

**Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching
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New for women coaches: Revamped approach pays early dividends

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The landscape for career women coaches in Canada is slowly evolving as growing numbers benefit from a variety of initiatives aimed at creating a working environment that is welcoming and rewarding. A key difference-maker is the Coaching Association of Canada's revamped National Team Apprenticeship Program (NTAP). Long a mainstay of the CAC's Women in Coaching Program (WiC), the NTAP works directly with specific universities and national sport organizations, one of which is Hockey Canada. In this issue of the *Journal*, Melody Davidson, Hockey Canada's General Manager of National Women's Team Programs, explains how her organization is approaching the development of women's leadership overall, with coaching a key component, and the NTAP a central partner. - Sheila Robertson, Journal editor

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New for women coaches: Revamped approaches pay early dividends

From 2000 to 2013, the National Team Coaching Apprenticeship Program (NTAP), an initiative of the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC), enabled more than 50 women coaches from over 30 sports to travel and coach with their national teams at major international events, including world championships and the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Traditionally, the NTAP supported six coaches from six sports over a three-year period following an open application process. In 2013, CAC decided to review the NTAP in consultation with Own the Program (OTP) and Canadian Interuniversity Sport (now U Sports). Selection criteria were developed through direct feedback from OTP for national sport organizations (NSOs) that had identified women coaches in their long-term high performance and NextGen plans. What emerged was a substantially different NTAP that aims to build and increase the capacity of women coaches within a designated sport and their own coaching environment. Those selected work with their NSO to develop a Professional Development/Leadership Plan based on a self-assessment and skills audit. The plan focuses on personal development, leadership development, technical and tactical strategies, and practical experiences such as attendance at competitions and events, the annual Petro-Canada Sport Leadership Conference, the annual national coach workshop, participating in leadership development webinars, serving as an apprentice coach at world championships, earning an advanced coaching diploma and credits within the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP), and experiencing sport-specific initiatives.

An Overview of the Revised NTAP

NTAP Objectives

- Target and increase the number of women career coaches at the Development and High Performance levels of the Canadian Sport System.
- Develop women coaches.
- Profile coaches as role models for the current and future generation of athlete and coaches.
- Increase partnerships towards a common goal.
- Build capacity by targeting and transitioning high performance women athletes into coaching.
- Educate NSOs and Multi-sport organizations (MSOs) on long-term coach development for women.

Sport Selection Process

- Each NSO identifies two or more women coaches or retiring athletes.
- OTP targets Olympic and Paralympic sports.
- The NSO's high performance director manages the process.
- A professional coach career pathway is developed.
- Access to high-level competition is provided by the NSO.
- Mentors are selected and work with the selected coaches from the outset.
- Selected coach has a coaching position at the club, provincial, or U Sport level.

Coach Selection Process

- NSO works with OTP high performance advisor to complete a coaching pathway and coaching depth chart to identify and monitor coaches.
- CAC develops a survey based on the information provided, which the NSO distributes to coaches.
- Selection of coaches follows information collection.
- Coaches/NSO complete an application form for the CAC and sign a contract.

Program Process

- Mentor coaches are selected and trained.
- Debrief process is developed for training mentors.
- Initial meetings are held with each sport/coach/Integrated Support Teams (IST).
- Individualized learning plans are defined based on a skills audit and educational and practical exposures.

Following the process described above, two NSOs were selected to inaugurate the new approach — Hockey Canada through the leadership of General Manager Melody Davidson, and Wrestling Canada, led by Executive Director Tamara Medwisky. What follows describes Hockey Canada's experience with the revised NTAP, the initiatives the organization has developed, and its successes, concerns, and next steps.

The development of Hockey Canada's 2014-2022 Strategic Plan paralleled that of the new NTAP pathway and merits close examination for its commitment to developing technical and tactical skills, athleticism, critical competition experience, and leadership support, of which coaching is a component, for high performance female athletes through four stages of their hockey careers: Pre-National Team (14 to 16 years old); U18 National Team Program; National Development Team Program; and National Women's Team Program. The goal is to create and sustain a qualified pool of talent so that many options are available when building teams of athletes, coaches, and staff.

Driving the Strategic Plan is its vision: "We are the Gold Medal Standard for female high performance hockey in the world by creating excellence in athleticism and leadership on the ice, on the bench, and in communities coast to coast."

