

Why Growing Numbers of Canadian Women Coaches Are Going South

When American-based, Canadian-born and bred former softball coach **Kelley Anderson** approached the *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching*, wanting to write an article on why so many of Canada's women coaches were practising their profession in the United States, we welcomed the opportunity to explore this sensitive issue.

It's sensitive because no country likes to lose a vital asset and still less to admit that, aside from the Coaching Association of Canada's Women in Coaching program and a few other isolated initiatives, little is being done to rectify the situation.

It's an issue because while our talent base of women coaches is thin, given our small population in comparison to the United States, the rate at which we are losing these coaches is symptomatic of the many serious impediments to improving the overall lot of women coaches in Canada, at all levels and in most sports.

Although she doesn't offer a panacea, because what is needed is not a Band-Aid but a total overhaul, Kelley does present real stories of real coaches, all of whom are committed to coaching as a profession. Passion for sport knows no gender boundaries, and it is long past time that this was universally accepted. Only then will Canada's coaching climate warm sufficiently to welcome women coaches who want only to coach, and preferably at home. — Sheila Robertson

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Why Growing Numbers of Canadian Women Coaches Are Going South

by Kelley Anderson

Women coaches, never huge in numbers, are becoming a rarity in college and university sport. This is a problem not only in Canada but in the United States as well. In Canada, one reason why women coaches are getting harder to find is that more and more of them are leaving to coach in other countries, particularly the United States. In fact, it is becoming a trend for Canadian women to play intercollegiate sports in the United States and then remain there to begin a coaching career.

In the past, many Canadian athletes, including some of the best, would go to the United States to play during their collegiate years and then return to Canada. Now, as growing numbers of Canada's potentially outstanding coaches are also heading south, what was once a player drain has become a coach pipeline.

Softball is one sport in which women are noticeably "fleeing" to the United States. Many top-quality hockey and basketball coaches are also taking flight. What results when American universities and colleges recruit qualified Canadian female coaches? Canada loses.

Is this situation the fault of the Canadian university sport system or is it simply a result of Canadians following their hearts or trying to live their dreams where they believe they have the best chance of doing so? Why are more and more female coaches going south and coaching American athletes, rather than staying home and committing to their sport in the land of their birth? To answer these questions and to shed light on the underlying problems, examine the numbers.

The American population vastly outnumbers that of Canada. In women's college and university sports in the United States there are over 2,625 head coach positions at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I level and over 6,000 assistant coach positions. Factor in Divisions II and III along with National Athletic Intercollegiate Association (NAIA) sports, and you are looking at over 10,000 coaching positions in women's sports. Add to this the increased emphasis on high school sports and the fact that U.S. high schools are attempting to prepare female athletes to continue at the college level since a successful high school career can lead to an all-expenses-paid, four-year college experience.

Consider, too, the fact that summer and club teams in the United States compete for players as well as for qualified coaches. It is not uncommon for a highly qualified coach to receive anywhere from \$5,000 to \$40,000 US to oversee a program or to coach. Summer coaching positions, especially in basketball and soccer, can bring in a healthy bonus for any coach willing to take on the responsibility. In short, opportunity and financial gain in the United States are much greater than in Canada. The consequence is that women coaches are finding it easier to continue their careers in the United States than to fight for the limited number of well-paying Canadian jobs.

According to the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) website, there are 299 head coaching positions at the university level in Canada. A generous estimate of assistant coaches suggests fewer than 1,000 positions — a paltry 10 per cent of what the United States has to offer. CIS sponsors 27 ice hockey programs. Thus, it is easy to see why women coaches in these sports are leaving their homeland to pursue their passion and flourish in their profession.

	Number of Sports	Number of Women's Teams	Number of Head Coach Positions*	Number of Assistant Coach Positions*
CANADA	11	299	299	1,000
UNITED STATES	17	11,991	7,145	14,000
BREAKDOWN	IN UNITED STATES			
Division I	20	3,291	2,625	6,000
Division II, III	20	5,700	4,500	5,000
NAIA	11	3,000	2,000	3,000

*Estimates taken from NCAA website, NAIA website, and CIS website, 2006

Behind every coach is a unique story about how and why she has pursued her coaching career in the United States. Many of the accounts are similar, but not all. Eight Canadian coaches currently coaching in the United States were interviewed for this article. They related accounts of typical and not-so-typical professional paths.

