



## **Staying The Course: Candid Observations of Women Coaches On The Trials And Tribulations Of Their Profession**

For the tenth issue of the Journal, it was my privilege to interview six of Canada's best-known and most successful women coaches. What they all have in common, aside from success, are skill, commitment, and a love of their game and of sport in general. Their experiences in their chosen profession enabled them to provide revealing and timely insights into the reality of sport in Canada. These are not coaches who have had much of an opportunity to exchange views, so I found the many common threads somewhat surprising. Not surprising, in my experience, is their frankness or their eloquence. They have much to say, and they say it well. I hope readers learn (and enjoy) as much as I did. - Sheila Robertson

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### **Staying The Course: Candid observations of women coaches on the trials and tribulations of their profession**

By Sheila Robertson

It is generally acknowledged that women who want a coaching career face a rough ride. Even today, with a woman's right to be in virtually every workplace generally accepted, women who are senior head and assistant coaches in Canada are comparatively few - despite several initiatives to raise their numbers and improve their environment.

The most recent statistics, compiled for Sport Canada's **Sport Gender Snap Shot, 1997-1998** (see [www.pch.gc.ca/Sportcanada/Sc\\_e/snapshot.htm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/Sportcanada/Sc_e/snapshot.htm)), paint a picture of under-representation and low salaries. Anecdotal evidence is even more compelling, and points to serious problems in attracting women to coaching, providing reasonable working conditions and remuneration once there, and ensuring opportunities to advance. The oddity is that this situation exists at a time when women athletes are close to achieving equal opportunity on the world's great sporting stages. And when given opportunity, results are not far behind. (Witness the outstanding performances of Canada's women athletes at the 2002 Olympic Winter Games.)

How then to attract qualified and dedicated women to a coaching career? And if conditions are really that grim, is it ethically responsible to do so?

The experiences of six of Canada's best women coaches, all of whom reached, or are at, the top of the profession, reveal a deep love of sport and of coaching, incredible

staying power, and rock-hard commitment. Their numbers may be few, but their accomplishments are many. Their observations shed some light on the powerful motivators that drive so many coaches to accept low salaries, inadequate working conditions, and insecurity.

Yet of these highly qualified experts - all of whom seized every opportunity that came their way, made decisions, relished challenge, overcame adversity, and, in the process, became some of the finest coaches this country has produced - four have stepped outside of Canada's sport system, and two who retain ties are contributing in other ways.

### **The Coaching Bug Bit Early and It Bit Hard**

Each of our coaches began her coaching career while in her teens and at the height of her athletic career.

**Growing up in Salmon Arm, B.C., Bev Smith began to play basketball at an early age, and the game has been her life ever since** (see "Born Too Soon!"). Named to the national team in 1978, when only 18 years old, she quickly matured into a star and was a key force in the team's two world championship bronze medals. From 1978 to 1982, while a student of human performance at the University of Oregon, she honed her game and built a reputation as one of the greatest women basketball players ever. She also played in Italy for 12 seasons, beginning in 1982, and made the Italian all-star team every season.

"Even as a young player, I always did coach," says Bev, who knew she wanted to somehow stay in the game "forever." "It was a natural progression, but I also created opportunities by becoming involved as a coach with junior teams and youth teams and working with young kids, and that established with people that I was interested in coaching."

In 1988-1989, she retired from play. "I was 28 years old and society was suggesting that women didn't play past that age," she says. "I felt I wanted to be a coach, and in '88 the opportunity came up and I became head coach at the University of British Columbia. It was a good place for me to begin coaching, but as I went through the year I discovered it wasn't the right time; I loved the game even more as a player and decided to go back. Physically and mentally it was far too soon to stop playing."

She returned to Italy to play and coach her Division One team, the only woman coach in the league. In 1992, when Kathy Shields became national coach, Bev rejoined the program, only to discover that much had changed internationally. "At the '92 world championship in Australia, I was completely shocked, and impressed at how far the Australian team had come since I had last seen them in '88. We used to beat them consistently and now they were so much more fit than us. They had started junior development in '88 and thanks to the Australian Institute of Sport, were training year round.

"I saw the game was passing Canada by and thought, we've got to do something in Canada if we're going to keep up with the rest of the world. And remembering my head start because of playing on a junior national team, I realized that's what made the difference."

For the next four years, Bev focused on playing, ending her illustrious career as captain of the 1996 Olympic team. So good was she that when inducted into the Canadian Basketball Hall of Fame in 2001, she was described as "the Canadian women's team's Larry Bird."

After much thought, in 1997 she agreed to become part-time head coach of the national women's team, feeling strongly this was her chance to "make a difference." At the time, she said: "While I am still a young coach, I am a capable coach. I had a very rewarding and satisfying career and now I've found a challenge that meets the one I had as a player. It's wonderful, and I think I'm very fortunate."

In the fall of 2001, the University of Oregon beckoned and she became head coach of the women's basketball team, intending to continue with the national team. Shortly after, when the team failed to qualify for the 2002 world championships, she resigned.

