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The 2015 Conversation on Women and Sport

“Now is the time to make things happen ... Let’s bring our solutions to life.” — Guylaine Demers

This article represents a first for the *Canadian Journal for Women and Coaching*. It shares the results of “The 2015 Conversation on Women and Sport”, an important gathering that took place in Quebec City in June. As the conference structure becomes apparent, I believe this article will inspire you and provide new and innovative ideas to help raise the number of women coaches in Canada. Wisely, the author has chosen to present the results as they were recorded so that readers “hear” the passionate voices of all the women who put their heart in this process, and not hers alone. Add your voices to the discussion, comment using our Facebook post! —*Sheila Robertson*, Journal Editor

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The 2015 Conversation on Women and Sport

By Guylaine Demers

Introduction

The 2015 Conversation on Women and Sport, held in Quebec City in June 2015, was the initiative of three influential, passionate, and committed women. **Penny Werthner, Marion Lay, and Guylaine Demers** are experts who have been actively involved for many years in addressing the challenges faced by girls and women in sport and physical activity.

The conference name reflects its objective: to foster a vibrant exchange of ideas and to find concrete solutions to overcoming the barriers that girls and women face within the Canadian sport system. The desire for all participants to work collaboratively was at the heart of the conference. Each was encouraged to contribute to solving real issues, to network, to show her creativity and passion, and the challenge herself by testing her ideas and hypotheses. The 2015 Conversation was a collaboration between the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) and Égale Action, the Quebec association for the advancement of women and sport and physical activity.

The selected themes

The 2015 Conversation was designed to challenge the participants to work together and to maximize each other’s knowledge, expertise, and creativity following five themes:

1. The low participation of girls in sport and physical activity
2. The low number of women coaches
3. The limited media coverage of women’s sport
4. The low number of women in influential positions
5. The presence of homophobia in women’s sport

The low number of women coaches is the focus of this article.

A new way to get the most out of a conference

To make the best of this event, we decided to work with the company, En Mode Solutions (www.enmodesolutions.com). In their own words:

“One day we became fed up with inefficient meetings and approaches that took up time and energy without providing satisfactory results. That’s why we are now working to demonstrate that it’s possible to think outside the box for the greater good, to seek solutions and create a brilliant future.

“We transform meetings, consultations, forums and other reunions into strong, indispensable moments to connect the right people, break down walls, innovate, solve problems and generate concrete results.”

Marion, Penny, and I believed those words describe exactly what we wanted the 2015 Conversation to achieve; En Mode Solutions proved to be the perfect vehicle for us.

The 2015 Conversation

First phase: Identify the problems

In response to being asked to collaboratively brainstorm the problems women coaches face, the participants identified the following:

1. Lack of networks that engage women coaches, provide collaborative learning and peer support, and are maintained in a viable manner
2. Widespread perception of coaching as a man’s world and therefore not a viable career option for women
3. Lack of powerful women coach role models at all levels
4. Lack of opportunities for girls to observe and interact with women coaches and dream of being like them
5. Failure to treat coaching as a profession in terms of salary and benefits. *Change that perception!*
6. Isolation of the coaching role
7. Lack of women in leadership/decision-making roles. *It’s hard to strive to be something you cannot be; it’s hard to make change when not in position to do so.*
8. Lack of excellent, competent women coaches in head coach positions
9. Lack of development and implementation of mentorship programs and a mentorship process. *What is the benefit/difference between individuals seeking mentors on their own versus being able to access a sanctioned program?*
10. Decline in the number of women coaches being hired for professional coaching positions by universities, colleges, national sport organizations (NSOs), and provincial/territorial sport organizations (PTSOs)
11. Lack of a clear pathway to national team coaching
12. Lack of NSO involvement and support in promoting women in leadership positions and coaching roles from the grassroots to high performance levels, including funding or scholarships specific to women. *We lack allies within the sport system.*
13. Lack of enforced equity policy practices regarding coach hiring
14. Lack of money to fund coaching development for women
15. Misperception of the women coach, including gender bias on the part of society. *A woman coach is ‘bossy’; a male coach is an authority figure.*
16. Barriers that stunt women’s ability to coach and/or grow in the coaching industry
17. Loss of the National Coaching School for Women

Second phase: Choose four urgent problems

Having identified the problems, the participants were asked to answer this question: Which of the problems need to be urgently addressed?

