



# Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching Online >>>>>

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## APRIL 2008 FEATURE

### **They Never Give Up: Once a Coach, Always a Coach**

by Sheila Robertson

Since its inception in September 2000, the [Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching](#) has explored the situations of women coaches from almost every angle. We've reported on women coaches with young children, on star women athletes wanting equal success in coaching, on the value women bring to the coaching profession, and on national team coaches who juggle career aspirations and motherhood. We've put Canada's women coaches under the microscope in an effort to draw influential attention to their situations, to stimulate debate, and to effect change that will lead to a more equitable environment.

Another voice that clamours to be heard, we were told, belongs to women whose childbearing years are largely past and who could now focus on coaching careers that were interrupted, slowed down, put on hold altogether, or handled with difficulty. Consequently, we sought out these largely silent voices and found women who have been tested, challenged, or shoved aside, yet who persevere, each driven by a powerful desire to coach: women with children, women with different ways of making it work, women with the highest of ambitions, women devoted to community coaching – above all, women who excel at coaching.

What follows are their illuminating personal stories. And what talented coaches they are! Educated, experienced, dedicated, committed – and under-utilized to an astonishing degree.

What these women have in common is a passionate desire to coach even when hopes for promotion are dashed, when they are penalized for speaking their mind, or when they have trouble being taken seriously because of their gender.

Out of the discussion come a number of provocative observations leading to 25 recommendations. It is the [Journal's](#) hope that this country's decision makers in sport will pay them the attention they merit and then follow up with action. It is long overdue!

This is not as impossible as it may seem.














Let's take a leaf from business, another male-dominated bastion, which, over the past 10 years, has begun to build an environment conducive to a growing and valued segment of their workforce – women – and provide incentives for this formidable talent pool: "... flexible working hours, compressed workweeks, letting women 'ramp down' their work schedules for a period of time while still keeping a hand in work, and then 'ramp up' to a regular workweek once they are ready."\* If business can do it, why not sport?

Let's urge sport's decision makers to make common cause with author Sylvia Hewlett, who notes in [Off-Ramps and On-Ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success](#), that "There's a new willingness on the part of cutting-edge firms to walk the talk and change the rules of the career game to better utilize female talent." Indeed.

\*As reported in *The Globe and Mail*, "Welcome mat's out – for mom", October 3, 2007.

The views expressed in the articles of *The Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching* are those of the authors and do not reflect the policies of the Coaching Association of Canada.

## Meet the Coaches

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## Lesley Beatson – Triathlon

The minute she finished high school, **Lesley Beatson** left her Toronto home for the ski slopes of Banff. Skiing and teaching skiing were her life for the next few years.



Lesley Beatson, leadership coach and former triathlon and swim coach

Moving to Rossland, B.C., Lesley coached the Trail Stingrays Swim Club to support her budding competitive cycling career. When she relocated to Vancouver in 1985 to train, her swimming and cycling experience caught the attention of local triathletes, and she attracted sufficient clientele to earn her living and continue her own training despite encountering skepticism. “I was quite serious, and I did win a bronze medal at the 1987 nationals, but a lot of people didn’t take me seriously. They didn’t understand that it was important to me because I loved it.”

Coaching world-class triathletes prompted Lesley to enrol in the National Coaching Institute (NCI) in Victoria. “I love coaching, and I wanted the education piece and a national coach position.” That was not to be. A man with less experience and no education got the nod, despite a strong letter of support for Lesley from the head of Triathlon Canada. The experience was frustrating and painful.

Somewhat disenchanted, Lesley was receptive when the Stingrays offered a lucrative contract to coach its summer program. In October 1991, she gave birth to her son, **Colston**. Come summer, she fulfilled her coaching duties, often with the baby on her back. It seemed a positive situation so she was taken aback when the club president took issue with her child-care arrangements. The next season, she continued to bring Colston to out-of-town meets but arranged home care during practices. The end came during the following season. When the club learned that her second child, her daughter, **Samantta**, was due the weekend of the provincial championships, she was terminated. The reason, the club claimed, was that it could no longer afford her, but she wonders about the truth of that claim.

As a single mother, Lesley was unable to coach at an elite level or full time. Instead, she coached master swimmers, triathletes, and cross country skiers on a very part-time basis and earned a master’s degree in adult education from Simon Fraser University. This led her to start her own business, Leadership Coaching and Consulting, which focuses on empowering individuals and groups to develop their maximum potential and advance their personal leadership abilities. “One reason I can do this is because of what I learned as an athlete and as a coach of sport.” She also teaches mental training at the Red Mountain Ski Academy, trains a group of adolescents who love to ski but not race, and works with individual athletes and teams. For over 13 years, she was a course conductor with the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP), which she describes as “a highlight of my sport coaching experience. I felt I had an influence on young people through working effectively with their coaches.”

Nowadays Lesley, who recently earned a PhD in leadership studies from Gonzaga University, is a cross country skier of some note. She won a gold medal at the 2007 National Masters Ski Championships and recorded top-10 finishes at the 2002 Master’s World Championships. Although she moved away from coaching sport as she struggled to earn enough money to support her family, she concedes that she might not have done so had she been able to make a viable living. “There are many different ways to carve out a coaching existence while raising a family. Through reflection, time, single parenting, and learning, my values have shifted. I will always be involved in coaching athletes on some level, but with a much different perspective.”

## Isabelle Cloutier – Diving

**Isabelle Cloutier** began to dive in her hometown of Terrebonne, Que. She moved to the Laval Diving Club in the late 1980s and spent the last four years of her career at CAMO (Club Aquatique de Montréal) Plongeon in Montreal, competing at senior nationals and the 1992 Olympic Trials.