The Not-So-Typical

Shannon Miller



Shannon Miller
Photo Credit:
www.umbulldogs.com

Ice hockey coach Shannon Miller describes the reason for her transition from Canada to the United States in one word: “respect”. The coach of the 1998 Team Canada Olympic silver medallists says she “wanted to coach where they respected women’s hockey and you could get paid for it.” It was a long time coming.

Just out of college, Shannon thought the only way she could coach would be to secure a full-time job and to coach on the side. She figured that becoming a police officer would give her a career that would allow her to make a living while still managing to focus on her passion — hockey. She started coaching in Calgary, Alta., and was the Team Alberta assistant coach when that team won gold at the 1991 Canada Games. In June 1991, she was asked to become the assistant coach of Team Canada. While the comparative men’s program paid their staff, there was no salary attached to the women’s positions.

Eventually she was hired as head coach of Team Canada, charged with preparing the team for the 1998 Olympic Winter Games, the first Olympic tournament for women’s ice hockey. For four years she coached Team Canada, but she only made a salary during one year, receiving \$55,000 for her Olympic year.

After her Olympic experience, Shannon received a phone call from a sport director in the United States who encouraged her to send out her resumé in that country if she wanted to coach for a living. Although she loved Canada, she knew she wanted to coach more than anything. She knew, too, that she wanted to be paid what she felt she was worth. With the promise that the women’s ice hockey program would be run on a par with the men’s program, she started her tenure at the University of Minnesota–Duluth as head women’s ice hockey coach.

Three National Championships later, and three trips to the White House to receive presidential congratulations, Shannon is making a healthy living in Minnesota.

Lana Ross



Lana Ross

The majority of women coaches in U.S. sport programs are involved with the sports of ice hockey and softball. And it is softball that is enjoying a boost in Canadian women coaches. Because the only university softball job in all of Canada is at Simon Fraser University, talented women coaches continue to be forced to leave home in order to pursue their careers. Take Lana Ross, for example.

While she was playing midget softball for the Jasper Park Magicians, Lana knew she wanted to be a coach some day. Two outstanding mentors, **Ken** and **Terry Tremblay**, helped her to see that coaching was a fun and worthwhile endeavour. After high school, playing softball was not over for her — as it customarily is for most Canadian girls — since she received a scholarship to Oklahoma City University (OCU). She played four years at OCU and subsequently returned to Canada to start a professional career. The Oklahoma City bombing had just occurred and she felt she wanted to be closer to her family. While in Canada, she continued to play for the Calahoo Erins, a Senior A team in Edmonton. At the same time she worked for Telus for three years and started coaching a local Midget A team. Nonetheless, she was not content, feeling that she was not doing what she wanted to do. She began monitoring softball coaching job

openings in the United States and eventually came across an assistant coaching job at Blinn College in Texas. It paid little, yet it was what she wanted.

After she had spent a year at Blinn, another job caught Lana's attention, this time with a NCAA Division I program at the University of Oregon. This job paid more and was located closer to home. After a year at Oregon, she decided to move back home to play for one more year, but, again, something was missing. Her time in the corporate world led her to decide that it was not worth it to be unhappy in a career she was not passionate about. She began another U.S. job search, eventually landing a job at Iowa Western Community College in Council Bluffs as head softball coach.

"The coaching position I hold now is absolutely everything I want it to be," says Lana. "I've turned the program into a winning one. My current record at Iowa Western is 150–79. My 2006 team had a record of 50–19 and recently received a national award for Academic Team of the Year. I work with great people and I'm very proud of the success I have had with the softball program."

Rhonda Denbow



Rhonda Denbow
Photo Credit:
www.mnstate.edu

Rhonda Denbow began her journey to the United States playing both volleyball and softball at Valley City State University in North Dakota. She spent the next 12 years in Manitoba, where she taught high school physical education, coached all of the school's sports, and eventually became the sports director in Winkler, Man. Rhonda then decided to leave teaching, travel the world, and play softball in Australia. When she returned, she knew she did not want to go back to high school coaching, so she became a volunteer pitching coach at her alma mater, Valley City State. After one year, she took a chance and applied for her current position at Minnesota State University Moorhead, where she has been for the past two years.

