



## **DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF WOMEN COACHES** **Introduction**

Sport in Canada is in transition as growing numbers of girls and women claim their rightful places as participants and competitors. By the end of the 20th century, women athletes accounted for 47 per cent of athletes on our national teams, a quantum leap by any standard. This growth is laudable; however, if taken as an indication that all is well from a gender equity standpoint, the statistic is misleading. Nowhere is the problem more evident than in coaching. When it comes to women coaching national teams, for example, the percentage drops a whopping 30 points to 17 per cent in 1998. By 2000, it had further plunged to only 11 per cent. With coaching salaries for women lower than those for men holding similar positions, what then is the impetus to position coaching as a viable profession for young women?

The Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching turned to former national coach Dru Marshall and asked her to suggest strategies to help develop the next generation of women coaches. The result is *Developing the Next Generation of Women Coaches*, a thoughtful, provocative, and personal examination of what can and should be done.

Among the strategies:

- Identify and nurture women coaches with potential.
- Adopt mentoring to help coaches grow professionally.
- Identify women athletes with potential.
- Develop and retain women coaches who currently hold coaching positions.
- Address the reasons for the high dropout rate among women coaches.
- Encourage the development of informal networks.
- Add the development of negotiation skills to coach education programs.
- Learn political advocacy.

## **DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF WOMEN COACHES**

By Dru Marshall

### **Setting the Stage**

The Canadian sport system supports 3,000,000 registered athletes of national and provincial sport organizing bodies, and 400,000 coaches (Coaching Association of Canada 1997). There are three times as many men coaching in Canada as women. While one of Sport Canada's policy goals is to "attain equality for women in sport," it is clear that we have a ways to go in the coaching area. The Sport Gender Snap Shot 1997-1998 (Sport Canada 1999) demonstrated that representation of women athletes on Canada's national teams in 1997-98 was 47 per cent. There was equitable access to treatment in training and competitive environments and sport science, medicine, and other health services, but only 17 per cent of national coaches were women.

More recent statistics indicate that this number has declined to 11 per cent (Women in Coaching 2000). Coaching salaries for women tend to be lower than those of men who have similar responsibilities and certification levels, although reasons for these differences are not clear. This situation is not unique to Canada. In the U.S., prior to 1972 when Title IX was enacted, women coached 90 per cent of women's teams. Carpenter and Acosta report that now only 45.6 per cent of women's college teams have a female head coach, an all-time low (Anderson 2001).

Given the current situation, what strategies are necessary to help develop the next generation of women coaches?

### **Identification of Key Issues**

There are many reasons why women should be involved in coaching. It is an honourable profession that is hugely rewarding and satisfying and allows the practitioner to make positive differences in people's lives on a day-to-day basis. Yet, as demonstrated by the statistics, coaching is currently not a profession that is attracting the next generation of women. We are at a time when more women are competing in sport, yet fewer are getting involved in coaching at the higher levels. What are some of the current problems for women in the profession, and how can we change the situation so that more women get involved?

Problems typically cited for women in the coaching profession include burnout, lack of financial incentive, lack of experience, family conflicts, discrimination, and the old boys' network (Anderson 2001). In the U.S., the increased funding provided to women's sport by Title IX has made coaching a viable career option for male coaches. Female coaches, therefore, are competing with a larger pool of coaches, many of whom are more experienced. Sheila Robertson carefully documented the issue of family and sport conflicts experienced by 17 women coaches in the second issue of the Journal (November 2000). In addition to the problems they cited, it is apparent that recruitment strategies for female versus male coaches may be different. Hiring and recruitment practices is one area where the old boys' network may come into play (See Anderson 2001 for examples).

Why is it important for women to coach women? There are a variety of reasons. Women have typically had different experiences in sport than have men and, as a result, they can relate better to the experiences of women athletes. Often the male and female versions of the sport differ. Think of ice hockey, volleyball, or basketball and the skills and strategies used in each of those games. Women who have been involved as athletes in women's sport truly understand the sport. While we have more women than ever before competing in sports that were traditionally played by men, such as ice hockey and soccer, male coaches are still coaching female athletes.