Isabelle Cloutier, executive director, Plongeon Québec, and former coach, CAMO Plongeon, and her husband, Aaron Dziver, her son Marc, and her daughter, Mia

At 17, Isabelle took up coaching by chance. Asked to step in on short notice, she reluctantly agreed. “I was traumatized because I didn’t know how to coach. After the class, I said that if they wanted me to do it again, they had better educate me, and that’s how it all started.”

Isabelle competed and coached until injuries forced an end of her athletic career. In any case, the two pursuits had begun to clash, as she found herself competing against athletes she was coaching, a situation she did not enjoy.

Interested in becoming a certified general accountant, she graduated from the Université du Québec à Montréal in 1995 with a degree in business and earned her professional designation in 2000. Throughout this period she continued to coach, holding assistant coach positions, first with Laval and then with CAMO, where she became the club’s technical director. For a number of years, she also delivered NCCP Technical courses for Plongeon Québec.

Also in 2000, Isabelle enrolled in the NCI-Montreal, working with master coach **Michel Larouche**, who, along with **César Henderson**, has mentored her throughout her career.

In 2004, Isabelle and her husband, **Aaron Dziver**, also a CAMO coach, welcomed their son, **Marc**. Isabelle spent her one-year maternity leave away from coaching but remained involved by handling the club’s accounting. When she returned to coaching, it was to work with provincial and national junior divers, partly because her ability to travel was limited and also because she enjoys that age group. “Of course when you start coaching you want to go to the Olympics, but eventually I figured out that I prefer to work with younger athletes.”

Not surprisingly, Isabelle encountered day-care issues, finding that the hours of operation conflicted with her coaching schedule. Although she worked out an arrangement with a friend, she believes that having day care at the workplace would make a tremendous difference in the lives of many women.

For Isabelle, the attractions of coaching are “being surrounded by kids and knowing that you are helping them grow and learn as athletes and as people.” And it’s also about success. A number of her divers made the national junior team, and three of them – **Roseline Filion**, **Meaghan Benfeito**, and **Jennifer Abel** – have since progressed to the senior ranks.

In December 2006, Isabelle’s daughter, **Mia**, was born, and while Isabelle was on maternity leave she pondered her future. “I was trying to figure out a way to stay involved in coaching with two kids, and I had trouble seeing a way to do it.” The dilemma resolved itself when Plongeon Québec invited her to become its executive director. After weighing the pros and cons, she decided that making the move was best for her family and would ensure her continued involvement with her sport. “I miss the kids on the deck, but this was a good decision at this point in my life. I haven’t closed the door to going back. We’ll see what happens, but my heart is still there for sure.”

## Mary Dyck – Volleyball and Soccer

Mary Dyck played volleyball while a student at Trinity Western University. In 1980, she transferred to the University of Lethbridge (U of L) and sat out for a year because of transfer regulations. She assumed managerial and then assistant coach responsibilities with the women's team in order to stay involved. Mentored by head coach **Steve Wilson**, she served as an assistant coach for the next four years.



Mary Dyck, high school volleyball coach and club soccer coach

In 1988, she became the founding coach of the university's women's soccer program and was an assistant coach with the Alberta Soccer Association (ASA) U-16/U-18 program, where her mentor was **Milan Bartosz**.

Mary, who was named Canada West Universities Athletic Association Coach of the Year - Women's Soccer in 1988, earned a master of science degree in sport administration from the University of North Dakota in 1990; says Mary, "My academic interests are entirely to support my coaching." Her return to the U of L coincided with having to re-apply for her coaching job due to structural changes in Canadian universities, and she lost her position. "Earlier I caused a stink when I complained about the men's program's hazing practices, and I was told that I didn't get my job back because I didn't get along with the men's program! It was depressing. I didn't see it coming. I'd done my master's to get better at coaching and administration and now I didn't have my coaching job."

Returning to Trinity Western in 1990 as a professor and volleyball coach, Mary coached the women's team to victory at the B.C. college championships and to sixth place at the national championships. Her upwardly mobile coaching path was changed by the arrival of her daughters – **Jesse** was born in 1990 and **Carly** in 1992. By 1993, Mary was back at the U of L as academic advisor in the Faculty of Education. Finding it difficult to coach at the university level and parent, her coaching shifted to junior and senior boys' volleyball and girls' and women's soccer. She was Alberta's women's soccer coach at the 1993 Canada Summer Games, founded the Southern Alberta Oldtimers Football Association and the Women's Soccer Association of Lethbridge, and returned to coaching high school girls' volleyball.

Mary compares her coaching career to climbing a ladder: "I went from coaching at nationals to coaching high school boys and my children and then I started back up again, and I have thoroughly enjoyed it all. I'm *not* a parent coach. I was a coach before I was a parent, and when someone sees soccer balls in my car and assumes that I must be a soccer mom, I say, 'No! I'm a soccer coach!' Coaching is my passion, not my profession; I have to keep my profession so I can keep on coaching."

In 2002, Mary earned a doctorate from the University of Calgary. Her goal was to get a better job so that she could indulge her passion even more. She now teaches in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education at the U of L, is a course conductor for the ASA and the Alberta Volleyball Association, and coaches both high school volleyball and club soccer.



## Michele Fisher – Rowing

Michele Fisher made history when she earned a spot on the Brock University rowing team at the age of 43. Not that she was new to the sport. She had, in fact, started rowing while in high school in St. Catharines, Ont., and was recruited by the University of Pennsylvania where she earned a degree in civil engineering.



Michele Fisher, lightweight women's coach, Brock University, and her husband, Brian

She turned to volunteer coaching after graduation in 1982, first at the Hanlan Boat Club in Toronto and then at Ridley College and various high schools in her hometown. All the while she was building a professional career, not as an engineer – jobs were scarce then – but in information technology (IT) and marketing operations with Canadian Pacific Railway in Toronto. Her first son, Marcus, was born to Michele and her husband, Brian, in 1988, and the family set down roots in St. Catharines. With the arrival of Michael in 1990, she took two years off work to focus on child rearing and occasional summer coaching.