### **Lori Sippel is a first assistant softball coach at the University of Nebraska.**

One of the world's top pitchers, the Canadian Softball Hall of Fame inductee spent 13 years on the national team and played at the 1996 Olympic Games and in three world championships. Her thirst to know more about the game made coaching almost inevitable. "Once you have more knowledge, you find yourself in situations where you start sharing it and soon you are coaching and teaching. I thought that was neat," says the Stratford, Ont., native.

In 1985, a scholarship took Lori to the University of Nebraska where she starred for the Huskers, throwing an unbelievable six no-hitters and the only seven-inning perfect game in the university's history.

The three-time All-American took her degree in special education and added an endorsement in coaching in hopes that coaching could become her career. Playing in her final game, she was asked by the head coach of the University of Kansas to become his assistant. She quickly agreed and in 1989, her coaching career began. "The door opened and I have never had to worry about looking," she says. "I had somebody who thought I would fit and asked me to come and help." After one season, she was back at Nebraska as an assistant coach, a position she has held with great success ever since. In 1997, she was also an assistant coach with Canada's senior women's national team, and she was a member of Softball Canada's coaches pool for several years in the late 1990s.

Huskers head coach Rhonda Revelle describes Lori as being in "a very elite class of pitching coaches. She develops and prepares pitchers mentally and physically as well as anyone else out there. She put this program on the map as a player, but just ask her, and she'll tell you her mission is not complete until she does the same as a coach."

**Mariann Domonkos is the best women's table tennis player ever developed in Canada.** Her accomplishments include a record 10 national singles titles. A national coach for 14 years, she has coached at two Olympic Games and in numerous world championships.

She began coaching at the age of 17 when opportunity knocked. At her home club in Châteauguay, Que., there was tremendous interest in table tennis and a chronic shortage of coaches, and Domonkos needed to earn some money. "I would get paid

a couple of bucks an hour to work two nights a week," she says. "It was better than working at McDonald's." She also worked for the Quebec Table Tennis Federation's summer development camps in the Laurentians, gaining a lot of coaching experience.

Although sport was in her blood, she wasn't heading for a coaching career. Instead, she finished a degree in physical education at the University of Ottawa and took a job as a YMCA fitness adviser and continued competing. She also took advantage of a federally sponsored internship program that although not targeted at aspiring coaches, gave "a nice taste of the administration side of sport, and as a coach you really have to be aware of that."

In 1988, while studying industrial design at Carleton University, she was appointed national coach of the women's table tennis team, a position she held for the next 14 years. "Not in my wildest dreams did I think that when I was ready to start working there would be a full-time career path in coaching. It was coincidence, a fluke."

**Dru Marshall was the head coach of Canada's national women's field hockey team in the late 1990s and is one of only a small number of coaches with 3M NCCP Level 5 certification.** She is the assistant dean of the undergraduate program in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta and has a doctoral degree in exercise physiology.

Imagine holding down not one, but two demanding positions; that's what Dru did until finally forced to choose between two loves.

Dru competed in many different sports while growing up in Winnipeg, before settling on field hockey as her sport of choice. As a player in her teens, she began assessing the impact of different coaching styles and philosophies. "I was fortunate because Manitoba was very forward thinking and so I was exposed to different coaches from different countries," she says. Being asked, at the age of 19, to coach a group of younger players was a turning point. "I was interested in helping other people reach their potential," she says. "I wanted people to have as much fun with sport as I did." Playing remained important, but coaching was taking over.

In 1979, when it came time to begin a master's program, in exercise physiology, she chose the U of A because it had a field hockey program and played for another two years before becoming the team's coach. "It was a convenient solution for the university," she says. "I was a graduate student so they could pay me a graduate assistantship, and that's how it worked for several years." At the same time she became Prairies regional coach for Field Hockey Canada, played at the Canada Games, and started coaching the provincial team. Over the years, many national and international assignments came her way, and in April 1996 she became the national coach, remaining in the position until March 31, 2001. For an untenured academic, the risk to her research program was huge. "When I was offered the position, I really had to think it over," she says. "I thought, OK, it's something I've always, always wanted, and I will hate myself if I don't do it." (In 1997 she was granted early tenure.)

**Debbie Muir was a high performance synchronized swimmer who competed at the first world aquatic championships in Belgrade in 1973.** The experience opened her eyes to Canada's potential to be the best synchro nation in the world;

fulfilling that potential would drive her coaching career.

Her post-competitive plan was to earn an education degree at the University of Calgary and pursue a teaching career. Coaching wasn't on her agenda, even though she coached for 25 cents an hour with the Calgary Aquabelles club to help pay her bills. There were no full-time synchro coaches at that time, not even Debbie's coach, Mary Ann Reeves\*, whose "real" job was as aquatic director at the YWCA.