Each problem was recorded and displayed. Walking around the room, participants reviewed and voted on each. After the votes were tallied, four urgent problems emerged:

1. Lack of networks that engage women coaches, provide collaborative learning and peer support, and are maintained in a viable manner
2. Widespread perception of coaching as a man's world and therefore not a viable career option for women
3. Lack of excellent, competent women coaches
4. Lack of development and implementation of mentorship programs

Third phase: Create the solutions

The third phase was the heart of the 2015 Conversation. Two hundred women (and three men) worked an entire day to find solutions to the four problems. Two facilitators guided the solution process, which was composed of four steps:

1. Develop a common understanding of the problem.
2. Identify the knots.
3. Identify/find good practices, research questions, and innovative solutions.
4. Go from ideas to results: Action Plan.

Here is the end-product for Problem 4 after a day of collaborative work:

4 EN MODE SOLUTIONS™

LACK OF DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

WOMEN COACHES / LES ENTRAÎNEURES

1 Common understanding of the problem / Compréhension commune du problème

2 Identify the knots / Identifier les nœuds

3 Solutions etc.

4 From ideas to results / De l'idée aux résultats

THE knot LE nœud
#1 - WHO (mentorship)

Good practices / Bonnes pratiques

Research questions / Questions de recherche

Solutions / Solutions

Action plan / Plan d'action

WHO / QUI	WHAT / QUOI	WHEN / QUAND
CAC	Create a program + Partnership with the funding	Pilot program by 2016
Sport Canada	Creation + implementation of policies related to funding	Concurrent with CAC
NSO's + PSO's	Funding + implementation of mentoring program	
Mentors + Mentees	Buy in + promotion	
Universities + colleges	Buy in, implementation + promotion + Research +	Immediate + on-going

I will try it! / Je l'essaier!

Handwritten signatures: Amy, Steve, Michelle, Doreen, etc.

The results of our collective intelligence

In this section are the knots, good practices, research questions, innovative solutions, and the Action Plan for a particular solution linked to each problem.

PROBLEM 1

Lack of networks that engage women coaches, provide collaborative learning and peer support, and are maintained in a viable manner

The knots

- Lack of consistent messaging about valuing networking as a viable, ongoing coach learning opportunity
- Lack of structures, processes, and people in an effective, sustainable, lively, network for women coaches
- Ego, perception, and competition kill connections
- Multiple individual barriers such as time constraints and a lack of self-confidence
- Need to create an environment of support for all where all differences are incorporated into a healthy environment for women coaches
- Lack of measurement metrics of programs/initiatives already underway

The Top Knot: We don't value coaching connections enough and lack structures and processes.

SOLUTIONS

The good practices

Top 3 Good Practices

1. Schedule online communication.
2. Teach someone by your actions how to connect and to appreciate the value of connection.
3. Hold a workshop on social learning as a professional development opportunity for NCCP-PD (National Coaching Certification-Professional Development).

Others

- Support and encourage CAC Women in Coaching initiatives and mentorship opportunities.
- Hold events like the 2015 Conversation on a regular cycle.
- Make better use of existing platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram and tap into new ones as they emerge.
- Develop coaches' communities of practice face-to-face and/or online.
- Ask coaches how many other coaches they've reached out to. Be a positive role model.
- Create one communication hub in a local community, PTSO, or NSO, local club with a designated leader.
- Organize noon meetings (evenings are for family).

Research questions

Top 3 Research Questions

1. How would you define an "effective network"? What would it take to keep you connected?
2. What enablers allow you to maximize your networks?
3. How can the value creation framework promote social learning?