As men continue to hold positions of power, gender inequities and stereotypes are reproduced. There have been positive changes at the athlete level, but not at the coach level where women also need female role models. So what is to be done?

## Strategies

To develop the next generation of women coaches, I suggest eight strategies. While the list is not exhaustive, I am hoping it provides food for thought.

### ***Identification of coaches to nurture***

One apparently simple way to develop the next generation of high performance women coaches is to identify and nurture those coaches who have the potential to develop to the upper ranks. This "selection process" may be similar to athlete selection. What would be important to look for in up-and-coming coaches? Young coaches interested in developing into high performance coaches need a strong dedication, desire, and commitment to personal excellence; solid leadership and communication skills; and well-developed coping skills. They need to demonstrate athlete improvement, be open-minded, and possess the desire to move up the coaching ranks. I suggest this is an "apparently" simple method because identifying the next layer of coaches in a system is often easier said than done.

Who should do the identification of the next layer of coaches? Politics often enters into the picture, with different interest groups pushing their candidate of choice. Thus, it is best if a committee is part of the identification process. The committee should include someone with "big picture" vision, who understands the sport needs as well as the needs of coaches. Preferably, this individual should not be seen as having ties to any particular stakeholder group (again, often easier said than done). There should be individuals representing various stakeholder groups, such as provinces/territories, clubs, and/or universities. Choices should be based on agreed-upon criteria and strategies should be put in place for each identified coach. These strategies should be unique, depending on the coach's life circumstances and level of development. If a choice cannot be made between two coaches, both should be given opportunities and the next level of decision should be based on their performance. A cautionary note: It helps if there are gender equity policies within organizations. In some sports, the idea of providing women with an opportunity to coach at an advanced level is not considered; women in these sports are dealing with systemic problems that must be handled by broader policies.

Sometimes choices are made and the selected coaches are seen as the "anointed ones" within their sport's coaching fraternity. As a result, the road is made a little bumpier. The beauty is that if the individual can make it through this initial political minefield, she will have become well trained to do the higher level coaching jobs.

Along with broad political issues in coach identification there are also issues at the coach level. Many younger women coaches may not even be considering a career in coaching. Their reasons range from seeing high performance coaching jobs as something they may never achieve, to seeing those jobs as being undesirable because of the political pressure and work involved, to perceiving a lack of opportunity. Thus, the identification process should involve identifying coaches at a variety of levels, with level-appropriate strategies to help in the development. For example, a developmental club coach may not be ready for an offshore experience with a national team and all that that entails, but may benefit from an experience at a national development camp in combination with a provincial team experience. Some coach identification strategies have failed because the younger coach is put into an experience she is not yet ready for. This can result in one of two extreme situations. From the coach's perspective, the stresses are too great, the experience isn't enjoyable, and she quits. From the association or club perspective, there is a lack of success with the athletes, and therefore they don't want the coach around. We do not put athletes into situations we think they are not ready for, and we should use the same care with coaches.

On a personal note, I believe that high performance coaches have a responsibility in identifying and developing the next layer of coaches. They can act as role models for the job. They can offer support, encouragement, and advice for coaches in any position, because typically they have an understanding from a personal perspective of where a younger or less experienced coach is coming from. They can generate excitement and enthusiasm for the sport and the job. I learned, for example, that although coaching a national team was one of the toughest things I have ever done, the position also afforded me my richest learning environment to date. I highly value learning experiences, so "selling" people on being

a top-level coach is easy for me. While the costs are high, the benefits are greater. Probably most importantly, national coaches, with the support of the national sport federation, can help provide opportunities, through annual planning, for developing coaches in both on- and offshore training and competition ventures. These opportunities should become part of the strategies for developing coaches. They may also become part of a broader program for an individual coach, as in an apprenticeship program.

### ***Mentoring***

A critical part of any coach's development is mentoring. Mentoring is becoming increasingly common in a variety of fields, from business to academics. For example, in a recent publication of the Red Herring, an entire story was devoted to young business entrepreneurs and their mentors. Many university programs offer mentorship programs for young academic staff, as they learn the ropes of being employed in the university environment. John Salmela (1994) demonstrated that one of the best ways expert coaches learned was through mentoring.