Before long, to Debbie's surprise, coaching had become a passion. "I fell in love with the idea of making other people better," she says. "I found I could help people to be better than I was. I got a real high out of helping talented people, giving them tips to become great, and quickly realized I would rather coach than teach." Debbie's timing could not have been better. Mary Ann stepped down as head coach of the Aquabelles and Debbie took over, even though she had to teach part time so that she could afford to coach.

In 1976, Debbie was named a national coach and in 1979, when federal money became available to pay coaches' salaries - one of Roger Jackson's many initiatives - she was able to quit teaching. "Roger (at that time the director of Sport Canada) was a great guy. He gets excited by passion and excellence and he saw our potential, our enthusiasm, our dedication, and he went to bat for us, even before we proved ourselves," says Debbie.

From then until 1991 was a glorious period for synchro and for Debbie as she built an enviable reputation as an astute, innovative coach who produced world champions such as Helen Vanderburg in solo and duet with Michelle Calkins in 1978; Olympic silver in 1984 with the duo of Kelly Kryczka and Sharon Hambrook and Carolyn Waldo in solo; all three events at the 1986 world championships; and gold at the 1988 Olympics with Waldo in solo and duet with Michelle Cameron.

**If fame is the yardstick, ice hockey coach Shannon Miller is an overachiever.**

More importantly, the first woman to be appointed head coach of a national women's team and head coach of Canada's first Olympic women's hockey team can point with pride to an incredible string of successes, most recently as the guiding force behind the University of Minnesota Duluth Bulldogs women's hockey team.

The native of Melfort, Sask., who earned a degree in physical education from the University of Saskatchewan, was herself an excellent hockey player, competing at four national championships before retiring in 1989 to pursue her career as a police officer in Calgary. She eased into coaching when she and a friend started a hockey team for 13- to 15-year-old girls, a pioneering effort that took two difficult years. She became an assistant with the Alberta women's hockey team, and in 1991 was assistant coach of the Alberta team that won the first-ever Canada Games women's hockey tournament. By then she had attracted the attention of the Canadian Hockey Association, and more opportunities opened up. In 1992 she was a "pretty green" assistant with the national team, sharing world championship honours then and again in 1994. When the team extended its winning streak in 1997, Shannon was its head coach. In 1998 came the Olympic silver medal.

After Nagano, the employment well was dry until the University of Minnesota Duluth made her an offer that included providing the resources to build an NCAA contender and a salary to match.

## **Creating Opportunities, Overcoming Limitations, Making Tough Decisions**

Clearly, all six of our coaches have everything it takes to scale the coaching ladder. As well as building enviable professional records, each has a talent for creating opportunities. For three, those opportunities lie outside our borders. It is hard to imagine Canada being able to compete with the resources available to top coaches, women included, in the United States. Australia, too, has an enviable system, as one coach discovered. The two who remain in Canada have recently made tough choices, dictated in part by the current sport system.

Let's first look at the United States.

### **Lori Sippel has spent all but one season of her coaching career at Nebraska.**

Her first coaching opportunity, at the University of Kansas, was a part-time, nine-month position with benefits and reasonable pay. "When you're just out of school and it's 1988, \$14,000 to \$15,000 is pretty good," she says. When her alma mater called to say an assistantship had come open, she found herself in a full-time position with full benefits, a pay increase, bonus opportunities, and a gas card.

Now a first assistant, Lori's situation - with its excellent remuneration and working conditions - seems far removed from a similar position in Canada. She is unfazed by the intense pressure that goes hand in hand with American college coaching, which she says reflects Nebraska's commitment to excellence - that and being the sole focus of the state's passion for sport. "There's no professional sport; sport at the university is pro sport for the state of Nebraska. Talk about being in a glass house! Because we're successful, the whole state knows who the athletes and coaches are. Coaches' salaries and raises are put in the paper so people can ask me, 'How come you've been here 15 years, Sippel, and he's been here for only two years and he's making so much more?' At the same time, I'm very comfortable, I'm taken care of; I have the opportunity to earn bonuses based on how the team does."

After the 1996 Olympic Games, Lori joined Softball Canada's coaches pool and accepted occasional assignments, university schedule permitting. She describes the experience as "satisfactory." There was a tournament in the Netherlands, a Canada Cup, two Super Bowls, and a Pan American Games qualifier. One frustration was Canada's short season; another was giving up some of the decision-making authority she is used to. "There are steps you have to take with the national team and it was a little out of my comfort zone because down here I can make my job my sole focus 365 days of the year, 24/7," says Lori, who has also been a colour commentator for CBC-TV's coverage of women's softball. "It's my job to know that at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, I walk out on the field and my team's going to be there and everything's going to be set up by my managers. I'm in control of my own budget so I know how to arrange trips, book hotel rooms, things like that. With the national team it was a matter of letting go of some of the responsibilities."

Another difference - and it's a big one - is that for nine months of the year, the Nebraska team is together on campus. Canada's national team has to figure out how to do a winning job in just two months.