Returning to the workforce with a part-time IT contract led to her being over-extended and she decided that coaching had to go. She eventually joined Canadian Tire Financial Services Ltd. and, in 1997,

welcomed Aidan into the family.

By 2004, looking for new challenges and interested in business, Michele enrolled in Brock's MBA program and was quickly recruited by rowing coach Peter Somerwil. "I had training shirts from my undergrad that were older than the young women I was rowing with!" With only one year of eligibility left, her career was short but sweet and, in fact, led her back to coaching. "I wanted to follow my passion, so I decided that instead of the corporate world, sport would be my new career. I joined the junior summer program at the St. Catharines Rowing Club, and it's been full tilt ever since."

Now lightweight women's coach at Brock and tapped by Rowing Canada Aviron as a coach with its junior development team, Michele says that a coaching career never seemed an option when she was younger, not least because jobs were few and far between. Nowadays, she relishes her choice. "Sport is so valuable; it transcends divisions in society. I always feel good about it. In the corporate world things happen to you; in sport I feel able to make a mark. I developed a lot of skills over the years, and this gives confidence I didn't have earlier."

Michele advises younger coaches to find their own style of coaching, while noting that this requires maturity. "In my first round, I emulated another coach and it wasn't my true personality, which explains why some athletes didn't respond as well as they do now to my coaching style."

Working on NCCP Level 3 in order to coach at the provincial and national team levels, Michele says that resuming the profession after "maturing" in the corporate and parenting worlds has made her much wiser and less ego driven. "The benefits are irreplaceable. I love to compete and I love to see a team create a great performance. I love the day-to-day interaction with the athletes, the constant problem solving. I love to be fit and healthy and to promote that in this job. And I love to see athletes demonstrate their personal attributes in the team setting."

## Alison Hitesman – Volleyball

Alison Hitesman's path to a coaching career was circuitous even though sport was always a part of her life. The Victoria native graduated from Dalhousie University in 1982 with a physical education degree. While there, she participated in basketball and track and field before converting to volleyball. When her ambition to teach was thwarted by high unemployment, she turned to nursing. These days, she works for the Government of Canada as a medical adjudicator for disability pensions, but her passion is coaching.



Alison Hitesman, head coach, Camosun College's women volleyball team

It began at Dalhousie, where coaching was a requirement for her degree. She then became a player and coach when playing senior volleyball and went on to coach at camps and clinics run by Soccer Alberta and Volleyball Alberta.

Coaching took a hiatus for several years while Alison and her husband, **Richard Dzioba**, lived in Vancouver and she worked as a community health nurse, although she continued to play sports herself. In 1991, the couple moved to Victoria and their family grew to include **Brittany**, now 15, and **Christopher**, 12.

"I always wanted coaching to be my profession, but given how often I moved, it wasn't feasible, other than in the club system where I was playing." That changed when Brittany began to play soccer. Alison became a volunteer soccer coach in the community and the school system and coached Grade 7 girls' and boys' volleyball teams, eventually coaching a competitive, travelling volleyball team, which necessitated NCCP courses. In the process, master NCCP coach **Linda Henderson**, who coached Camosun College's men's volleyball team for 14 years and is now the athletic director at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, pressed Alison to coach at a higher level. Alison accepted the challenge and got

involved with Team BC. In 2006, she became assistant coach of Camosun's women's team.

It was her good fortune that head coach **Marty Donatelli** was keen to have her join his team. "He was receptive, and I suspect that every female coach will say that their first step was meeting someone who was open to her coaching and who had no preconceived notions that a coach had to be male."

Now the team's head coach, Alison says that she loves the challenge and the competitiveness of coaching. The reality, she notes, is that rarely do people get to do what they love on a full-time basis. "If I could coach full time, I would leave my government job in a New York minute; I'm that keen. Getting paid to do what I'm passionate about, even if not full time, is the ultimate."

Alison, who is also the head coach of the U-16 girls' team of the Victoria Volleyball Association, plans to develop a program at Camosun that is highly respected within the college system and is strongly linked to the community. She hopes that Camosun's relationship with the new Pacific Sport Institute will propel the college to promote sport to a higher level. And she wants to make sure that girls have the opportunity to play whatever sport they want.

As for advancing women in coaching, Alison says, "Women coaches are likely themselves athletic and thus will have highly involved kids in sports, and that just adds to their scheduling constraints and at times reduces or delays their involvement as coaches."

## Jennifer Holleman – Boxing

Jennifer Holleman didn't set out to be the owner of a boxing club and a Canada Winter Games assistant coach. Her sports had been equestrian, soccer, basketball, volleyball, and track and field. To lose weight after childbirth, she signed up for a boxercise class at a friend's urging. Despite finding the sport intriguing from the start, she initially laughed at the suggestion that she compete. Nevertheless, something drew her to it, and before long she was training with 1976 Olympian Bryan Gibson at his club in Kentville, N.S.



Jennifer Holleman (L), head coach, Tri-County Mariners Amateur Boxing Club, national champion Maddison Fraser, and national silver medalist Phylcia O'Connell

Winter Games.

Mentored by both Gibson and Jim Worthen, who is heavily involved with the Canada Games and has his own club in Trenton, N.S., Jenn decided to open the Tri-County Mariners Amateur Boxing Club, in Yarmouth, N.S., in December 2006. "Both have done so much for me, encouraging me, helping me along, and showing me how to do things properly."

Local response has been overwhelming. Jenn's gym already boasts one national champion – Maddison won the 50kg title in February 2008 – and two provincial champions. The club, with 30 registered boxers, 95 per cent of whom are female, is reportedly the largest in the province. "The aura is amazing. The kids are awesome, and we're like one big family. And it's challenging. My biggest fear was that my level of satisfaction would not be what it was as an athlete, but, honestly, it's better."