What is mentoring? Mentoring is a strategy used to help coaches grow professionally. Mentoring is a flexible process that should reflect the unique culture and objectives of the sport organization. A mentor provides support, reinforcement, counsel, friendship, and constructive example. I believe mentoring is particularly important in the development of women coaches because, in my experience, women are not typically good at developing their own support systems. I also think it is important for women to have at least one female mentor, as women typically approach problems, and solutions to problems, in a different way than a male counterpart.

There are a variety of forms of mentoring. Often, a one-on-one model (that is, one mentor coach working with another coach) is employed. While this model has some obvious advantages, it is almost impossible for one individual to be able to provide expertise in all of the tasks in which a coach might be involved. Another potential model to use in coaching is a resource-based model, where a general pool of mentors is available to coaches on an "as needed" basis; young coaches, with the aid of their federations or clubs, can develop their own pool of mentors, depending on their needs.

Some coaches use a combination of both the one-on-one and resource-based models, as is the case in the Women in Coaching Long-Term Coaching Apprenticeship Program (LTAP) of CAC [Coaching Association of Canada]. Coaches in this program have one identified mentor, but are encouraged to develop a pool of mentors with different types of expertise. I believe strongly in this model. As a young coach starting out in a high performance system, I was fortunate to have a group of mentors that included two experienced coaches in my own sport, two elite coaches from outside my sport to provide perspective, two communications experts, and two leaders in sport administration. While my federation paired me with two senior coaches on an informal basis, I set up the rest of my "mentoring team." My mentors have never met one another, but I am sure they would have an interesting conversation!

Mentoring can be informal, as in my personal example, or more formalized, as in the LTAP. A formal mentoring arrangement that has clearly established goals and measurable outcomes helps to link competency development of the coach with the strategic needs of the sport organization. Whether mentoring is formal, informal, one on one, or resource based, or any combination of these, it should be used in developing the next generation of women coaches.

### ***Identification of athletes with the potential to coach***

Another strategy to help develop the next wave of women coaches is to identify high-level athletes with coaching potential. Coaching isn't for every athlete, but there are those who have the skill set to develop into excellent coaches. Traits these athletes possess include intelligence, an ability to strategize, a positive and enthusiastic attitude, passion for their sport, a high energy level, and great communication skills. High performance athletes who become high performance coaches have a distinct advantage over coaches who haven't been athletes: they know how athletes think and feel during competition because they have been there before. However, again we must be careful about how quickly we push athletes into the coaching realm.

Laurie Eisler, the coach of the six-time national CIAU [Canadian Interuniversity Athletic Union] champion University of Alberta Pandas volleyball team, has a number of alumni involved in coaching roles with her program. Laurie believes that "at times we push people who have finished their playing careers into coaching too quickly." She believes athletes who have finished their playing careers need a gradual introduction into the coaching arena. "Athletes who have played at a high performance level typically need a break. Few are going to want to continue making the sacrifices that are necessary to coach at that level. You need a lot of time and energy, and you also need to get some balance." I concur with this perspective. Over my 20 years of coaching at the university level, I have involved 13 of our alumni as assistant coaches; two have gone on to coach at other CIAU institutions and six have been involved with coaching at the provincial level. In all cases, when they first started coaching they were amazed at the amount of work behind the scenes, and some of them lost interest within a year or two. I have learned through the years that people need to be introduced to coaching on a gradual basis. More recently, I have had coaches involved in our program for as long as 11 years. Those who have been gradually introduced to coaching, and given more responsibility over time, recognize the beauty of the job.

### ***Retention of current coaching situations***

Another important strategy in developing the next generation is the further development and retention of those who are currently in coaching positions. Coaching needs to be seen as a viable career choice for a woman. This means that high performance women coaches need to be hired, and hired with salaries and benefits packages that are commensurate with their capabilities. The current 11 per cent rate of national coaches who are women is low and the numbers have, in fact, decreased since the Sport Gender Snap Shot 1997-1998 report was published. Thus, strategies (such as the Sport Canada policy goal) must be put in place to develop more high performance women coaches. For those who have made it to that level, their situations should be comparable to those of their male counterparts. For the most part, this hasn't yet happened. Here are some examples to illustrate my points.

