



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

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The Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching is buoyed by the steadily growing readership and the overwhelmingly positive response, at home and abroad, to the first 10 features. As we enter our third year, you, our readers, can expect more of the innovative, timely, and informative features that characterize the Journal. Our upcoming offerings will include:

- Lori Eisler, one of Canada's most successful university coaches, sharing some of the secrets of her success
- Joan Vickers explaining her acclaimed work on decision making
- Sheila Robertson in discussion with several retired high performance athletes who are carving out successful high performance coaching careers

Beginning in this issue, a book review section will accompany each feature. To launch the section, former Olympic rower Susan Antoft reviews Laura Robinson's provocative new book, "Black Tights: Women, Sport and Sexuality". We welcome suggestions for books and volunteer reviewers.

Also in the works is an exciting new initiative — an annual research issue of the Journal that is devoted to women in coaching topics. Our scientific editors are former field hockey national head coach, Dr. Dru Marshall, assistant dean of the undergraduate program in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta, and Dr. Guylaine Demers, an assistant professor in the department of physical education at Laval University. Accompanying the research journal will be a graduate prize open to a woman in a Canadian university graduate program whose submission is selected for publication in the Journal. The prize will cover the costs of travel, accommodation, and admission to the annual Sport Leadership conference and the winning entry will be published in the Journal. The expected launch date is June 2003. Watch for further details in the next issue of the Journal.

The current Journal feature is a remarkable account by Dru Marshall of the "First Annual Women's National Team Coach Retreat", held last March. Writing with clarity and perception, Dru presents the accomplishments of the retreat, which exposed all too clearly the difficult realities of women national team coaches. A major accomplishment of the retreat was to zero in on problems and begin the work of resolution.

The success of this first retreat reflects the inspired and innovative leadership of the Women in Coaching program and is a credit to the retreat's facilitators, Dru Marshall and Mariann Domonkos. The comprehensive agenda, designed to ensure spirited debate and maximum participation, led to the fulfillment of Cyndie's underlying goal — the founding of a personal support system for national team coaches, a development of major importance.

As we said upon launching the Journal, we envision a day when Canada's women coaches work in a positive and productive environment, able to concentrate on their primary goal of coaching their athletes to success. A stated goal was to put the challenges faced by women coaches on the table and offer workable solutions to problems endemic to the profession. Given the strong response to the Journal, an important first step has been taken towards breaching the formidable barriers to getting ahead. Join us as we move forward towards a healthy, happy environment for women coaches in their chosen career with progress reflected on the forthcoming pages of the Journal. — Sheila Robertson

OCTOBER 2002 FEATURE

First Annual Women's National Team Coach Retreat A Resounding Success

By Dru Marshall

As many of you are aware, coaching can be a lonely profession, particularly as you move up the ranks in your sport. National team coaches in particular face a unique set of pressures. They typically have invested a great deal of time and personal resources in their career development in an effort to become technical and tactical experts. They have to answer to more people, be more politically involved, and be role models on a continual basis. Because of these pressures, the development of a personal support system for national team coaches is critical.

Cyndie Flett, director of the Coaching Association of Canada's Women in Coaching program, had a vision that would allow many of our top women coaches to come together for a weekend retreat to share stories, network, and potentially develop the start of a personal support system. In envisioning this retreat, Cyndie believed that former women national team head coaches should facilitate the event in order to share their experiences and help to reduce the likelihood of new national team coaches struggling with similar issues and the potentially negative experiences they had experienced. Cyndie believes that we have a tendency in sport in Canada of not valuing retired coaches. Inadvertently, then, asking former national team head coaches to facilitate a retreat for current national team coaches became a form of celebrating their successes.