Determined to upgrade her coach education, Jenn is enrolled in the NCI-Atlantic, attending on a Women in Coaching (WiC) scholarship (<http://www.coach.ca/eng/grants/women.cfm>). Getting there wasn't easy. She was unaware of the WiC programs and unearthed information with difficulty. "Somehow I contacted a lot of the right people, like WiC consultant Sheilagh Croxon; she was awesome and showed me how to apply for grants and the scholarship. A lot is available that women just don't know about; if they had more knowledge, maybe more would pursue a coaching career."

Although travelling all over the Atlantic provinces to attend the NCI is challenging, Jenn has no regrets. "When I'm there, I'm totally in the zone, grasping all the concepts, understanding everything, and it's so cool, and then, boom, it's time to go home."

As well as developing excellent athletes and earning NCCP Level 5, Jenn's ambition is to coach the women's team that will one day, she predicts, be part of the Olympic Games. Over the longer term, her goal is to develop a "fantastic female legacy", producing technically proficient athletes in a sport that, as she points out, has helped so many youth "stay on the straight and narrow".

Jenn's first amateur fight took place in November 1999 when she was 29. Seven fights later, she won a bronze medal at the national championships. She became a five-time provincial champion and fought 36 bouts.

Throughout this period, Jenn, who has a background in accounting and pub management, was a stay-at-home mother to Maddison, 14, and Tori, nine. When she married her fisherman husband, Andrew, her family grew to include his children, Brandon, 18, and Erin, 13.

Forced by boxing regulations to stop competing at the age of 34, she started to dabble in coaching. Her coaching skills emerged quickly. In 2005 and 2006, she was named assistant coach of Team Nova Scotia's cadets competing at the national championships. And in 2007, she was assistant coach of the provincial team at the 2007 Canada



## Lorrie Horne – Ringette

**Lorrie Horne** grew up on a farm near Olds, Alta., and attended a four-classroom, eight-grade school. She and her six classmates, five boys and one girl, enjoyed the freedom to roam, on foot and on horseback, and all learned to skate at an early age. She played hockey on the boys' team, switching to ringette in Grade 8 when size became a factor. She went on to win four national titles with the Alberta Dinosaurs and attributes grit and determination to her success as a player.



Lorrie Horne, coach of Canada's 2002 world championship ringette team

In 1992, Lorrie earned a physical education degree, specializing in athletic therapy, from the University of Alberta (U of A). In 1995, she added a master's degree in exercise physiology. Her coaching career began when she joined Alberta's ringette team to the 1999 Canada Winter Games, working with head coach **Peter Semonick**, "a helluva good guy who taught me how to coach". She was also an assistant coach of the Pandas hockey team.

After graduation, Lorrie played for the Tuusula Ringette Club of the Finnish National Ringette League (FNRL) for a year, coached the club's junior team, and assisted with a regional junior team. After two more years back in Alberta with the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology's Personal Fitness Trainer Program, she returned to Finland as head coach of the Shakers Ringette Club. The team was in 12th place in the FNRL but, with her at the helm, made the playoffs. Back home once again, she agreed to head Augustana College's new women's hockey program and instruct physical education. She also became the part-time head coach of the U.S. ringette team and led the Americans to the bronze medal at the 2000 world championship, their first ever ringette medal.

In 2001, Team Canada came calling. At the 1998 and 2000 worlds, the team had settled for silver, and with the 2002 event slated for Edmonton, there was a burning desire to excel. Ringette Canada made sure the team had everything it needed to win gold, and that included providing Lorrie with a mentor in the person of U of A professor **Dru Marshall**, a former national coach of the women's field hockey team. "She had been my professor, but we really didn't know each other. We went for a walk to talk about it, and that was it. Our relationship continues to this day."

The gold medal won, Lorrie agreed to continue with Team Canada for the 2004 worlds in Finland. For many reasons, this time the preparation didn't go as smoothly as in 2002, and the result was a 9-3 loss to Finland in the final. Her contract ended shortly afterwards and, in the same period, Augustana's hockey program was cancelled for financial reasons. It was time, Lorrie felt, to explore other pastures. After taking a course in entrepreneurship, she decided that the answer was to go into business for herself. She established two companies –The People Coach Inc. specializes in corporate team building and staff retreats, and Future Champions Coach Mentorship Programs develops ringette coaches.

These days, the companies are doing well, and Lorrie also holds down a human relations job in the construction industry. This allows her common-law spouse to stay home in Sherwood Park, Alta., with the couple's two daughters, **Ava**, three, and **Kate**, nearly two.

Lorrie's coaching career is on hold, at least until the children are older. "It's time to be home now. I really miss coaching, the competitive environment, the building aspect. I get jazzed turning a group of people into a functioning unit as a team. I miss it all, but my mentorship programs keep me in the coaching environment. Of course, it would be different if it was possible to coach high performance and earn a viable income, but that's not happening any time soon."

## Dawn Keith – Basketball

Lethbridge-born **Dawn Keith** began playing organized basketball in Grade 6. Her talent was evident from the beginning and eventually led her to spots on provincial teams. A 5’8” shooting guard, she went to Scottsdale College in Arizona for two years and then returned home to attend the University of Lethbridge (U of L). “I got back with my boyfriend [now husband], **Warren**, and connected with U of L coach **Louisa Zerbe**, who became my mentor.” Coach and player shared the excitement when, in 1986, U of L won the CIAU bronze medal.



Dawn Keith (L), head coach, Alberta's, Centre for Performance, and Kelly Boucher, coaches of Alberta's U-15 girls' basketball team, national silver medallists in 2007

Alberta junior women's team.