Sheila Robertson reported in the Journal that Elaine Dagg-Jackson, coach of Canada's world champion Kelly Law curling team, is a volunteer coach, yet was paid for a comparable position in Japan. Elaine made a decision to stay in Canada to coach the Law rink on a volunteer basis because of the irresistible challenge the potential of the rink presented, and she quit as the paid coach of the Japanese national team. As a nation, we need to put more value on sport in general, and on coaching in particular.

Tracy David, another of my coaching colleagues at the University of Alberta, is one of the premier soccer coaches in the country. As a player, Tracy was part of the Edmonton Angels club team that won the first five national club championships for women, and she was on the national team from 1986 to 1990. She has been coaching at the university level for the past 15 years (winning two CIAU titles), and has coached at the provincial and club level. She has a B Licence (Level 4) in soccer coaching and is currently completing her master's degree in coaching studies at the University of Victoria. The Canadian Soccer Association has hired three males to coach the national women's team and the developmental teams at the U-17 and U-19 levels. (Tracy applied for all three jobs and never received an interview.) The assistant coaches of the three teams are also males. In fact, one male serves as the assistant coach for both developmental teams! Sport Canada policy could change these practices in the near future, but clearly, more political advocacy work needs to be done at the high performance level.

In my own situation, I had to decide between two careers. After having spent 20 years with our national team program, doing jobs from regional coaching right up to head coach of our team, I had to choose between a job at the university and one as the full-time head coach of the national team. I had held the position for five years on a part-time basis while being a professor. One of the things I had fought for was a full-time position with the national team. When this came to fruition, the salary level and benefits package were not comparable to my university situation. While this was only one factor, it made my decision to stay at the university easier. I can't help but think though of the time and money that both Field Hockey Canada and I have invested in my coaching career.

These examples illustrate that we have a ways to go in making coaching a viable career option for women. While the examples are gloomy, there is hope on the horizon in the form of Sport Canada

policies, initiatives from CAC (particularly the Women in Coaching program), and in the infusion of money that the federal government has committed to putting into coaching.

### ***New paradigms of coaching***

It is apparent that something may be wrong with the current paradigm of coaching. While a profile of employed coaches in Canada shows an almost equal percentage of women (49 per cent) and men (51 per cent) in coaching, almost half of the paid coaches are between the ages of 15 and 24. Only five per cent of the paid coaches are between 45 and 54, and only two per cent are over 55 years of age (Coaching Association of Canada 1997).

In a recent study conducted by Sagas and Cunningham of assistant coaches in the NCAA, more than two thirds of the female assistants surveyed anticipated leaving the profession before age 45, compared with 15 per cent of the males surveyed (Anderson 2001). Thus, dropout and retention are issues for women coaches. As Rose Mercier states in the Journal (September 2000), "it takes a supportive employment environment and creativity - to find workable solutions."

To reiterate, common reasons for coach drop out and lack of retention are burnout, lack of financial incentive, lack of experience, family conflicts, discrimination, fighting the old boys' network, and expectations to succeed. We need to be aware of these factors as we develop new paradigms for women in coaching. The Journal provided compelling stories from 17 women who have tried to continue coaching while raising families. Many have a conflict between their family and their coaching commitments, but almost all have figured out solutions to try to make it work, including job sharing.

Laurie Eisler has found a creative solution that has allowed her to coach while she has had two children. Laurie started coaching university volleyball in 1991. She had her first child during the 1996-97 season and her second child during the 1999-00 season. Lorne Sawula, a male volleyball coach with great experience (Lorne was recently hired as the women's national team coach and will assume his duties on April 1, 2001), was hired as an assistant coach with Laurie's team during the 1996-97 season. Although Laurie was initially intimidated by Lorne's involvement in her program and worried that her athletes would think less of her compared to him, she knew the opportunity to work with someone of his calibre was too great to pass up.