How

- Explore how integral coaching can support women in their professional development.
- Develop an alliance of women coaches (for example, gocoaches.org).
- Hold women-only events and conferences for networking opportunities to learn best practices. (Some may be open to men.)
- Ensure that accessibility and inclusiveness are priorities of these networks.
- Start with social media and grow groups from there.
- Ask LGBT women coaches what they need.
- Initiate a network after leaving an intense learning event like the 2015 Conversation.
- Ensure that leaders are aware of their important role in creating network responsibility.
- It starts with YOU. Take the lead, reach out, make the connection.

Solutions/Insights:

- Need to train Coach Developers in a new role of social learning leaders
- Present consistent messaging across the system

Solution/Insight to explore:

- Consistent messaging across the system

The one-paragraph solution

Develop consistent messaging about valuing networking as a viable, ongoing coach learning opportunity to increase retention. Use the existing coach education framework to train Coach Developers in a new role to facilitate social learning.

Main issue in applying this solution

Buying into the value of CONNECTION between women coaches

Most important factors to achieve success

- NCCP (National Coaching Certification Program)
- CAC-WIC (Coaching Association of Canada – Women in Coaching)
- NSO (National Sport Organization)
- CAAWS (Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity)

The Action Plan

Each action plan outlines the strategies that have been identified to help solve the problem and will hopefully be an inspiration.

WHO	WHAT	WHEN
NCCP-CAC Coaches Association of Ontario	Develop a new LF PD module and conduct a pilot	Fall 2015
CAC-WIC	Scheduled monthly call with the national women coaches	July 2015
Speed Skating Canada	Women coaches at the speed skating symposium – Start WinSport	June 20, 21 2015
Coach Developers	Advocate for value of connection between coaches	Every Wednesday starting June 17, 2015
Canadian Sport Parachuting Association's Women's Initiative Committee	Contact women coaches to inform + start a dialogue	July 2015

PROBLEM 2

Widespread perception of coaching as a man's world and therefore not a viable career option for women

The knots

- Enforceable policies, consistent at all levels and in all organizations
- No professional coaching pathway, regulated education, or certification
- Male dominance, especially in key hiring positions
- Multiple and complex barriers to opening the coaching profession to women
- Lack of women at the grassroots level

The Top Knot: Lack of Professionalization (Licensing)

SOLUTIONS

The good practices

Top 3 Good Practices

1. Develop and adopt affirmative action policies.
2. Develop a system to create professional coaching opportunities.
3. Provide benefits for women coaches.

Others

- Develop and adopt affirmative action policies.
- Follow the policy of the Canada Games Council (CGC) regarding gender equity.
- Follow the “Rooney Rule” in hiring decisions*.
- Provide pension and benefits.
- Pay for child care.
- Establish certification similar to teaching at the college level.
- Establish a certified and accredited coaching degree in universities.
- Use the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) system to create professional coaching opportunities.
- Provide benefits for women coaches.
- Offer a good salary.
- Examine Pour3point.ca: Training, paying, and connecting coaches in low income schools.

**The Rooney Rule requires National Football League teams to interview minority candidates for head coaching and senior football operation jobs. It is sometimes cited as an example of affirmative action, though there is no quota or preference given to minorities in the hiring of candidates. It was established in 2003.*

Research questions

Top 3 Research Questions

1. Have other countries professionalized coaching?
2. How have other professions become professionalized; for example, education, law, and medicine?
3. How can a regulatory body be established?

How

- Explore what other fields have done to become professions.
- Learn how to establish a regulated coach governing body.
- Learn what coach licensing processes exist in other countries.
- Learn if other countries have professionalized coaching? If so, what does it look like?
- Discover what sport can learn from other fields that have navigated this process successfully.
- Discover what needs to be done politically and legally to create a regulated profession.
- Assess how many women coaches are in Canada and what compensation they receive.

Solutions/Insights:

- Licensing for practice
- Regulatory body
- Advocacy at provincial, territorial, and national government levels
- Parent-friendly supports
- Scope of practice requirements
- Paid positions

Solution/Insight to explore:

Working with NSOs, CIS, Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA), and CGC as the major employers of coaches in Canada to require licensing for coaches.