Participants at the First Annual National Team Coach Retreat are:
Back row, left to right: Karen Hughes, Beth Ali, Charlene Mash-Hadlow, Laurie Eisler, Phyllis Sadoway, Sheilagh Croxon, Barb Desjardins, Kelly Hand, Cyndie Flett, and Mariann Domonkos
Middle row, left to right: Isabelle Cloutier, Natasha Wesch, Manon Perron
Front row: Heather Wallace, Daniele Sauvageau, Dru Marshall, Sherry Vanin Robertson, Pat Reid, and Lindsay Sparkes.
Photo credit: Mariann Domonkos

Planning the Retreat

When Cyndie asked Mariann Domonkos and me if we were interested in facilitating the first annual women's national team coach retreat, we both instantly agreed. Just as Cyndie had thought, as former national team head coaches — Mariann with table tennis and I with field hockey — we had many experiences we could share with other coaches. Mariann and I had never met before, but we had an opportunity to get acquainted over dinner when she was in Edmonton on business. We established a quick and easy rapport, sharing stories about our own

coaching experiences and talking about what it would have been like for us if we had been given the kind of experience Cyndie was envisioning. We identified a number of issues as topics for discussion, ranging from dealing with the responsibilities of being a national team coach, to handling the fallout from major decisions, to national team coaching.

Participants for the retreat were nominated by their national sport federations (NSFs) and had to meet a strict set of criteria, which included being a member of their respective national team coaching staff. As spaces were limited, priority was given in the following order: senior national team head coach, senior national team assistant coach, junior national team coach, member of national team coaching pool, and national junior/youth/development team coaching staff. NSFs could nominate more than one individual, but only one coach per sport was funded. Interestingly, some NSFs nominated their female coaches, but these were not selected because they were not members of a national team coaching staff. The participants are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants in Women’s National Team Coach Retreat

Participant	Sport
Beth Ali	field hockey
Isabelle Cloutier	diving
Sheilagh Croxon	synchronized swimming
Barb Desjardins	team handball
Laurie Eisler	volleyball
Kelly Hand	sailing
Karen Hughes	ice hockey
Charlene Mash-Hadlow	wheelchair basketball
Manon Perron	figure skating
Phyllis Sadoway	ringette
Danièle Sauvageau	ice hockey
Lindsay Sparkes	curling
Sherry Vanin Robertson	synchronized swimming
Heather Wallace	squash
Natascha Wesch	rugby

The list of potential topics Mariann and I generated was discussed with Cyndie and then sent to the participants, who were asked to prioritize topics for discussion and suggest other areas of interest. This data was collated and a plan for the retreat was developed (Table 2) and sent to the participants the week of the retreat.

Table 2: Women’s National Team Coach Retreat 2002 Schedule

FRIDAY		
17:00	Depart from Pearson Airport for Briars Resort	Meet outside luggage pickup area doors
18:30	Check in and eat dinner (dress: casual business)	Main Building Dining Room
20:00 – 22:00	Session 1 - Meet and greet activities, expectations and wine and cheese	First Tee Lodge
SATURDAY		
08:30 – 09:00	Breakfast	Dining Room (Main

		Building)
09:00 – 10:30	Session 2 – D. Sauvageau Athlete Evaluation for the purpose of carding, selection/de-selection	Admiralty Room (Main Building)
11:00 – 12:30	Session 3 – Perceptions, fallout, and responsibilities: the joys of being a national team coach.	Admiralty Room
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch	Dining Room
13:30 – 17:30	Recreation and Spa Time	Spa and other facilities
17:30 – 18:30	Session 4 - Afternoon Debrief and Large Group Discussion	First Tee Lodge
18:30 – 20:00	Dinner (dress: casual business)	Dining Room
20:00 – 22:00	Session 5 - Having it All <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing personal balance with all those responsibilities 	First Tee Lodge
SUNDAY		
07:30 – 08:15	Yoga	Admiralty Room
08:30 – 09:30	Breakfast	Dining Room
09:30 – 10:45	Session 6 - Contract Negotiations	First Tee Lodge
11:00 – 12:00	Session 7 – Retreat Debrief and Evaluation	First Tee Lodge
12:00 – 12:30	Check out	
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch	Dining Room
13:00 – 14:00	Depart for Pearson Airport	

The Retreat Friday

The retreat was held March 22-24 at The Briars in Lake Simcoe, Ont., north of Toronto. This timing was selected as a potential “down time” for both summer and winter sport coaches, the Salt Lake Olympics had just concluded, and coaches involved in summer sports were gearing up for their seasons.