In 1998, Lori decided to come out of retirement to play at the world championships in Japan and help Canada qualify for the Sydney Olympics. Mission accomplished, her retirement became official. She did not return to the coaching pool. "I was asked if I wanted to be in the pool and possibly be an assistant, but that would take the

whole summer, and that is too much of my time," she says. "Summer is the most critical part of our year at Nebraska; it's when we recruit." Both the university and Lori's head coach had supported her Olympic experience, but Lori was keenly aware of the extra demands her head coach then had to assume.

Widely considered a potential national coach, Lori is quick to say that she wasn't in Softball Canada's coaching system long enough to give it a fair shake. However, she senses that other countries are making more of a commitment to high performance sport in general. "If you have happy people at the top running the program, people who feel they don't have to go elsewhere to have a stable income or a rewarding life, people who feel they are taken care of well enough that they can focus on the job at hand, not worry about taking a second job, or how the bills are going to be paid when they're travelling, chances are those people are going to be pretty productive."

Would Lori come back to Canada to coach? "Every time I am asked that I say 'of course.' There's no doubt where I come from and my pride at being Canadian. But as far as me excelling at the level I want to excel at as a coach, and being able to do that knowing I have a roof over my head and can feed myself, I don't see anything comparable. I will never change my citizenship, but the opportunity to do what I'm good at and enjoy doing, it's down here."

**In 1997, Bev Smith enthusiastically assumed leadership of the national team and by the fall of 2001 she was gone, worn down by feeling she hadn't done the job she set out to do.** "When I became national coach, I knew exactly what I was getting into," she says. "My plan was to work with the senior team and really try to develop the juniors because that experience had given me a head start as a player and it was doing the same for other people in the world."

There were some successes - qualifying for the 2000 Olympic tournament, starting a junior team, providing quality coaching and quality experience.

In 2001, with limited dollars available, Bev could support either a junior development mega-camp or the national team's preparation to COPABA, but not both. She chose the juniors and shortly afterwards the national team failed to qualify for the 2002 world championships, losing 51-50 to Argentina at the 2001 COPABA tournament.

Bev believes she made the right decision. "The camp was an unbelievable experience, probably the best I've ever had as a basketball coach or player in Canada," she says. "Actually having a team of 24 athletes and 12 coaches developing the skills we need to be successful internationally. Three weeks devoted to us - absolutely incredible. To have our Olympic athletes working with our younger kids on a daily basis was a dream come true. I used the money for the mega-camp because it's important, it's development and if we don't do it, it's a vicious cycle."

She made the decision believing the senior team could qualify. That said, she acknowledges that the players were hurt by not having enough training time or any exhibition games. When they got into the fire against Argentina, not having played together showed, and the world championship spot was lost. "I think we could have done it regardless," says Bev. "Those are decisions you make, but having to choose was the straw that broke the camel's back for me. I felt you're damned if you do and damned if you don't, and I didn't have the energy to fight the battles anymore. I was too jaded and felt it was time for someone with more energy to take over."

"It's not that I don't have the courage to make tough decisions - and I still think it was the right decision - but the same problems are going to be there next year and, frankly, I don't know how to solve them."

Reminded of how optimistic she felt when she took the job, she says: "It hurts when you see your athletes out on the floor and they're giving 100 per cent and they just haven't had the time together that other countries get. They're putting themselves on the line because they love their country, they love representing Canada and try to do their best, and they're not being given a fair shake."

Now Bev is back at her alma mater, the University of Oregon, thrilled to be there and in a situation light years away from her experiences of the past four years. For starters, not only is she full time, she has three full-time assistants, a full-time secretary, a full-time strength and conditioning coach, a graduate assistant coach on scholarship, and two managers on scholarship. She has great facilities and everything she needs for the players to have a shot at success. She has a three-year contract (three instead of four because of visa requirements) because "people who understand college sports know that it takes at least that time to put your stamp on a program," and she has a "very decent" salary.

**After Nagano, the Canadian women's ice hockey team - and their head coach - were treated as failures instead of silver medallists.** One game, and their wonderful nine-year record was forgotten. For Shannon Miller, moving on was difficult because there were so few opportunities. If she wanted full-time, paid coaching, her only option was to return to Calgary's Olympic Oval where she had built the high performance centre for female hockey players while on leave from the police department. Calgary police chief Christine Silverberg, wanting to keep Shannon connected to the force, supported a compromise that would include coaching and policing.

And that's what Shannon wanted. "My number one choice was to stay in Canada, stay on with the police department, and continue to coach at the Olympic Oval," she says.

Unfortunately for women's hockey in Canada, the Oval wanted her full time or not at all and for the same salary she was making before being named Olympic coach. "Building the Oval program was wonderful, but I was working 16 hours a day and was paid in the \$40,000+ range, and because I was building a program, I wasn't doing much coaching, only a couple of hours a day with individual athletes, but mostly it was administrative," she says. "I just felt buried and very much underpaid. I couldn't go back to that, so I walked. I had a much better offer in the United States so that's where I went."