Bobbi Towers



Bobbi Towers
Photo Credit: www.okcu.edu

Bobbi Towers played for Oklahoma City University (OCU) for four years on a softball scholarship. She then worked for Parks and Recreation in Black Falls, Alta. Learning through the grapevine about an opening, Bobbi found herself looking at the job Lana Ross had vacated at Blinn College. After a two-year stint at Blinn, she was recruited to become the assistant coach at OCU.

Melody Davidson



Melody Davidson
Photo Credit: Hockey Canada

The current Canadian women's ice hockey team head coach has a unique perspective and story. Melody has been coaching for 30 years and has been involved with Hockey Canada since the mid-1990s.

Becoming a full-time coach did not happen easily. Much as she wanted it, a coaching career seemed a pipe dream. "You wanted it, but never thought it could become reality. The closest thing was recreation director so I took a job doing that in Castor, Alta. In fact, in Canada it was never a reality for me; I had to go to the United States to make my living as a coach."

In the fall of 1997, Melody landed her first "paying" job as head coach of Connecticut College, a Division III position. In 2000 she returned home and took a job as Hockey Alberta's coaching development co-ordinator. She applied for the head coach position of Cornell University's Division I team in 2002 and entered the United States on a three-year visa. While she says she was "compensated well", moving south was difficult. "I loved my job at Cornell, but I wanted to live in Alberta and be near my family and friends."

Last May, Melody resigned from Cornell after signing a four-year contract with Canada's Women's High Performance program as general manager and head coach, for which she is "fairly compensated." Melody has also taken on a volunteer position as assistant coach with a local Alberta Junior Hockey League men's team. "The experience has been terrific and I love my time with them," she says. "I needed to find a team to work with because it is hard to be sharp as a coach if you're not coaching and they welcomed me."

The Typical: Coming and Staying

Lori Sippel



Lori Sippel
Photo Credit: Scott Bruhn/NU
Media Relations

Lori Sippel is one of the first Canadian athletes to play in the United States university system and then continue with a Division I coaching career. Hers is the typical story. She was recruited to play softball on a scholarship at the University of Nebraska (U of N). She remembers hearing whispers of people saying she was not going to get a good education, and that her degree in special education, with an endorsement in coaching, would be useless in Canada.

Ending her career at U of N as an Academic All-American, after graduation in 1989 she became a part-time assistant coach at the University of Kansas. After one season, she was back at Nebraska as an assistant coach.

Lori is now the associate head coach at the University of Nebraska, where she has written articles, been asked to speak at a variety of clinics and conventions, been in instructional videos, and taken on public speaking engagements. Based on her record of success in the United States, in 2005 she was appointed as head coach of Team Canada, newly turned into a full-time position. She has also kept her full-time position at Nebraska. Her situation is groundbreaking, and so far, things are going well. Competing at the XI ISF World Championships, Team Canada finished in fifth place and qualified for the 2008 Olympic Games. Lori's exploits as a star pitcher with the national team were recognized by her induction, in July 2006, into the International Softball Federation Hall of Fame.

Kelly Swanson



Kelly Swanson
Photo Credit: www.sjcd.edu

Kelly Swanson's trek to the United States was also typical. She played at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) in Richmond, Kentucky, from 1998 to 2000 and was a standout for the Colonels softball team. EKU head coach **Jane Worthington** was no stranger to Canadian athletes, as she had had a Canadian on her squad every year for her first 10 years. Kelly went to graduate school at the University of South Dakota, where she worked as a graduate assistant coach. Following her graduate work, she went to Frank Phillips College in Texas, where she stayed a year before becoming the head coach at San Jacinto Junior College, also in Texas.

Jami Ingram



Jami Ingram
Photo Credit: www.twu.edu

Also typical is Jami Ingram's situation. Another softball player, the Richmond, B.C., native played for Blinn College during the 2000 and 2001 seasons. She transferred to Texas Women's University (TWU) for her junior and senior years and continued her softball career, earning Academic All-American honours in 2002. She holds an associate degree in kinesiology from Blinn College, and a bachelor's degree in kinesiology, teaching, and master's degree in kinesiology, sport administration, both from TWU.

While completing her master's degree, she was the graduate assistant coach during 2005 and was a volunteer assistant coach in 2004. She is now in her first year as the assistant for Blinn College Softball.