Dawn and Warren married in 1991, and when he joined the Lethbridge Fire Department, she, too, returned to her hometown, as head coach of the Lethbridge Community College (LCC) women's team. She became a director and coach of the STARS Basketball Association, which handles youth basketball programs in Southern Alberta, served on the board of directors of Basketball Alberta, gave birth to **Nick** and **Katie**, and managed to continue coaching, ignoring concerns voiced by male colleagues about the propriety. Her athletes, however, were on her side. “They were supportive of me, very mature, and we were winning. We ended up nationally ranked and going to the 1997 nationals. I brought my mom as manager and had Katie with me all the time.”

Dawn made three applications to coach at the U of L, all unsuccessful. “I’m a mover and shaker. I like to get things done, I like change and creativity, and not everyone appreciates these qualities. I’m not a loudmouth, but I speak my mind, and perhaps that was the problem.”

In 1999, Dawn stepped down from post-secondary coaching to develop and coach the Lethbridge Selects Basketball Club, a first for girls in the city. She became an adjunct instructor at LCC, earned a master's degree in administration and leadership from Gonzaga University, and continued her involvement with Basketball Alberta. In 2003, when Canada Basketball launched a Centre for Performance (CP) in Alberta, Dawn became an assistant coach working with head coach **Claire Mitton**. “I had thought I was done coaching, but CP was a brand-new, open, clear pathway. The program is phenomenal, what we're learning is always new, I know what's going on, and I'm connected with people at the top.”

Last summer, at the invitation of head coach **Kelly Boucher**, Dawn joined the U-15 provincial girls' team as an assistant coach. The team won the Western Canada Games gold medal and took silver at the national championships, and eight of the players are currently training with CP.

Named head coach upon Mitton's retirement in 2007, Dawn remains totally supportive of CP, although she worries about Basketball Alberta's intent to water it down for financial reasons. “This is a wonderful program. The people are willing to make changes for the betterment of basketball in Canada and they are learning, with open minds, from the Europeans and the Australians.”

Zerbe recognized Dawn's ability to work with children and encouraged her to study physical education. And she encouraged her to coach, first with summer camps and Alberta South teams, and then as her assistant when Zerbe moved to Concordia University. She facilitated Dawn's NCCP certification and in 1988 sent her to the now-defunct National Coaching School for Women. “It was awesome to be with so many women from across the country trying to make their way in coaching through proper education.”

The Concordia experience showed Dawn that a coaching career was for her. Warren was trying for a position as a firefighter with the City of Calgary, so she headed west and eventually landed at Mount Royal College as head coach and physical education teacher. She also became head coach of the U-19

## Lise Dubé Le Guellec – Biathlon

Lac Saint-Jean native **Lise Dubé Le Guellec's** coaching path can be traced directly to her decision, at 13, to join the Air Cadet movement. Showing aptitude in marksmanship, she won a silver medal at the 1977 Canada Summer Games. At 20, she began to work in the fitness industry, entered bodybuilding competitions, and then qualified as an aerobics instructor.



The Le Guellec family  
(L to R): Pierre-Luc, Serge, Lise, and Jean-Philippe

In 1985, her first son, **Jean-Philippe** (J-P), was born to Lise and her husband, **Serge**, a career air force officer. Soon after, she resumed training and was hired as director of fitness at La Sporthèque de Hull. Once **Pierre-Luc** was born in 1988, she scaled back her workload to two days a week to dedicate herself to her young family.

When her sons reached their teens, Lise enrolled both in the Cadets. One of the sports offered was biathlon, and she suggested that J-P try it out, never dreaming that he would become the 2004 world youth champion. The suggestion was fateful for her, too. J-P took to the sport with a vengeance, and that created a problem since the family was living in Montreal and the nearest coach was miles away at the Valcartier Training Centre. "Since he wanted to do biathlon, no problem. I'm a cross country skier, I know how to shoot, and I know fitness, so I decided to coach him. We quickly realized that he had great potential, and I decided to focus all my time on him."

Lise immediately began taking NCCP courses and coached J-P for the next five years. Her work as a biathlon coach was closely supervised by then-national coach **Daniel Lefebvre**. Given J-P's rapid progress, the family moved to Quebec City so that he could train full time.

In 2003, when Lefebvre took over J-P's training, Lise finished Level 3 and became the head coach of Club de biathlon de Courcellette. "I really wanted to be a coach, but this is not easy. Biathlon is a very male-dominated sport, but this doesn't mean it cannot be done. I gained the respect of my male colleagues through hard work, determination, and a desire to listen and learn." She was also the centre's biathlon director, started a Sport-Études program in local schools, organized cross country ski competitions, and ran summer camps for youngsters interested in biathlon. As if that wasn't enough, she enrolled in the NCI-Montreal and is close to completing the program.

In 2007, Lise, a reserve officer in the Canadian Forces, went to the Canada Winter Games as coach of Newfoundland's biathlon team. It was another fateful move. While she was there, her interest in shooting was rekindled, and she now trains full time. Within five months, she made Canada's military team and competed at the 4th Military World Games in India.

Also in 2007, she and Serge moved to the Laurentians, near Prévost. Determined to remain involved with biathlon, she has bought a trailer and criss-crosses the region introducing biathlon to teenagers. As part of Level 4, she is training as a wax technician and accompanied Canada's team on the 2008 Europa Cup circuit, serving as well as an assistant coach. "There is no way I will give up biathlon. I've worked so hard to get all those Levels."

Lise and Serge have been chosen as two of Canada's officials at the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. With J-P on track to make the team, the Games will be a family affair for the Le Guellects.

## Carol Love – Rowing

**Carol (Eastmure) Love** was an accidental rower. While she was standing in the registration line at McMaster University in 1971, someone casually suggested she try out for the university club. Although she was athletic, rowing had never been her sport. Within five years, she was stroking Canada's eight to a fourth-place finish at the Olympic Games, and one year later she was a world champion bronze medallist.