Shannon started from scratch, and alone, at UMD, intent upon building the best college team in the world. She would settle for nothing less than that, and she wanted it to happen fast. That meant recruiting world-class players and the university gave her the resources to do just that. Working day and night, she put together an international team, and in its first season the Bulldogs made it to the final four in the U.S., known as the "Frozen Four." "You had somebody, myself, who had just come off what was considered a failure by not winning gold at the Olympics, and I was very, very driven to win - not to prove something, but to build a winning program," she says.



Within three years, the Bulldogs have compiled a 53-10-7 record for a .807 winning percentage. They have one NCAA title, a conference championship, two conference playoff crowns, and a national tournament appearance. Last season they won everything and were feted at the White House. Shannon was selected to coach the first-ever conference all-star team and she serves on the NCAA women's hockey committee. Her staff has grown to three and includes former Canadian star Stacy Wilson, who is an assistant coach; star goaltender Manon Rheame, who is a volunteer goalie coach; and assistant coach Shawna Davidson.

Shannon attributes her success to having the resources to recruit, her international connections she used to recruit international players (two of the best players on the Swedish national team are Bulldogs), and the coach education and coaching experience she got in Canada. "Put that all together and you've got a winning combination," she says.

She signed a three-year contract with UMD, and says in hindsight she did not do a particularly good job of negotiating. But after the team made it to the Frozen Four, the athletic director suggested that contract adjustments were in order. "After living there for two years I now understood the American way, so I renegotiated for a higher salary and performance rewards and cars, things like that," she says. "It is public knowledge that I make a base salary of \$80,000 and get a \$10,000 bonus when we win everything. I get a brand new Ford Explorer every 30 days, I have a membership at a private golf and country club, and both my budget and my salary are the same as for the men's team, thanks to Title IX (see sidebar). That's the way it works here, truly. I mean, it's equality."

**Debbie Muir chose a direction that eventually took her to Australia.** When Synchro Canada formed a national team in 1981, Debbie became national coach and, over the next seven years, everything fell into place. "When you are leading the way and going into territory where you haven't been before, and people have no preconceived ideas of what they can and cannot do, and the right volunteer leaders and backers are in place, you can do anything, and that's what it was like at Synchro Canada (until 1988)," she says. "People who sometimes get in the way of a coach doing her best job, for whatever reason - none of that happened. And our outstanding international results fortified the belief that we were doing the right thing, and it was very contagious."

Her \$25,000 annual salary was, she thought, reasonable for the time. "The idea of benefits never occurred to me. I could coach full time and that was all I cared about."

Gradually, however, a negative side began to emerge, a combination of people attracted to the sport because of its growing success, exploding bureaucracy, regionalism, and parental self-interest. The inevitable result was compromised quality of training, and by 1991, Debbie had had enough. "What I had enjoyed so much over the years was the ability to do what I needed to do when I needed to do it - in the interest of being the best in the world," she says. "It wasn't 'cover your ass' kinds of things; it was go out there and take risks, do what you need to do. Towards the end, that wasn't there anymore and was certainly a part of my decision to go. It was just too bureaucratic and mediocre. I wasn't as motivated or as passionate, and I also felt I had achieved all my goals."

Wanting to do something different, Debbie decided to sell the corporate world on her concept of building great teams and great athletes. A divorce put that plan on hold, as money became an issue. For the next few years, she worked as a synchro consultant with clients that included the national team. She also returned to the Aquabelles as technical director.

One day, on an impulse, she faxed the executive director of synchro in Australia, suggesting that with the 2000 Olympics slated for Sydney, she would like to do some training camps with the national team. Three minutes later she was reading an invitation to become Australia's full-time national coach. Although that was more than she could manage, she agreed to prepare a program leading to the Olympics and do one training camp in order to assess the situation.

On her first visit to Australia, she discovered "a mess, a shambles, with girls who were not athletes and who had no idea how to train full time," she says. "All of a sudden I felt a little spark. Here was the opportunity to change a whole group of people, a whole way of thinking, a way of life, and to be challenged in a different way - and I wanted to see what was making their sport system work. "

Even though synchro was barely on the Australian sport radar, all the tools for success were readily available. As in the early days in Canada, Debbie was given free rein to make it happen. "Tell us what you need and we'll get it for you" was the attitude. "In Australia, they have really gotten down to the level of the coach and athlete and have all the structures that support performance," she says. "There aren't a lot of layers of bureaucracy, and money went directly to training and sport medicine and travel opportunities."

Even when funding for teams not showing medal potential was severely slashed in 1997, creating huge difficulties for Debbie, she learned plenty from her Australian experience, including how to target government money strategically. "The Australians holding the money bags do not feel pressured to treat everyone equally. They just do it! They don't care about bad press, or who was bad-mouthing them; they just do it."

Debbie returned to Canada proud of what had been accomplished. "When I started with Australia, the team was ranked last in the world and at the Olympics, they were eighth, which moved them to 12th out of 25 countries in world ranking," she says. "It was great because they had limited talent and a very small talent pool."