The one-paragraph solution

CAC to lead and service NSOs, CIS, CCAA, and CGC to develop and implement a sustainable model of license requirements incorporating affirmative action plans

Main issue in applying this solution

Money

Most important factors for success

- Athletic directors and university representatives
- CEOs and high performance directors
- CGC
- CAC

The Action Plan

WHO	WHAT	WHEN
CIS + CCAA	Women coaches for female teams Male head coaches of female teams must have a woman assistant coach	Now for all new positions
NSOs	Report cards for next generation are publicized	
CAC	Coordination with parties re above	Ongoing
Employers	Remuneration for all coaches	

PROBLEM 3

Lack of excellent, competent women coaches

The knots

- Few women in positions of leadership and/or power
- Lack of paid opportunities
- Lack of accessibility to NCCP educational opportunities
- Lack of opportunities for current athletes to begin coach development
- No support/mentorship group to encourage and retain

The Top Knot: Increase the number of coaches at the base

SOLUTIONS

Good practices:

Top 3 Good Practices

1. Retain high-level athletes! Involve us!
2. Develop mentors and mentees.
3. Offer all-women coaching clinics.

Others

- Provide babysitting support at major competitions and training facilities.
- Provide childcare and potluck dinners from community members to free up moms to coach.
- Introduce coaching as a career option to children.
- “Able” a mom directly, not through the online impersonal registration process.
- Mandate coaching courses as a requirement to begin coaching “technical and theoretical”.
- Mandate that PTCRs / NSOs / PTSOs offer free NCCP training for all CIS female athletes.
- Encourage working moms to include nannies as coaches. (Note: this is an upper middle-class solution.)
- Support sports to value “grassroots” contributions.
- Attract awesome mentors!

- Educate people on the importance of great coaches.
- Invite women to be involved. (“Sometimes we need to be asked.”)
- Recruit retiring athletes.
- Involve strong male leaders.
- Create development and mentorship programs to start them young.

Research questions

Top 3 Research Questions

1. What are the unique needs of (potential) women coaches and how do these needs differ from those of males?
2. When is the best entry point to get women into coaching? (Childhood, post-secondary, motherhood?)
3. What do athletes do after they retire from high performance sport? How many are encouraged to coach?

How

- Assess when current coaches and athletes start to think about/learn to be a coach.
- Define good coaching.
- Conduct polls asking why more women aren’t involved.
- Assess the current percentage of women coaches at the base.
- Investigate the number of volunteer grassroots coaches seeking certification.
- Collect life stories of amazing women coaches to share their stories in a compelling way.

Solutions/Insights:

- Establish a safe and welcoming environment for women coaches.
- Recruit current CIS athletes and moms to coach.
- Provide leadership training for young athletes.
- Foster collaboration among coaches rather than competition.
- Certify CIS athletes and national team athletes while they are still athletes.
- Inform potential coaches of coaching opportunities.
- Establish a network of male champions interested in fostering the development of women leaders.
- Create a PTSO policy that promotes women coaching girls and women at the grassroots level.
- Expose girls to coaching and NCCP and leadership development opportunities.
- Insist that clubs learn to develop the “whole” person not just the athlete.
- Make coaching a desirable profession.
- Start women in coaching opportunities early so they can build confidence and competence in their abilities.
- Encourage head coaches to be positive role models to facilitate the development of the younger coaches.
- Address the systemic issues preventing women from coaching.

Solution/Insight to explore:

- Recruit and educate CIS- (and NCAA-), national-, and provincial/territorial-identified athletes to become coaches.

The clear solution:

Offer a variety of educational opportunities to current CIS, national team, and identified athletes.

Main issues in applying this solution

- Buy-in from coaches and administrators; outreach
- Timing and time required
- Resource organization (human resources)

Most important factors for success

- Administrators, coaches, athletes
- Lack of a current model

The Action Plan

WHO	WHAT	WHEN
CAAWS staff	Develop a pilot plan with CAC	December 2015
TBD	Pilot the project	2016-2017
TBD	Report on pilot and expand	Summer 2017
Everyone	Arrange education/certification for current athletes	

PROBLEM 4

Lack of development and implementation of mentorship programs

The knots

- Structured programs: Who is responsible for creating, maintaining, running these programs?
- Money: Where does the funding come from? How can a sustainable financial commitment be secured?
- Competence and confidence: How can mentors and mentees build their skills and knowledge to fulfill the role?
- Demonstrating the value of coaching and mentoring: Lack of awareness and education about the importance of coaching and mentoring.
- Time and location: Do the logistics of the program work? Are there restrictions due to prior commitments?