Many of the participants had never met one another before and thus it was important for us to provide opportunities for social interaction and casual conversation. The majority started arriving into Toronto from points across the country on Friday afternoon and were driven to the retreat location in three vans by Mariann, Cyndie, and me. Participants from the Toronto area drove in a separate van. The van rides, which took approximately 90 minutes, provided an opportunity for participants to get to know one another, and helped establish a rapport that would continue throughout the weekend. All participants met for the first time as a group at dinner on Friday evening. It was interesting to observe a like-minded group of individuals come together for the

first time. Conversations started cautiously, but as people recognized the common interests they had as a group, ready friendships were formed.

Following dinner on Friday, a relatively brief session was held to explain the purposes of the retreat. Being a national team coach is typically, by its nature, an isolating position. The primary purposes of the weekend were to meet each other, get to know each other, and have an opportunity to learn from each other. In short, as Cyndie had hoped, we set out to lay the groundwork for a personal support network for national team coaches. Mariann and I shared short stories about our tenure as national team head coaches. We emphasized the wonderful opportunity the participants would have during the course of the retreat to establish a network with people who truly understand what each of them goes through on a daily basis. I was provided this opportunity only very late in my tenure as a national team coach, when Cyndie managed to arrange a meeting with Danièle Sauvageau, Bev Smith, and myself when we all were coaching our respective national teams and happened to be in Montreal for another event. The three of us discussed all kinds of issues that night and, not surprisingly, recognized many more similarities than differences in situations we had encountered. I knew that I would be able to call on either of them for advice or support. More importantly, I knew I could call if I needed to vent. In other words, I now had a personal support system of people who were in similar positions and who understood what I was going through. I empathized with the retreat participants who, for the most part, were being given this opportunity very early in their national team careers, and urged them to try to take maximum advantage.

A wine and cheese affair followed the first session, complete with an ice breaker (a bingo game Cyndie had developed using “facts” about each participant). Pat Reid, the chair of the Canadian Olympic Committee’s Women in Sport Committee, was a special guest at this event. It was hoped that Pat could become part of the support network for each coach and that she could answer some of the more challenging Olympic and Pan American Games related questions. This event was very successful, and it was clear that participants were getting to know one another.

Saturday

The first session was on athlete evaluation and selection and featured Olympic gold medal-winning ice hockey coach Danièle Sauvageau. Danièle gave a great presentation on her 2002 Olympic experience, particularly around athlete selection and the appeal process she went through during the final selection of her team. She provided much food for thought, from developing “ghost” rosters, to the type of information that can be collected statistically to aid in selection decisions, to the attention to detail that is required in evaluation and selection, and to the ultimate conclusion that preparation is everything.



Danièle Sauvageau talks about her 2002 Olympic experience as head coach of Canada’s women’s Olympic ice hockey team, winners of the gold medal at Salt Lake.

Photo credit: Mariann Domonkos

During discussion of Danièle's presentation, other coaches contributed their stories of selection decisions. Key findings from this discussion included:

1. the importance of documentation of performance, statistics, incidences, and conversations, amongst other things.
2. the importance of feedback to athletes (written and verbal) and the documentation of that feedback.

During the next session ("Perceptions, fallout, and responsibilities: the joys of being a national team coach"), we brainstormed a list of responsibilities (Table 3). These responsibilities ranged from financial management to counselling to planning. Interestingly, "designing practices" or "coaching" weren't named until the third piece of flip chart paper!

establishing rapport	athlete evaluation
role model	fund raising
win/focus on results	recruiting
reporting to masses	creating a vision
building support staff	conflict management
liaising with funding sources	program development
developing trust	running practice
liaison with officials, hosts	dealing with injuries
grass root development	long-term planning
reporting	dealing with media
team building	dependability
availability	video analysis
photographer	promoter
managing athletes	logistics/planning
objective perspective	transport
technical research and development	3M NCCP certification
making time for self, family, friends	creating a positive environment
communication: athletes, parents, staff, agents, sponsors, officials, board, volunteers, national and provincial sport federations, coaching associations, multisport organizations, coaches, facilities, media, other countries, medical, sport science	