**Mariann Domonkos says it's time to carry through on a decision that has been several years in the making.** Although table tennis is too much a part of her life for her to ever leave completely, she is ready to try other challenges. "You put your heart and soul into coaching, and I think it's only normal that eventually you run out of steam a little. And when you start to feel that energy diminish a little bit, you wouldn't be doing yourself or your athletes any justice if you stayed for the wrong reasons."

Mariann has enjoyed tremendous support from the moment her coaching career began, perhaps helped at first by her sterling athletic record. "When I finished the internship program, the Canadian Table Tennis Association supported creating a position for me as an assistant national coach, so I have never had to overcome a reluctance about having women coaches. As for athletic accomplishments, yes, that

opens doors, but you have to prove yourself as a coach, and very quickly."

Contributing to Mariann's decision to move on is a development she can take full credit for, and that is growing numbers of young players, women and men, who are interested in a coaching career. "What I am most proud of, and I hope I'm not jumping the gun, is that a number of the women athletes I've worked with over the years are showing an interest because of the work I did with them technically as players. To me, this means a lot more than getting really good results at one event."

She has high hopes for two young women coaches now working in development while attending university. But, she wonders, "Are they going to be lucky like me with a full-time position to move into? They'll stick around for a few years even if there isn't, but eventually it would become too difficult to justify. More coaching positions at the developmental level would have a lot of impact on the growth of any sport."

Mariann's first love is the high performance and developmental training camps she holds across Canada, and she intends to continue with those. Because so many athletes lack good coaching in their developmental years, when they reach the national team much of her work focuses on undoing that earlier training. "It's slow, it's frustrating, it creates motivational difficulties, and these are the challenges of coaching," she says. "If the technical work is done well in the beginning, that is one less big problem a coach faces, which leaves you to get on with positive things that create enthusiasm and show results."

As she eases into her "departure," assistant coach Christian Foisy, one of those young, enthusiastic coaches she mentions, is preparing, as of April 1, 2002, to officially take over the women's team. The two are working closely together so he can pick her brain and get comfortable with the team as she slowly withdraws.

Withdraws to what? She's not sure what direction she will follow, but her decision frees her to explore other avenues. She talks about going into private business, of going back to school, of travelling with her husband, Adham Sharara, who heads the International Table Tennis Federation.

## **Born Too Soon!**

**Bev Smith:** "My first exposure to sports was the ice hockey game. Before the Second World War broke out, my dad briefly made it to the professional level and he brought his passion home. During the long winter months, we hit the ponds and lakes and played shinny from dawn to dusk. One day all the boys went off to minor hockey; of course, at that time, in the late '60s and early '70s, females were not allowed to play organized hockey, even though I could skate and stickhandle with the best of the rink rats.

I had to find a sport that girls were allowed to play, but boy, do I envy and greatly admire the girls of today and dream of what might have been had I been born a wee bit later.

I threw my passion for hockey into basketball and with a great girls' program at my high school and solid and fundamental coaching things worked out well for me in my new sport and I just kept going ...

So, abandoned by the family game, I adopted another game - if you can't beat them, switch sports!"

**For years, Dru Marshall juggled two equally demanding careers until circumstance forced her to make a choice.** She never planned to have two careers. For one thing, even though her goal was to be the national coach, coaching wasn't a job - it was something she loved doing. For a long time she was oblivious to the load she was carrying. In fact, when she stopped coaching, the relief she felt startled her. "To be honest, I can't believe how it feels to have two days off on a weekend because I haven't had that for 20 years," she says.

Along the way, she was urged to make a choice. During her post-doctoral studies into obesity in children, her boss, who was supportive of her coaching, nevertheless urged her to "finish" it because he thought she could make a real contribution as an expert researcher. The pressures would eventually become too great, predicted the dean of the faculty. Dru continued to believe she could do both. "I always argued that my teaching is better because of my coaching," she says. "I had to learn different styles to deliver and communicate information to make sure everyone understood and remained motivated to learn. I know I'm a good teacher and I know that is partially due to my coaching experience, which allows me a different way of thinking and makes me a better researcher."

Despite the academic pressure, the school recognized that having a national coach was beneficial because Dru continued to coach the university team and shared the tactics, techniques, and strategies she learned at the high performance level. "My bottom line was always, I absolutely love coaching. I can have an absolutely crappy day at work and go out on the field for two hours and all my problems disappear. Why would I choose to give that up?"

Then, just as Field Hockey Canada decided to make her position full time, the university offered her the position of assistant dean of her faculty. After she carefully weighed all the options, the university won out.

"I told Field Hockey Canada about the university's offer, but said I was very interested in continuing with the team, that I thought the team had made significant progress and was poised to make a breakthrough. They were highly supportive and said they wanted me to stay, but thought I was nuts not to take the opportunity at the university with its good salary, benefits, and pension."