Family First

Of the coaches interviewed for this article, four have TN visas,* two are permanent residents of the United States (green card holders),[†] and the others are on HB1 visas.[‡] Canadians, it should be pointed out, are eligible for the TN visa if they teach at the college level. Such coaches are engaged as instructors in such areas as dance, health, bowling, weight training, and personal fitness.

All of the coaches interviewed stressed the importance of family in making the decision to come to the United States. Many of them struggled with the decision, but eventually realized that they would only be happy doing something they loved — coaching. All remain very proud to be Canadian, yet they have come to the conclusion that their services are not marketable in their own country.

*The TN visa is designed for professionals meeting the qualifications set out in one of the 64 eligible categories listed in the NAFTA treaty. These professionals must have received an employment offer from a U.S.-based employer and their job description must comply with the requirements outlined in the eligible categories. Self-employed workers are not eligible for this type of visa and cannot apply for permanent residence.

This visa lasts one year but is renewable indefinitely and is not subject to a quota. Spouses and children of professionals who hold such a visa are not entitled to work in the United States.

[†]A green card, officially known as a permanent resident card, is evidence of lawful permanent resident status in the United States.

‡The HB1 is a work visa that lasts three years and is renewable once for a maximum period of six years. Professionals within this category must hold a university degree equivalent to at least a bachelor's degree. They must have also received an employment offer from an employer based in the United States. The employment in question must be a specialty occupation and must have been approved by the relevant labour department. Spouses and children of professionals holding such a visa are not entitled to work in the United States but may study and reside in the country. This visa allows professionals to apply for permanent residence.

Is It the Money?

American colleges and universities place a huge emphasis on college sports. In some schools, sports bring a great deal of prestige and money, some of which spills over to the coaches. The average salary of the coaches interviewed for this article is \$45,000 US. For the head coaches, the salaries range from \$40,000 to \$115,000; the assistant coach range is \$20,000 to \$30,000. Being able to earn a reasonable salary and to coach in a committed environment continues to draw women into the profession in the United States.

Unfortunately, the Canadian system is less motivated by money, and, as a result, university coaching salaries can be much lower. Although many Canadian colleges and universities sponsor women's sports, often their coaching positions offer a meagre stipend of between \$5,000 and \$10,000.

Even the salaries of the two national team coaches, Lori Sippel and Melody Davidson, are relatively low in comparison to some of the other coaches interviewed. For example, Shannon Miller, head coach at Minnesota-Duluth, earns considerably more than Canada's national team coach. It is likely that an associate head coach at a U.S. Division I school would earn more than a Canadian national team women coach.

Although hard figures are not always readily available, there can be no doubt that Canada's universities and colleges pay extremely poorly in comparison to the American institutions. Even most NCAA Division III institutions, which are non-scholarship and account for the largest membership in the NCAA, pay their coaches more than Canadian schools would. Division I schools often have their coaches on contracts that offer incentives and bonuses for post-season play, championships, and awards. After all, sport in America is a big business.

Coaching Qualifications

One major difference that Canadian women face when coming to the United States to coach is the lack of an accreditation program. In the United States, a coach does not have to be certified at certain levels in order to coach; nonetheless, every coach interviewed for this article had a bachelor's degree and many had a master's degree. Many had college coaching endorsements, physical education backgrounds, and health education backgrounds, while others majored in criminal justice, business, or psychology.

Some sports do offer coaching programs for their association members. The National Fastpitch Coaches Association, for example, offers coaching classes to its members. This program, which can eventually result in a master's degree from Texas Women's College, has been well received by softball coaches throughout the United States.

Feelings for Canada

Many of the coaches interviewed here have felt betrayed by the Canadian sport world. They believe that when they left Canada, the country forgot about them and what they had to offer. Many wonder why their respective provincial sport bodies have never so much as asked them to speak or to conduct a clinic, not to mention come back to Canada and coach.

A number of the softball coaches claimed that they would give back to their respective communities now, if the opportunity arose. However, they have tried to go this route and have been turned down, time and time again. The majority of the coaches interviewed believe that they are in the United States for the long term. Many have started families and, consequently, believe their lives are better suited to the United States. Some highly respected coaches claim to have been ignored for high-level coaching positions in

Canada and, because they do not coach in Canada, they also feel that their guidance and experience are not recognized or asked for.