The Strategic Plan's short-term goals include creating "centres of excellence and best practices in coaching and coach development" ... and "to develop and grow the pool of talent — athletes, coaches, IST, and staff — from which our elite programs can draw."

Long-term goals include developing “more women as high performance athletes and leaders within our communities” and “to attract more alumni players as leaders, mentors, and coaches across the female hockey system.”

This article focuses on *Coaching Excellence: Developing coaches at every level of the elite system*, one of four key strategic priorities.* *Coaching Excellence* calls for “world-class coaches in every elite level of the female game; resources and programs to enhance performance and leadership skills of coaches; and teams to coach.” In other words, job creation.

**The others are Integrated Support and Technology: Expanding Knowledge and Know-how; Leadership Excellence: Developing Leaders at all Levels; and Operational and Organizational Excellence: Hockey Canada*

As Melody Davidson explains: “When we put together the strategic plan, one objective was developing excellence in all areas — coaching, support staff, whatever it might be, and communicating with alumni who are active in the women’s game as coaches, staff, mentors, community advocates, and leaders. We began a concentrated effort to engage our alumni, providing consistent opportunities to bring them to our camps and events or giving them critical experiences in leadership roles, and assuring them that the development of our alumni was a priority, regardless of the specific role.

“In the first year, it was a matter of integrating a conscious effort to let alumni interested in coaching know that opportunities to become involved are available and how to sign on. We did an education piece with current players, and held many one-on-one and group discussions, recognizing that it can take time for women to believe they can and should [get involved]. A sport administrator, for example, might be brought to a camp as a team leader. A strength and conditioning coach could be given the opportunity to join Hockey Canada’s strength group’s meetings and camps. A community goalie coach would be encouraged to let us know what she was doing in case suitable opportunities arose for her to develop her skills.”

Becoming involved and improving skills is one thing; turning such opportunities into a paid position is quite another. The fact remains that job creation is a particular challenge given the scarcity for women of paid head and assistant coach positions. Hockey Canada has addressed the situation through a “quad plus one (five-year) communication, development, and selection process for elite coaches similar to that used for player development and selection.” It also developed a Gold Medal Standard High Performance profile for head coaches, assistant coaches, and goalie coaches bolstered by feedback, implementation, and adoption across the system. It helps that the job market has expanded to include sport schools, opportunities to run a hockey-related business as, for example, a goalie coach or a skills coach, and coaching positions within U Sports, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), or overseas. Ongoing work involves providing in-depth coach professional development combined with on-ice, practical application at camps to accelerate the number of coaches in the system with High Performance 1 and High Performance 2, and the NCCP’s Advanced Coaching Diploma.

Coaching experience is relevant when discussing the job market. Comparing the female game with the male game illustrates the dilemma. A coach in the female game, whether female or male, working at the college level or within the Canadian Women’s Hockey League, will get potentially 30 games a year, excluding playoffs, behind the bench. Over the course of five years, a coach in the female game will gain in the range of 150 games of experience. On the other hand, a coach in the male Major Junior or Tier 2 can expect in the range of 70 games of experience in the regular season or in excess of 350 games in a five-year span.

Canadian universities currently seeking a head coach for their women’s teams are agreeable to considering signing women coaches. “But”, says Davidson, “not all of our young coaches have much or any experience so do you recommend someone like that to dive into being a head coach? It’s risky without that critical background experience. We’ve built a good base and a good pool, but as a next step we must figure out how to get them critical experience to succeed at every level of coaching.”

Getting the experience is a work in progress that depends on close cooperation with Hockey Canada’s 13 member branches, particularly around the Canada Winter Games. There the picture is promising for 2019 in Red Deer, Alta., with four illustrious National Team alumni holding prominent coaching roles.

Former standout National Team defenceman Delaney Collins is the head coach of Team BC. The winner of three world championship gold medals, she was an assistant coach with the Mercyhurst Lakers (at Mercyhurst College in Erie, Penn.) from 2011 to 2016, was on the coaching staff at the 2015 U18 world championships, was a coach when the Development Team won gold at the 2016 Nation's Cup, and became an assistant with the U18 Team in 2016. "I love being part of Hockey Canada's organization," says Collins. "The highest level is the Olympic/world championship level. That would be a dream of mine. It's something I would like to pursue. I'm just grateful for any opportunities that are given to me. It's been such an honour to work with the program ..."