It was crunch time. A decision, a choice had to be made. In the end, a \$25,000 salary spread made the difference. "I'm not independently wealthy, although I could have lived on the field hockey salary, but there was no security, none whatsoever," she says. "When I made the decision, I felt absolutely sick - and guilty - but I also knew I had rarely made a decision for me. It was always for the teams or the department or the faculty. Now I had to ask myself, 'What's best for Dru?'"

## **Changing the System**

**When Shannon Miller talks about her setup at UMD, it sounds as close to perfection as a coach can expect to get.** She agrees, calling it "absolutely a coach's dream to be getting paid well to do something you dearly love." The downside? Not living in Canada. "I'm homesick, oh yeah. I miss my family. I miss my friends. I love my country, but I cannot do what I love in my country so I chose to

leave."

The obvious question is, what would it take to bring her back? "I would have to be a full-time coach with a high performance hockey team that has the resources to pay coaches a respectful salary and fund travel to compete against the other best teams in the country," she says. "Competition at the highest level is where I'm at and it's the ring I want to be in. If you put up the money, the rest will naturally follow, as it has in the United States. Developing good female coaches would lead to better, well-trained athletes and would mean a better, more attractive product."

Shannon believes it could happen in Canada under the right circumstances. Three years ago, there was no team in Duluth, and now the Bulldogs attract a base crowd of 1,000 every weekend, and the figure has reached 4,000. The numbers for other schools may not be as high, but compared to the small crowds in Canada (although that may change after Canada's Olympic victory), overall attendance is good and getting better as the product improves.

As well as more full-time, well-paid coaches, Shannon recommends that national coaches take coaching clinics to Canada's grassroots coaches - women who do not aspire to coach the national team, but want to do the best possible job in their communities. "If a national coach is very good at what she does, and is a good teacher and motivator, why wouldn't you try to keep her in the country, pay her well, and let others learn from her experiences?"

As she builds that winning program she talked about earlier, Shannon is also developing herself. "I am a far better coach than I was three years ago because I am coaching every single day, and every weekend I am in a competitive situation where I have to be at my best to win. I eat it up; I love it." She would willingly share her personal growth. "Every time I come home, whether to do a coaching clinic or make a speech, I bring my knowledge and experience with me, and if I ever coach the national team again, I'm going to be a much, much better coach."

**Debbie Muir has moved on.** After Sydney, she decided it was time to dip her toe into the corporate world, as she had long wanted to do, and apply her coaching skills to senior managers. Using a program she developed and calls "Podium Performance at Work," she demonstrates how to get world-class performances from employees with a one-day workshop followed by one-on-one coaching. She has also created an educational program to help athletes understand the connection between the body and the mind and its effect on physiology and goal setting. Her third initiative is a youth program at Calgary's Lindsay Park Sport Centre that introduces high performance sport skills. "I want to be more far reaching and use the skills that made me a successful national coach," she says.

Debbie, who is a member of Canada's Sports Hall of Fame and the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame, believes strongly in the need to improve sport delivery in Canada, and for her, the best way is to turn attention to development. "Part of the high performance problem is that not enough good athletes are being developed," she says. "We have to involve more kids in sport, and sport organizations must do a better job of identifying talent and providing excellent, full-time, paid coaching at the developmental level. Then your cream of the crop, coaches as well as athletes, will start to rise and more opportunities for high performance athletes will lead to a greater demand for coaches."

**Like Shannon, Lori Sippel believes she has become a better, more creative coach.** In her case, the improvement is directly related to her retirement from playing. No longer juggling her two passions freed the self-confessed perfectionist to concentrate totally on coaching. "I was wondering if I was the missing link, the reason why Nebraska hadn't won a national championship," she says. "As soon as I was done playing, I took a big breath and said, 'Now I'll see what I'm about as a coach because it's my sole mission.' And I found I am better. I know my players better, because they are my focus and my full-time job. It's exhausting at times, but I have focus and I have a career as a coach."

While Title IX has certainly forced open certain doors for women, Lori suggests the situation would be even better if attitudes had changed along with the law. "Title IX gave us the right, but it is still a matter of attitudes," she says. "We have great facilities and things like that, and we deserve them, but people always say it is because of Title IX. It would be better if everybody understood that change was based on attitudes instead of a law that says this has to be done."

**As Mariann Domonkos moves into the next stage of her life, she is not entirely lost to the coaching profession.** As she says, "This is a job I've been doing because my heart is in it and you don't just walk away." In the meantime, she can look back on the metamorphosis of the sport since she began in 1969 and note its growth with pride. "It's amazing how far we've come; it's a nice upward curve," she says. "We measure our progress by the number of players, their level, their commitment, the number of coaches, the professionalism and quality of our program. As I said earlier, we've got a nice crop of young Canadian coaches who are motivated and keen, and we are able to give them opportunities. They are the reason I am so upbeat."

"I'm planning to remain involved, but only in the area where I feel I can contribute and enjoy, and that's coaching. I can resign and continue because there's always a need for assistance, so that's what I'll become - an assistant to my replacement - and no, that doesn't bother me, not at all."

