canada, can attest to this first hand. "We've been calling the Velodrome a game-changer for our program," says the former two-time Olympic track cyclist, who moved to Canada in 2014 to take on his current position. "Before we had to be transient, going to the U.S. to train during the winter; now we can be here consistently training 12 months of the year — this has already improved the teams' performances starting at the Pan Am Games."





JAY SHAW / CANADA SOCCER

Hartwell believes high-end sport facilities such as the Velodrome are enabling Canadian teams to compete with “the best of them” around the world to achieve favourable results. (Case in point: the national track cycling team won five out of six gold medals at the Pan Am Games.) “The last six months of training in this facility, along with athlete development, gave us that last tenth of a second we needed to truly be world-class,” he says.

### Leveraging new facilities

Giving ownership of these sporting facilities to municipalities and other organizations, such as York University and the University of Toronto, now that the Games are over, is a win for everyone, adds Harnett. “It’s a bigger opportunity for these communities to leverage these facilities to their benefit which will go a long way in maintaining their viability.”

Even refurbished facilities are proving to be a real boon to community sporting activities in the aftermath of the Pan Am Games. The Etobicoke Olympium, for example, features a new competition pool and upgraded dive tower, in addition to a new walking/jogging track. The University of Toronto’s

Tennis Centre in Scarborough now features eight new wheelchair-accessible courts.

By the same token, soccer enthusiasts can now play on 18 new world-class training fields located in the six official host cities of the FIFA women’s cup. “These fields are now being used by clubs and city groups to train young boys and girls, and that will carry on,” says Montopoli. “This one event will impact athletes for many generations to come.”

Elizabeth Walker-Young, Assistant Chef de Mission for the London 2012 Paralympic Games and Chef de Mission for the Canadian Team during the Toronto Parapan Am Games, hopes the impact will extend beyond Canada too. Those athletes coming from other nations also got to experience state-of-the-art facilities that are now more accessible to people with disabilities, with features like talking elevators and handle-less doors. “Even if one little tidbit about the access gets back to their home countries, that’s a good reflection on us,” she says. “They can talk about how these changes can have a huge impact.”

Walker-Young also points to the fact that events like these “move the dial forward” in terms of the Paralympic movement.

“If there are more coaches and volunteers working at [these events] and seeing athletes with disabilities participating, it takes the fear factor away.”

While 2015 was the official Year of Sport, the hope is that the momentum created will continue to grow towards 2017 when Canada celebrates its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Confederation.

“The spirit of sport seen across our country through the Year of Sport will continue to fuel our collective efforts to prepare and deliver a wonderful birthday celebration in 2017,” says the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Canada’s Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities. “The government of Canada is proud to support the hosting of successful national and international sporting events in communities across our country. These investments generate economic, cultural, and social benefits that go far beyond the actual event, especially for our young people who are inspired by our athletes to follow their own dreams, whether it be in sport or other passions they may have.” ■

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