Carol Love, head coach, Trent University and the Peterborough Rowing Club

Her competitive career over, Carol moved to Peterborough, Ont., to be assistant athletic director at Trent University. She was gradually drawn into coaching with Trent and the Peterborough Rowing Club (PRC) and also initiated a high school women's program, a first for the city. In 1980, the Canadian Amateur Rowing Association offered her the opportunity to coach the U-23 men's team.

In 1981, Carol married fellow Olympian **Brian Love**, and they moved to New Zealand, eager for the experience of living abroad. Brian took a job with the University of Otago and Carol became executive director of the Dunedin YMCA, the first woman to hold such a position in that country. After three years, the couple returned to Peterborough, Brian to work for Trent and Carol to coach on and off as a volunteer with the PRC and on contract with the university.

In 1985, Carol gave birth to her daughter, **Robin**, and less than a month later began a three-year stint as coach of PRC and Trent, made possible by Sport Canada's Women in Sport and Fitness Leadership Program, which provided shared funding to create opportunities for women in administration and coaching. "It was very exciting. The educational side and the feminist theme were very strong, and the women I met made a huge impact on me. And there I was with a baby and there were no problems with that. The women who did the training were amazing; the whole experience was quite powerful."

During this period, Carol gave birth to **Timothy**, in 1987, and added national assignments to her coaching portfolio. A highlight was leading a U-23 tour of Australia, which included future stars **Marnie McBean** and **Derek Porter**. "I've always thought that they went on to do so well because of the great experience we had. That trip was a significant experience for all of us."

Life changed dramatically in 1990 when the Love triplets, **Richard**, **Bridget**, and **Rebecca**, arrived. Carol had already decided that it was time to stay closer to home, and the triplets' arrival sealed her decision to put her coaching on hold. For the next decade, family was Carol's focus, although she did coach an alpine skiing junior development program and handled seasonal rowing contracts as the children grew older.

In 2004, Carol plunged headlong into renewing her coaching career, thanks in large measure to initiatives developed by **Bill Byrick**, Trent's director of athletics, who forged a partnership with the PRC in order to pay Carol a full-time salary as head coach of both clubs. She became head coach of Ontario's 2005 Canada Summer Games team, which dominated the regatta with nine golds, three silvers, and one bronze medal. Rowing on that team was Carol's daughter Robin.

After the Games, Carol joined the board of directors of RowOntario as vice president of athlete and coach development in order to be involved in making decisions at the elite level. "These positions allow me to contribute and gain knowledge and are interesting and stimulating, keeping me involved and on the leading edge of the sport."

Aspiring to have an opportunity to coach at the national level, Carol intends to pursue NCCP Level 4. "That's essential if I want to move up. This is an exciting time for me."



## Pam Medland – Athletics

**Pam Medland** was one of Canada's most promising 400m/800m runners in the 1970s. She set numerous provincial and national records and was third and fourth at the 1976 Olympic Trials. She retired from the sport in 1976 at the age of 19 and stayed away for the next 25 years, traumatized by the lack of support through her transition. She married, had a family, and developed a career in library administration. Currently with the Okanagan Regional Library, she holds a degree in English from Simon Fraser University and master's degrees in English and library science from the University of Toronto.



Pamela Medland, head coach, Kelowna Track and Field Club

Pam was drawn back when her children – **Daniel**, born in 1992, and **Emilie**, born in 1995 – began to excel at hockey and figure skating respectively. “I’m known for being an early developer and an early dropout, and I didn’t want my kids to have my experience. As well, I am very interested in early athletic development and in systems that ensure a positive experience.” She began teaching her children fitness and off-ice exercises and then became the coach of Emilie’s soccer team.

In 2002, a move to Port Alberni brought Pam into contact with the town’s excellent track facility, and she found herself assistant coaching. “I gradually realized that I really love the sport and have a lot to offer; I wondered why I’d been away.” Moving again in 2004, Pam volunteered to coach at the Kelowna Track and Field Club and did so for two years before becoming the head coach and middle distance and distance coach in 2007, only the second woman to hold the position. She attributes her rapid rise to club politics, which led to the position opening up.

Mentorship has marked Pam’s coaching career. Her own coach, **Gerry Swan**, the head coach of the Valley Royals Track and Field Club in Abbotsford, B.C., whose athletes included **Brit Townsend**, now head coach at Simon Fraser University, strongly encouraged his athletes to take their NCCP Levels and to pursue coaching careers. Other mentors are **Brian McCalder**, the president and CEO of BC Athletics, on whose board Pam has served, and **Thelma Wright**, head coach of Canada’s team to the 2008 North America, Central America and Cross Country championships. Networking, too, is essential. She insists that athletes wanting to make the transition to a coaching career must establish a network early on. “There are key people in B.C. sport whom I know from my time as an athlete, and they have been very supportive of me.”

Pam, who won a 2007 BC Athletics Excellence in Coaching Award as a junior development coach, is working on NCCP Level 3 with a view to coaching at the provincial level. Going higher, she suggests, will be more difficult given the track and field tradition of personal coaches moving up along with their athletes. “Women have to start at community coaching and work their way up with their athletes, and that takes a long time. We’re not going to be appointed to address gender imbalance; there’s too much at stake.”



## Carla Nicholls – Athletics

For as long as she can remember, **Carla Nicholls** has loved track and field. Her talent was spotted by **Rocky Chysyk**, her Grade 8 physical education teacher in Broadview, Sask., and throughout high school he regularly took her to the University of Saskatoon (U of S) to train with heptathlon great **Diane Jones Konihowski**, who was coaching there. In 1985, Carla entered U of S with the sole intention of training with Konihowski and was so “crushed” when the latter accepted a position in Calgary that she dropped out for four years.