It became clear that decisions were required in each of the responsibility areas that were identified, and that with decisions came fallout. As a group, we developed a set of general rules for dealing with fallout:

1. ensuring that each coach has a personal support network
2. anticipating and planning for "what if's"
3. making value/principle based decisions (not emotional)
4. implementing a communication plan
5. being in "Ready Position" as a coach; in other words, always being prepared

Lunch was devoted to more informal networking. In some groups, discussion continued of the issues raised in the morning session. In others, new issues were raised, or personal situations

were discussed. It was clear that Cyndie's vision of a personal support network for each coach was coming to fruition.

Rather than follow a traditional schedule that would have meant working all day and leaving the evening open for personal or social time, the schedule was adapted to leave the afternoon open for the coaches to take advantage of the on-site spa. One of the key responsibilities of any national team coach is the responsibility to care for oneself. If a national team coach is not healthy or does not have a positive sense of well being, it is unlikely that she will function at optimal efficiency. As organizers, we wanted to ensure that this was modelled at some point during the weekend. There are many ways we could have done this, but we chose a spa experience. Thus, following lunch, everyone visited the hotel spa. For many coaches, this was a first-ever experience. Spa treatments selected included massage, facial, pedicure, manicure, reflexology, body polish, and guided meditation. Each participant then shared her experience — some were very positive, others less so, but generally, fun was had by all. One participant suggested that we should always remember to “pay ourselves first”. In other words, we should ensure that we take care of ourselves, as this will likely ensure that we are better able to take care of others.

During dinner, it was clear once again that people were becoming more comfortable with one another. Many stories were told and in-depth discussions on almost all aspects of coaching were held. The social events, including all meal times, were a very important, albeit informal, educational opportunity. Most importantly, there was much laughing and frivolity — what better way to establish a network?

Following dinner, we had the final session of the day, a session we entitled “Having It All”. In our preliminary discussions and information-gathering process, it had become clear that coaches wanted to address the balancing act that is involved with national team coaching. They wanted to know, as an example, how to balance the demands of a personal life, family, significant other with the demands of their sport and athletes. The discussion was wide and varied, with all participants sharing some aspects of their lives. There was recognition that children create an obstacle, which, given the current model of coaching, made being a national team coach for a reasonable length of time extremely challenging. However, despite these challenges, the group found some potential solutions. Essentially, the following points summarize the discussion in this session:

1. It is important to have a strong support system. From a coaching perspective, this means surrounding yourself with good people. From a personal perspective, it means having the support at home, including emotional and financial support.
2. It is important for coaches at the national team level to have a personal definition of balance and strive to attain that level.
3. It is important for coaches at this level to set priorities.
4. We all should be part of a culture or paradigm shift that takes a team approach to coaching a national team, which means sharing responsibility among a coaching staff. We should model this approach early in the athlete development model.
5. We should work smarter, not harder. We should find what works for each of us individually (that is, find our “right way”).
6. We should ensure that we are giving athletes a positive image of coaching so that the next generation of potential coaches see coaching as a viable career opportunity.

Sunday

For many, Sunday began with either an early morning yoga session or a run. The final session was on contract negotiations, and after listening to the discussion, it was clear that we have a long way to go to reach parity and personal satisfaction.

National team coaching was seen as being devalued and unappealing to potential national team coaches. Coaches are unsalaried in many instances, do not have access to benefits packages, and are not professionally evaluated. It was clear that all of the coaches at the retreat must

become “political animals” around the issue of contract negotiations. Too many were devaluing themselves, and everyone else in the coaching profession, without recognizing the damage being done.

Few strategies were provided at the end of this session; instead, we all had an increased sense of self-awareness, the importance of the support network we had established, and a better understanding of the job that lay ahead. It became apparent that contract negotiation is an area in which coaches in general require professional development work. There is also a role to be played in the gathering and sharing of accurate statistics of salary, benefits, and contract information to ensure that coaches are negotiating from a position of knowledge as opposed to ignorance. Some discussions also occurred around the difference between being an employee versus being on contract. It was obvious that this topic should be on the agenda of future retreats and an expert guest speaker is likely in order.