The Top Knot: Who has Ownership?

SOLUTIONS

Good practices:

Top 3 Good Practices

1. YWCA
2. Nova Scotia female coach mentorship program
3. Special Olympics Canada coach mentorship program pilot

- *Others* – Don't reinvent the wheel. Use what's already out there and successful.
- Investigate Sport Canada, which used to have a leadership program for staff. What is the current status?
- Tap into Égale Action's Mentore Active program.
- Imitate other mentorship programs or collaborate on ideas from other programs.
- Create follow-ups.
- Explore the Me to We Initiative.
- Research Motivate Canada.

Research questions

Top 3 Research Questions

1. How will a mentorship program be evaluated? What should be the outcomes?
2. What aspects of mentorship are effective for different age groups?
3. What programs exist within Canada or elsewhere? What can we learn from these programs?

How

- Discover if mentors are better equipped if they are from the same sport background.
- Assess where (who) the funding will come from.

- Explore what is happening in areas such as business and healthcare and who 'owns' the programs in those disciplines.
- Develop the stages and timing for encouragement / mentorship into leadership.

Solutions/insights

- Create informal regional coaching resources, including book clubs for coaches.
- Don't reinvent the wheel; make it better.
- Seek mentors.
- Offer mentoring to young women coaches.
- Make mentorship less formal as formality takes staff and money. Empower people to find a mentor who is meaningful for them.
- Create a national mentor pool. Mentees can "speed date" to find a potential mentor.
- Encourage NSOs to pay mentor an honorarium.
- Holding workshops by women coaches for women non-coaches or parents to show them what's possible.
- Do something. Start at the club; suggest to the PTSO or NSO conduct a pilot project or case study.
- Approach PTSOs and NSOs with a developed, structured program. Ask for support in terms of money, awareness, mentors, and advertising.
- Encourage NSOs to work together to make connections.
- Establish a national coaching school for women.
- Realize that opportunities for mentorship exist everywhere; at a friendly bike race or coffee shop, with a teacher or co-worker.
- Lower the bar for what mentorship looks like.
- Publicize available resources.

Solution/Insight to explore:

- Identify and empower the driving organization to lead the design, implementation, delivery, and evaluation of the mentorship program.

The clear solution

Identify and empower the driving organization to lead the design, implementation, delivery, and evaluation of the mentorship program.

Main issues in applying this solution

- Buy-in
- Funding
- Partner collaboration
- Media awareness

Most important factors to success

- CAC
- NSOs and PTSOs
- CIS and CCAA
- CGC
- CAAWS
- Mentor
- Media
- Sport Canada
- Universities and Colleges

The Action Plan

WHO	WHAT	WHEN
CAC	Create a program and partnership for funding	Pilot program by 2016
Sport Canada	Create and implement policies related to funding	Concurrent with CAC
NSOs and PTSOs	Fund and implement mentoring program	
Mentors and Mentees	Buy-in and promote	
Universities and Colleges	Buy-in, implement, promote, research, and evaluate	Immediate and ongoing

CONCLUSION

The 2015 Conversation was a true success. The participants were unanimous: This was a special and unique event. I hope you were able to find inspiration and concrete solutions you can apply in your own context. My own challenge now is to keep the ball rolling and make sure that everyone will stay on board and put their plan into action. My personal next action: to organize the 2018 Conversation. My commitment to the participants was to organize a Conversation every three years. So I hope to see you in 2018 in Quebec City where we will share our best shots and face the challenges that will still be there.

To get a firsthand view of the 2015 Conversation, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7wOT7Ub0aU>

About the 2015 Initiators

Guylaine Demers is the president of Égale Action and professor at Université Laval.

Marion Lay is the president of Think Sport.

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