Carla Nicholls and her children Arden and Dawson

After graduation, Carla moved to Regina to work as an operating room nurse. She returned to competition with the Regina Athletic Track Club (RATC), only to be forced out by recurring knee injuries. At 28, her problem solved by an arthroscopy, she was back at it again, undeterred by being an “old lady”. She caught the attention of **Les Gramantik**, the University of Calgary’s head coach, and set her sights on making national teams, which she did successfully. “I was unhappy that I had missed out on my dream and felt that I couldn’t go through my life not giving it a go.”

In 2001, her athletic career came to an end. Hampered by injuries and reminded by her husband, **Mike**, that it was time to start a family, she retired. “I was okay with it, but I did feel ripped off about my age.”

Carla had been working as an assistant coach at the RATC. “I just started helping out, and then it got more involved. Say ‘yes’ once and you’re done.” Then she and **Mike Zimmerman** convinced the University of Regina to let them start a team, with him as head

coach and her as assistant coach. “It was a wild time. Between cases, I’d be on the phone in the OR doing track stuff. In the background the surgeons would be cutting off a leg. That’s how crazy I am about track and field.”

While Carla never expected to make track and field her career, she always wanted to be a leader. “I wanted an office with my name on it; I just didn’t expect it to read Head Coach, Track and Field.” In a twist of fate, in 2001, three weeks into her retirement, Zimmerman decided to move on. When Carla took over, the club had 14 male and three female athletes, she was receiving an honorarium, and her car was her office. Today the club has one of Can West’s most competitive programs and boasts over 85 athletes, half of them women. Carla is the full-time head coach, and her name adorns her office door.

Carla’s relationship with Gramantik continues. “Through him I saw how sport can open the world to people, even someone from small-town Saskatchewan. He built my confidence and he’s been amazingly supportive from day one.”

Now the mother of **Arden**, born in 2001, and **Dawson**, born in 2005, Carla says that the biggest challenge is “the pressure coaches put on ourselves as mothers. I’m trying to be a really good mom and a half-decent housewife, but I really want this profession as well, and so I stay up until two o’clock in the morning to make it work, because I’m not willing to give up that motherhood time.” That she is succeeding is thanks, she says, to her supportive husband and extended family.

Carla, who was Saskatchewan’s 2005 Coach of the Year, was recently chosen for CAC’s National Team Coaching Apprenticeship Program (<http://www.coach.ca/eng/women/apprenticeship/index.cfm>). She is also Athletics Canada’s Women in Coaching leader and writer of the sport’s new NCCP manuals. Her coaching ambition? “To go to the top, the very top. I want to be an Olympic coach and I would love to be Athletics Canada’s head coach some day.”

**NOTE:** On March 11, 2008, Carla was named to Athletics Canada’s 2008 Olympic Games staff as an event coach. Way to go, Carla!

## Gail Niinimaa – Biathlon

**Gail Niinimaa** was a national team biathlete from 1984 to 1986, retiring at the age of 31 because women's biathlon was not yet an Olympic sport. At the time, she had completed NCCP Level 3 and had begun work on Level 4. Despite her athletic background and coach education, national team coaching assignments were few and far between. She gave birth to her daughters, **Lisa** and **Sara**, in 1987 and 1989 and coached youth development programs while they were young.



Gail Niinimaa, Level 5 biathlon coach and former assistant junior national team coach

A home economics graduate from the University of Alberta, Gail built a career as a textile conservator at Calgary's Glenbow Museum while still competing internationally. She was able to do this because of the strong support of the museum's director, the late **Duncan Cameron**. After her children arrived, she took 10 years off and now works for the museum one day a week. Since 2006, she has spent four days a week as administrator of Youthlink Calgary – The Calgary Police Interpretive Centre, whose mandate is to educate youth on the consequences of crime and poor lifestyle choice. "All my coaching and museum skills fit into this job beautifully."

During her hiatus from coaching, Gail was an active and committed volunteer on Biathlon Canada's board of directors. Her experience has been chequered. As chair of the Domestic Committee, she wrote a program, Biathlon Bears, to introduce youngsters to the sport. Preferring to concentrate on high performance, Biathlon Canada shelved the program until the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) mandated community coaching, at which time Biathlon Bears was revived but without Gail's involvement. Gail retired from sport politics in 1994 after she ran for president of the association and lost. She now sits on the Introduction to Coaching Committee and is considering continuing as a master learning facilitator.

In 2003, financed by a Petro-Canada coaching scholarship, Gail enrolled in the NCI-Calgary and spent the next two years juggling family, her "other" career, working with her mentor coach, **Geret Coyne** in Canmore, Alta., and handling occasional coaching assignments. Upon graduation in June 2005, she applied, unsuccessfully, to be an Olympic team coach of Canada's women's team. The assignment went to a male coach "who did not have Level 4 and was 25 years younger than me."

In December 2006, Gail completed NCCP Level 5. Her contract as an assistant junior national team coach expired in March 2006 and, without explanation, was not renewed. She continued coaching the Foothills Nordic Ski Club junior development team until March 2007, when she stepped down after being offered \$5 an hour less than she was paid in 2006. She points out that her full-time "other" job pays much better, which she attributes to recognition of her skill level.

Much as she enjoys working with youngsters and young adults and helping them to reach their goals, Gail is currently doing no coaching. She wonders "why older, experienced women coaches are considered washed out, but men of the same age are deemed to be wise and experienced. ... Is this the nature of coaching? In other areas of my life, my experience is recognized."