In fact, the athletes benefited because they had two perspectives from two wonderful communicators. Lorne took over the team as head coach when Laurie went on her second maternity leave, and Laurie rejoined the team at the end of that season as they won their sixth consecutive national title. As their relationship has evolved, Lorne and Laurie have become co-coaches. They are hugely respectful of one another and confident in each other's abilities. They share the same philosophy, but use different methods and words to communicate their messages. They both recognize that there are many ways to do the same thing. They have created an environment in which the athletes feel comfortable asking for clarification.

Laurie believes one key to making this situation work is the internal support system that has developed. "Coaching is a lonely profession. With Lorne, I have unconditional support. We don't necessarily agree on everything, but there is always support."

Another key to success in this situation is the apparent lack of ego of both of the coaches. In a study of the top 50 business leaders in the U.S., Neff and Citrin (1999) found that an ability to keep egos in check was one of the common characteristics of these leaders.

A third key to this success story is the athletes themselves. They have learned to be tolerant, accommodating, and accepting of individual differences.

The final key, and a very important piece of the new paradigm puzzle, is the role the University of Alberta and its athletic department and athletic director played. This year, Laurie requested that her team practise during the day, in order to accommodate her family situation. The Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation moved classes to accommodate this request, and athletic director Ian Reade was willing to

make a controversial decision, based on a women's issue, to move practices to the middle of the day. It was a coach-friendly decision by an organization, and this will be important in the future paradigms for coaching.

Laurie's example and the stories of the 17 women told in the Journal demonstrate that workable solutions are possible. We need to be creative in our approach and look at different situations for women coaches, so that coaching is seen as a truly viable career option for women.

### ***Development of networks***

Another strategy to develop the next generation of women coaches is to encourage informal networks. The LTAP provides a wonderful opportunity for coaches to interact over a period of a number of years. I am sure that those women will stay in contact throughout their coaching careers on an informal basis and will help one another through difficult situations.

At a recent meeting, I had the opportunity to meet three other national head coaches: Danièle Sauvageau (ice hockey), Bev Smith (basketball), and Sheilagh Croxon (synchro). We had a wonderful conversation about the trials and tribulations of coaching at the national level and found that we had many shared experiences, ranging from team selection to discipline problems to handling support staff. It wasn't long before each of us said, "I wish I could have called you to talk before I made that decision." Now that we have met, we can serve as informal "sounding boards" for each other. I believe that this type of support network will help in the retention of current coaches, and, if it is modelled, in the recruitment of the next generation.

### ***Development of negotiation skills***

We need to work at improving the skill set of all women coaches, including the development of negotiation skills. Coach education programs typically focus on technical, tactical, physical, and mental development, along with communication and leadership skills; they tend not to focus on negotiation skills around contracts and job situations. This is an interesting concept because typically you do not negotiate contracts very often - so you had better make sure that you are doing the best you can the first time around! The Canadian Professional Coaches Association produced a great online reference guide for employment contracts for coaches; however, it is one thing to read this information and another to put your negotiating skills to work. Women have to be demanding in contract negotiations and creative in their approach to putting together full-time career coaching positions.

### ***Political advocacy***

Another strategy in the development of the next generation of women coaches is political advocacy. All of us have a voice, be it at the local, provincial, national, or international level, in furthering the cause of women in coaching. As a result of powerful voices, we see the development of policies for women in sport at the Sport Canada level. The members of the Coaching Working Group, a committee struck to examine coaching in Canada for the Secretary of State (Amateur Sport), include six current or former national head coaches who are women. Such coaches can serve as advocates for improving the lot of future coaches. University coaches can lobby for policies, salaries, and situations that are gender equitable. Organizations have to demonstrate a willingness to provide support to women during various stages of the life cycle, and differently than they would for men. Policies around workload and day-care provision during training are two examples. Cyndie Flett, manager of the Women in Coaching program, is advocating the creation of an ombudsperson for coaches, particularly for those who go through alternate dispute resolution. If an ombudsperson was put in place, a coach who encounters discrimination of any kind would have an avenue for a fair hearing of a grievance. Sport and politics go hand in hand, and we all have a responsibility to speak to ensure that the next generation of coaches has a viable situation. Individually we all have voices, and collectively we can make a difference.

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