**Bev Smith is focused on proving to her university that she can produce the results expected of her.** While she has solid support because people remember her great career, her reputation raises expectations. "Certainly, results are something the university community takes great pride in, even though we talk a lot about college athletics being a journey and a process. Rankings are monitored throughout the year and there's a clause in my contract that rewards PAC-10 championship and NCAA appearances," she says. Pressure also comes from the local community. "People down here are crazy for sports. In the Eugene newspaper, if it's not the university taking the headlines and the front page, it's high school sport. It's a passion; it's ingrained in their society - unlike ours. As Canadians, we take pride in not being fanatical, but we could use a little passion."

Assistant coaches also enjoy decent working conditions and wages. One of Bev's assistants is Allison McNeill, another former Duck, recently named as her successor with the national team and the former head coach at Simon Fraser University. "Assistants here can make a living, have a family, study, and aspire to becoming a head coach," says Bev. "Allison resigned from SFU because there just was not the necessary support. The more I do and see here, I have the utmost respect and admiration for head coaches in Canada, coaches like Allison for what she

accomplished at SFU, basically alone."

Bev remains deeply concerned about sport in Canada. A delegate to the 2001 National Summit on Sport and a member of the federal government's coaching task force, she is troubled by the lack of commitment by government to sport. "I've pondered our dependence on government for a number years," she says. "I've thought, it can't all be up to government, but I've come to the realization that if government doesn't commit to sport, no one will. Commitment is leadership and it's saying sport is important."

**As Dru Marshall reflects upon her coaching career, she is struck by how much her approach has changed over the years.** "I am sure I made every mistake in the book in terms of thinking things were important when they weren't, like doing rooming lists alphabetically, like punctuality, getting into little fights with players about things I don't even worry about now," she says. "I went from being a fairly autocratic coach to a very facilitative leadership style."

Dru remains convinced that coaching is a realistic career choice for women. "I love coaching. It's a great challenge. It's great for personal and professional development to really find out who you are and how you react under pressure. You have a chance to make an impact on some really high achievers, kids you know are going to go on to have an impact, huge in some cases, on other people's lives.

"The highs are the highest and the lows the lowest and you are never really in balance, because to be an elite athlete or an elite coach you have to be tremendously focused. There is no half way."

Dru would like women coaches to share experiences and information. Late in her career, she met Bev Smith and 2002 Olympic ice hockey coach Danièle Sauvageau. "They knew exactly what I was going through and could have been great sounding boards. Not very many people have been there and understand the pressures, the issues, and how you feel when making decisions. You might have good personal support, but there is a different level of understanding when you've actually done it. We have a lot of expertise to share."

Although she has officially retired from coaching, Dru continues to contribute through the university. "We are developing a really solid undergraduate and graduate academic program in coaching that has an exceptional practical component," she says. "There will be a three-year mentorship program, and many of the mentors have national team experience. So you see, I'm not really getting out of coaching. This is going to be my contribution.

"I've always thought the worst thing I could do would be to get out of coaching entirely. I have 25 years of wisdom to give back to sport. I really look forward to working with younger coaches and being involved in their development. I am sure it will keep me young."

\*Today Mary Ann is the director of the National Coaching Institute - Calgary.

### **SHEILA ROBERTSON**

Sheila Robertson has worked as an editor and a writer with Canada's sport community for over 25 years. As founding editor of Champion magazine, she set editorial standards that remain a model for the sport community. Her sport clients

have included the Canadian Professional Coaches Association (CPCA), the Coaching Association of Canada, the Canadian Olympic Association, the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, Sport Canada, and the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport and Physical Activity. Since 1994 Sheila has been the editor/writer of Coaches Report, CPCA's quarterly magazine. She was the editor and chief writer of Making the Most of Your Opportunities: A Media Guide for Athletes and Their Coaches. In 1995, she was the recipient of the Frank Ratcliffe Memorial Award for communications, presented annually at the Canadian Sport Awards. Coaches Report was a finalist for the award in 2001.

### **Title IX**

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 is the landmark U.S. legislation that bans sex discrimination in schools, whether in academics or athletics. Title IX states:

"No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

The advancements in education and academics since Title IX are notable:

- In 1994, women received 38 per cent of medical degrees, compared to 9 per cent in 1972.
- In 1994, women earned 43 per cent of law degrees, compared to 9 per cent in 1972.
- In 1994, 44 per cent of all doctoral degrees earned by American citizens went to women, up from 25 per cent in 1977.

For sport, Title IX governs the overall equity of treatment and opportunity while giving schools the flexibility to choose sports based on student body interest, geographic influence, budget restraints, and gender ratio. In other words, it is not a matter of women being able to participate in wrestling or that exactly the same amount of money is spent per women's and men's basketball player. Instead, the focus is on the necessity for women to have equal opportunities with men on the whole, not on an individual basis.

Areas that determine if an institution is in compliance include athletic financial assistance and accommodation of athletic interests and abilities.