Carla MacLeod, the head coach of Team Alberta, played defence for the National Team from 2003 to 2007. Her accomplishments include gold medals at the 2006 and 2010 Olympic Winter Games and four world championships, winning gold in 2009 and silver in 2005, 2007, and 2008. She began her coaching career in 2010 as an assistant with Mount Royal University. Other coaching assignments include as an assistant coach with the U18 team and with Japan's national women's team.

Team Quebec's head coach is Noemie Marin and its assistant coach is Sarah Vaillancourt. Marin, a former Olympic softball player and a forward with the Montreal Stars of the CWHL, was head coach of the Development Team and is currently head coach at John Abbott College. She has been an assistant coach with the U18 Team and Team Quebec. Vaillancourt, who works as a skills coach, is a two-time Olympic gold medallist and won four world championship silver medals.

Less than four years into the Strategic Plan, and Davidson is pleased that players now see there are options to continue in the game at many levels, and not only as a player. As noted, engaging women in various leadership roles focuses primarily on communicating with alumni, informing them of camps and events, providing opportunities, and discussing options. "Every spring we circle back to see who's available, who's new, what her role should be," says Davidson. "We build our staffs and camps from there while simultaneously communicating with the branches and the members, and we generally use different processes for each individual who wants to be involved. Every August we hold Strategic Plan meetings and review every role and each person's unique professional development plan.

Midway through the life cycle of the Strategic Plan, Hockey Canada held a cutting-edge all-female event entitled the *NCCP High Performance 1 Coaching Seminar*. The four-day seminar, a partnership between the Hockey Canada Foundation, the CAC, and the NCCP, had two goals: to engage current and former members of Hockey Canada programs and to increase the numbers of female coaches and mentors. The initiative, marketed to 350 alumni through Hockey Canada's monthly newsletter, camps and events, social media, and email, was met with an overwhelming response. In the end, 32 current and former players, six group leaders, 13 presenters, and various Hockey Canada staff, were selected for the seminar.

Sessions covered "Ethics and Leadership in Coaching", "Physical Preparation", "Effective Use of Technology", "Game and Bench Management", "Conflict Management", "Planning a Competitive Performance", "Offensive and Defensive Team Play", "Mental Preparation", and "Advanced Skills Analysis".

As anticipated, the seminar has led to the education of quality women coaches, mentors, and role models involved in hockey at various levels and thereby influencing the next generation of female hockey players. As that growth continues, so do the numbers of women coaches. The expectation is that the 32 players must successfully complete the coursework and evaluations to become a certified coach by 2020. Aiding and guiding that process is the current focus with each coach being supported by National Women's Team program staff. The result, says Davidson, is that "we all will have the opportunity to positively impact hockey at the grassroots and high performance levels, and everywhere in-between."

Another initiative driven by Hockey Canada is *We are Coaches*, which fully supports associations from coast to coast that host an all-female coaching certification event. The goals are to help build infrastructure to support and sustain the growth of female hockey in Canada; develop role models and leaders within the female hockey community; and remove barriers to coaching education,

While the rate of progress outlined in the Strategic Plan is encouraging, Davidson repeats that providing those critical experiences remains the biggest obstacle to growth and is a "concentrated focus" of Hockey Canada. There are additional encouraging signs within the Canada Winter Games. Hockey New Brunswick has announced that its

staff at the 2019 Games will be led by Head Coach Kayla Blackmore and Assistant Coach Monika Cormier, who is also head coach of its U16 team. Hockey Newfoundland and Labrador has appointed an all-female staff consisting of Head Coach Meghan Frizzell, Assistant Coaches Sara Diamond and Jennifer Pollett, Trainer Stephanie Spencer, Goaltending Coach Nancy Caines, and Director of Operations Deidre Patey.

The four Atlantic branches, Hockey Canada, and CSI-Atlantic have together created a position called “Atlantic Canada Female Coach Mentor” to invest in the development of female players and coaches. Troy Ryan, an assistant with the 2018 Olympic women’s team, holds the position. He is charged with the planning and preparation of coach development sessions; providing leadership to the Atlantic members and mentorship of the coaching staff of the female U18 Team Atlantic; scouting duties for the National Women’s Team programs in the area; and providing mentoring and leadership for on- and off-ice training for women players and coaches of women’s teams in Atlantic Canada.