Conclusion

America's gain is Canada's loss. Canada will continue to lose highly qualified female coaches to the United States as long as the financial opportunities continue. Many of our best young women athletes will continue to receive sport scholarships in the United States, and too many will decide to stay there and eventually move into the coaching profession thanks to the incredible opportunities that the United States has to offer. Unless there are drastic changes in the philosophy of Canadian women's sports, great coaches will continue to exit the country to coach generations of American athletes.

Definitions

NCAA: The National Collegiate Athletic Association, the governing body for college sports, has three distinct divisions: Division I (athletic scholarships, big budgets, known as the most highly competitive athletic division in the US); Division II (limited scholarships and budgets); Division III (non-scholarship athletes).

NAIA: The National Athletic Intercollegiate Association, the governing body for colleges and universities in the US. There are approximately 300 institutions that are members of this association.

Colleges and universities: In the United States, these two words are used somewhat interchangeably.

About the Author



Kelley Anderson

Kelley Anderson is the owner of Madco Sports in Richmond, Kentucky. She has 10 years of softball coaching experience at the college level. As a college coach, she attained a 231-92 record with one NCAA tournament appearance. She also is a private softball instructor and travels throughout Kentucky. She first attended the University of Alberta where she played basketball and then decided to pursue her first love: softball. She then moved to the United States and earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from Eastern Kentucky University.



Marg McGregor

Commentary — Marg McGregor, Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Interuniversity Sport

"The shortage of qualified women coaches is the bigger issue."

The article is somewhat limited by its focus on softball. Softball is not a CIS sport so of course there are more opportunities to coach softball in the NCAA. It would have been really interesting and relevant and perhaps more balanced had the article focused on a CIS sport like basketball or volleyball or field hockey.

As well, the article displayed our classic Canadian lack of self-confidence when it comes to the United States. It may be because we share the border with such a big country and we're self-deprecating as a nation. Canadians simply don't blow our own horn and pound our chests and sing O Canada at the top of our lungs the way our American counterparts sing The

Star-Spangled Banner. This, I believe, is the culture of Canadian sport at all levels, not just university sport. Sport is not endemic in our culture the way it is in the United States.

Keep in mind that Canada's population is close to 33 million and the United States is just under 300 million, so of course there are more jobs in every profession. The CIS has 50 universities, the NCAA has 12,000, so of course there are more coaching jobs.

It would be interesting to find out what percentage of all NCAA coaches are female and compare that to the percentage of CIS coaches who are female, and that is 15%. You then might be able to draw some kind of conclusion, but on sheer numbers, absolutely the US is going to out-number, out-power Canada every day. Is bigger better? A qualitative look might have been interesting.

The Title IX factor is significant and certainly college sport in the States has been driven by Title IX legislation, which Canada does not have. However, most of our universities pay equivalent salaries to men coaches and women coaches for comparable responsibilities and comparable experience. The universities are on salary grids and are going to be pretty comparable.

All that being said, there is a shortage of highly qualified female coaches in Canada and in Canadian university sport. I don't believe the full factor is that female coaches are being enticed to the States, but it is a factor. I know many universities want to hire qualified women coaches for women's sports, but often there are not qualified women candidates who are applying. The shortage of qualified women coaches is the bigger issue. Some sports that have been around for a long time, like women's basketball, have a larger labour pool of qualified women candidates while some of the emerging sports just don't have very many.

Many retiring university athletes are approached by athletic directors to get involved in the program and many are not interested in taking up coaching as a profession either because of the work/life balance, the time involved, the salaries, and the general lack of stability or longevity. All those issues make it difficult for women, and that in turn makes it difficult for universities to staff with women coaches.

CIS has equity and equality committee and we run awareness-raising workshops for athletic directors and we had a session for women administrators at last year's AGM. We have quite progressive policies. For example, there must be 50% men and 50% women on our board of directors and that means there are women's voices at the boardroom table. At our AGM, each university is entitled to two votes, providing they bring one male and one female from the university. So women's voices are being heard and are influencing decisions. Do we have the answers to getting more women coaches? I don't know that anybody does.

In terms of a call to action, I would encourage people to get more money into the system in support of women's sport by making alumni donations to their universities and targeting them to support women's teams and women's coaching.