We finished the retreat with a debriefing session that captured the contents of this article. We left on a very positive note, richer for the experience and each with a stronger support network. The camaraderie that was established demonstrated first hand that the participants had accomplished the goal of getting to know one another. The various levels of discussion held throughout the weekend highlighted the learning that had occurred. The stage has been set for each participant to have a strong personal support network composed of individuals who know what it takes to operate at the national team coach level. Whether the participants take advantage of that network remains to be seen in the future. The CAC, and in particular, the Women in Coaching program, should be congratulated on their foresight in having this event.

The vision for the future is to have the women’s national team coach retreat continue on an annual basis. Former national team coaches will continue to be asked to be facilitators in order that they can pass on some of the wealth of experience they have gained. Plans have begun for the second retreat and all women national team coaches should watch for information on this opportunity in the near future.

DRU MARSHALL

Dru Marshall has a doctoral degree in exercise physiology and is the assistant dean, undergraduate program, in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta. Until recently, she was the head coach of the national women's field hockey team. She is one of three field hockey coaches to have achieved 3M NCCP Level 5 certification and has won numerous coaching awards. Dru is the author of many publications and technical reports and has conducted research on a wide range of topics, including eating disorders in high performance athletes, coaching women athletes, and athlete selection.

The Journal Feature Book Review

Black Tights: Women, Sport and Sexuality

Laura Robinson
HarperCollins Publishers
Toronto, 2002

Reviewed by Susan Antoft

The world of sports may not be safe for girls like my 12-year-old daughters, according to Laura Robinson in her book, “Black Tights: Women, Sport and Sexuality”. Present and future dangers and injustices they may face are too numerous.

They could become sexual targets of male coaches. They may develop eating disorders to conform to official and unofficial rules about being thin. They would have no choice but to comply with male-dominated Control Committee rules such as the revealing bathing suits that are compulsory at beach volleyball competitions. They will receive minimal media coverage of their competitions, and when coverage occurs, the accompanying images may centre on their breasts and crotches. They may face discrimination should they come out as lesbian. When it comes to money, they may receive lower training allowances and attract fewer sponsorship opportunities and so may need to bare their bodies to cover the costs of competition. They will most likely watch public funding go towards facilities that disproportionately benefit boys and men.

None of these dangers and injustices is new — they have been studied and reported on since my first Olympic competition in 1976, and likely even before that. Where is the news that progress has been made in the intervening 26 years? Where are the practical recommendations to start changing things around?

These dangers and injustices originate from gender discrimination and exploitation of individuals who don't have a strong voice; they don't stem from women's sexuality. So why does Robinson repeatedly refer to the sexual body and sexuality? "Much of what we do in our 'other lives' is directed profoundly by our sexuality." If her assertions were true, women would not be accepted anywhere as students, professionals, teachers, legislators, and business leaders. 'Strong' and 'smart' are characteristics of those who can influence change; 'sexy' is the fastest ticket to dismissal.

My recommendation to the reader is to wait for the book that provides the roadmap for claiming the sporting space that celebrates women and girls in sport. Wait to read about the best practices on what individuals and organizations are doing to ensure that women are welcomed, encouraged, and recognized in sports venues. Wait for the successful strategies that positively influence sport editors to portray women as athletes and with the prominence their accomplishments deserve. Wait for the practical advice that you, the mother of daughters, or one of the thousands of sport "old girls", can use to be effective advocates and contributors to the decision-making processes that will make the world of sport safe for girls and women. The material and the writers are out there; it's a matter of someone smart and strong providing the leadership.

Susan Antoft was a member of the 1976 and 1980 Canadian Olympic rowing teams. She won bronze and silver medals at the 1977 and 1978 World Rowing Championships. She was one of the first Canadian women athletes to wear black tights. By profession, Susan is a computer scientist and mathematician. In addition to the joys and challenges of being a mother to two almost-teenagers, she is working on a MBA in corporate finance. skantoft@sympatico.ca