“These initiatives, and many others, reflect Hockey Canada’s collaborative vision to provide opportunities for women coaches,” says Davidson.

Two of Canada’s most successful women players are enjoying coaching success with U Sports. Vicky Sunohara won Olympic gold medals as a player in 2002 and 2006 and silver in 1998. She became head coach of the University of Toronto’s Varsity Blues women’s team in 2011 following stints as an assistant coach with the Blues and a camp coach with the national U18 and U19 programs. Danielle Goyette, also a member of the 1996, 2002, and 2006 Olympic teams, was named head coach of the University of Calgary Dinos women’s hockey program. In 2017, she was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

In the United States, several important head coach positions are held by Hockey Canada alumni. Cassandra (Cassie) Turner is head coach at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut and recently signed a contract extension through the 2020-2021 season. Cara Morey, a rising star in international coaching, is now head coach of Princeton University’s women’s hockey team. And Nadine Muzerall is head coach of the Buckeyes at Ohio state University.

Recent changes involving the CAC are expected to further enhance the growth and retention of women coaches in Canada to the benefit of NSOs that, like Hockey Canada are hard at work in this area.

At the time of writing, the NTAP has morphed into the University Mentorship, tackling U Sports where only 17% of head coaches are female. The CAC continues to work with OTP through the Canadian Olympic Committee’s (COC) *Coaching Enhancement Program* (CEP). A four-year commitment, launched in 2017, the CEP is designed to, “on a system-wide basis, improve sport performance by elevating the quality of Canada’s coaches by systematically improving coach education, mentorship, retention, and recruitment. The CEP is a ground-breaking initiative built and delivered by Canada’s high performance partners ... and will arm Canadian coaches with the skills necessary to fulfill Canada’s sporting potential. The CEP supports NSOs in their commitment to assess and develop their leading senior coaches as well as those who show the potential to rise to the top.”

“The COC is investing \$5.2 million over five years with OTP to administer the CEP, with a portion specifically targetting NextGen women coaches,” says Isabelle Cayer, the CAC’s senior coaching consultant who manages the Women in Coaching (WIC) program. She added that in CEP’s first year, the CAC consulted with seven NSOs and eight women coaches who were selected to participate in the WIC- CEP, which involved a comprehensive leadership assessment process, feedback, and follow-up sessions, and a session with the coach’s mentor to further support her development as a result of the assessment.

More funding is expected which will, in turn, lead to more women coaches entering and remaining within the Canadian Sport System.

Wrestling Canada Another Beneficiary of the new NTAP

Three of Canada's most outstanding women wrestlers – three-time Olympic medallist Tonya Verbeek, Olympic champion Carol Hyunh, and three-time world champion Martine Dugrenier – were selected by Wrestling Canada to participate in the NTAP initiative to build and increase the capacity of female coaches within a sport, within their own coaching environment. “In various and different ways, we have integrated them [into our programs] with support from the CAC,” says Tamara Medwisky.

Verbeek was the association's Talent ID coach and now is its International coach. She recently led Canada's wrestlers at the 2018 Commonwealth Games where the team won 10 medals. Hyunh is a Next-Gen coach at the CSI-Calgary. Dugrenier, also a member of the Gold Coast coaching staff, is a physical education teacher at Vanier College in Montreal, coaches at the National Training Centre, and was selected for the Commonwealth Games Federation's Women's Internship Coaching Program (<https://thecgf.com/news/future-women-commonwealth-coaching-talent-participate-first-ever-mentor-programme-gold-coast>).

About the author

Sheila Robertson is the founding editor and an author for the *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching*; the author of *Shattered Hopes: Canada's Boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games*; the editor and an author for *Taking the Lead: Strategies and Solutions from Female Coaches*; a contributing author to *Playing It Forward: 50 Years of Women and Sport in Canada* and *Women in Sports Coaching* (Routledge 2016), and the founding editor and lead writer of *Champion* magazine and *Coaches Report* magazine. The Sheila Robertson Award, presented annually by the Coaching Association of Canada, recognizes a national sport or multi-sport organization that demonstrates a consistent approach in valuing the recognizing the role of the coach internationally and to the media and the public. Visit her website at <http://canadiansporthistory.ca/>