### What We Think: the Upside

- “Women want a coaching career because they have enjoyed the benefits of sport and feel that they can contribute to the positive experiences of others.”
- “Women have knowledge, ability, and experience, and coaching is a career that suits our strengths.”
- “Women bring skills and ability to the table.”
- “Girls being coached by a woman see leadership and see a woman handling stress, showing compassion, being organized, and dealing with conflicts and interpersonal issues constructively. Boys being coached by a woman see leadership, respect, knowledge, competence, and a healthy distribution of power. If this means that every team needs a male and a female coach, then Canada needs a lot of female coaches!”
- “The gift that women coaches can bring to sport is nurturing and caring for the whole person.”
- “We are role models for our daughters and sons and demonstrate that women and moms can be 'real' coaches, both competitive and nurturing in our own way; we are one and the same.”
- “Athletes get a different experience with female coaches, so the more female coaches the better.”
- “Motherhood offers a wealth of human experiences that are very applicable to coaching youth and young athletes and managing parental issues.”
- “An opportunity to mentor athletes from our wealth of experience is an intrinsic value and adds value to our lives. All the established benefits of coaching are available to enhance our lives, while parenting can be an all-consuming energy directed at our children. It is positive to be able to have experiences outside that circle.”

### What We Think: the Downside

- “Coaching is not a fair playing field for women.”
- “The real stumbling block is the clash between the career path and the child-bearing years. If you start to coach at 20 – and it takes 10 years to acquire experience and expertise – by then you want to start a family, and the two ambitions collide.”
- “Our biggest obstacle is the widely held perception that coaching is strictly for males.”
- “Positions often go to younger men with less experience.”
- “Depending upon a partner to handle child care is not reality.”
- “It is very hard for a young coach to have a social life, but that often doesn't matter because you're so committed.”
- “Re-certification or getting up to date is difficult.”
- “It is hard to re-establish a position within an organization. Women often have to start at the low end and in a less-than-challenging position.”
- “Major issues are balancing family life and coaching, low salaries, and travel demands.”
- “Women coaches need exceptional support, which is not the average expectation that many husbands or partners have initially and requires a huge adjustment period and excellent communication strategies.”
- “Often the woman coach struggles to be recognized and validated in sports. If she is juggling two jobs, she is perceived as not 'committed' and is thus de-valued by the perception that coaching is only a hobby.”
- “Networking often takes place in hours not suitable for moms and often with single people or men who do not do child-care arrangements.”

### Lessons Learned

- “If a club or team has a wonderful woman coach, accommodate her and pay her for what she does.”
- “Gender equity initiatives help to prepare women to assume coaching positions.”
- “Child care and maintaining a balanced lifestyle are huge challenges.”
- “Given the difficulty of balancing career and marriage and parenthood, having a supportive partner is essential.”
- “Get boards of directors' and administrators' support beforehand when applying for a coaching position.”

- “When deciding to attend an NCI, get a commitment that a coaching job will be waiting upon graduation.”
- “Mentoring works when the mentor coach values you and treats you like an equal.”
- “Encourage young female athletes to start coaching at the community level and support them with mentorship.”
- “It would have helped to have someone mentor me on career goals.”
- “There is so much gratification in a coaching career, although it only suits people who make the commitment and accept the difficult hours and poor pay.”

## Recommendations

We recommend 25 steps that sport organizations, with the financial support of Sport Canada and the provincial/territorial governments, must take to develop and support women coaches.

## MENTORING

**Establish** a mentorship program (<http://www.coach.ca/WOMEN/e/journal/nov2001/index.htm>) that helps women coaches to see the path they need to follow in order to get club, provincial, and high performance positions.

**Pair** young coaches with senior counterparts to discuss career issues.

## CHILD CARE

**Provide** coaching staff with childcare.

**Ensure** that women coaches maintain contact and remain involved with their sport organization during maternity leave.

**Permit** “ramping down” to shorter hours, with flexibility to tend to family matters.

**Provide** babysitting services during major competitions and training camps.

**Support** babies accompanying their coach mothers to practices, competitions, and training camps, with appropriate childcare provided.

## RECRUITING

**Encourage** young women athletes to consider coaching, support them with mentorship, and be up front about the issues they will face, in particular child care.

**Provide** financial incentives to make a coaching career feasible.

**Create** and promote opportunities for women coaches.

**Find** better avenues to bring more young women into coaching.

**Promote** the benefits that high performance sport offers the greater community.

**End** the divisive mentality that pits government against government, be it federal, provincial/territorial, or municipal.

## WORK CONDITIONS

**Offer** flexible arrival and departure times.

**Limit** active coaching time to 20 hours a week so that coaches can work on their NCCP certification and handle their administrative responsibilities.

**Change** the traditional structure and hold mid-day practices.

**Guarantee** that coaches are qualified, well organized, and paid commensurate with their skill level.

**Support** organizations that support their coaches.

**Provide** coaches with travel credits.

## EDUCATION

**Run** coaching clinics with female course conductors.

**Introduce** business training to the NCCP.

**Publicize** the WiC programs to a much greater extent, in particular the grants and scholarships that are available.

**Develop** and market a seminar that addresses the emotional and practical issues faced by women coaches who return to work.

**Tell** the stories of women coaches to show that it is acceptable to have children *and* coach.

**Provide** coaches with the opportunity to interact with other coaches at symposiums and clinics.

## About the author



Sheila Robertson  
Photo Credit: George Bayne

**Sheila Robertson** has worked as an editor and writer with Canada's sport community for over 30 years. The founding editor of *Champion* magazine, she was also the founding editor of *Coaches Report* magazine and its lead writer from 1993 to 2005. She is the editor of and a writer for the *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching* and *Making the Most of Your Opportunities: A Media Guide for Athletes and Their Coaches*. In 1995, she was the recipient of the Canadian Sport Award for communications. In 2005, Coaches of Canada established the Sheila Robertson Award to recognize a national sport organization that demonstrates a consistent approach in valuing and recognizing the role of the coach internally and to the media and the public.