

## The New National Coaching Certification Program And Its Implications For Women Coaches



Mariann Domonkos

The National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) is in the midst of transition to a competency-based system that will include a broadening of its structure and the targeting of programs to specific groups of coaches. Of significance is the identification of community coaches as a target group. This will expand the reach of national sport federation coaching programs beyond what they had been able to achieve under the previous structure. The "new" NCCP will feature an outcomes-based curriculum and updated learning methodologies that will emphasize what coaches can "do" with the knowledge they acquire and will include more emphasis on coach assessment.

In this issue of the [Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching](#), Professor Guylaine Demers, a valued member of the Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET) Development Team, provides a comprehensive description of the new program along with a thorough analysis of the current environment in which women coaches work in Canada. She explains the implications of the changes, evaluates potential advantages and disadvantages to women coaches, and analyzes the potential impacts. She urges women coaches to meet the challenges posed by the "new" NCCP by taking a leadership role during the critical transition period.

This article is essential reading for all women coaches who are committed to enhancing their coaching competencies. - Sheila Robertson

## JULY 2003 FEATURE

### The New National Coaching Certification Program and Its Implications for Women Coaches

by Guylaine Demers

You may have heard about the changes in coach training in Canada. A fair amount of information is circulating about the new National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP), which is moving toward competency-based training. To help you gain a clearer understanding of the implications of this new approach, I start off with a fairly detailed explanation of the new NCCP. I then review some of the problems facing women coaches. I conclude with an analysis of the implications of the new NCCP for women coaches and present some ideas on how to exert a positive influence on the forthcoming changes.

#### The New NCCP in a Nutshell

The NCCP's new training approach is called Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET). It emphasizes development of the "ability to do" instead of knowledge transfer. The main goal is to make coaches better prepared to use the knowledge conveyed to them in solving specific problems in their own context. To achieve this goal, an effort is made to create learning situations that give coaches an opportunity to apply or enhance their competencies such as problem-solving, critical thinking, value appreciation, leadership, and interaction.

#### Why a new program?

In 1995 and 1996, an in-depth survey was conducted to evaluate the impact of NCCP. Comments from a broad cross-section of coaches, course conductors, national and provincial sport federations, and government agencies were factored into the evaluation. The survey provided confirmation that NCCP is a credible program that stands on solid foundations and makes an effective contribution to coach training and development. At the same time, recommendations were made to improve the program. For example, there should be more emphasis on the practical aspects of training, there should be customized training activities geared more effectively to specific types of coaches at the various levels in the sport system, and the structure should be more flexible to respond to the specific context of each sport. The importance of making a clearer distinction between training and certification was also highlighted.

In May 1997, on the strength of over 25 years' experience in coach training and certification and the conclusions of the evaluation, the NCCP partners - provincial and territorial governments, national sport federations (NSFs), Sport Canada, and the Coaching Association of Canada -unanimously decided to make a number of changes to the program. The main goal of the changes is to serve coaches' needs more effectively by giving them access to a broader range of programs and ensuring that those programs better reflect the particular situations and challenges faced in different sports contexts and environments. Appendix 1 is a summary table showing the major differences between the existing NCCP and the new NCCP/CBET model.

## New NCCP structure

There are many different reasons why people get involved in sports, and their needs are largely determined by those reasons. As a result, the sports experience evolves in a specific context.

To ensure that all types of coaches in the Canadian sport system are considered, a new program structure was approved by the NCCP partners. The structure is based on streams and contexts instead of levels (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - The new NCCP structure



## Streams

### Community Sport

Generally speaking, coaches operating at the **community** level share the following characteristics:

- They help to foster a love of sport in a climate of fun and safe conditions.
- Most of them work with young children (10 and under), often in team sports.
- They encourage participation, whatever the skill level.
- They work in recreational sport or at a low competitive level.
- They do not lend much importance to results in competition; instead, they focus on ensuring that young athletes derive enjoyment from sport.
- They can teach basic sport techniques.

An example of a coach in a community context is the parent who decides to coach a soccer team for eight weeks during the summer because his or her child is playing. This type of coach is not necessarily planning to coach on a continuing basis, year after year.

## Competition

Generally speaking, coaches involved in **competition** share the following characteristics:

- They operate in an environment where the athletes are trying to perform well in competition.
- They provide athletes with support for technical, tactical, physical, and mental preparation.
- They provide athletes with support in training and in competition.
- They try to enhance athletes' competitive abilities.
- They try to develop the athlete over the medium or long term.
- They use sport as a means of developing the whole person.
- They use sport as a means of teaching values.
- They help athletes develop their potential to the full.
- They create conditions in which sport is a positive experience serving to enhance the athlete's self-esteem.

There are three possible contexts: introduction to competition (regional), athletes in development (provincial and national), and high performance athletes (national and international).

The Competition stream is the closest to the current NCCP model.

Example: I am a girls' basketball coach in a high school, I want my team to reach the regional finals, and I would eventually like to coach higher-level athletes, such as the provincial team.

## Instruction

Generally speaking, coaches involved in **instruction** share the following characteristics:

- Their main responsibility is to teach techniques for a specific sport.
- They work with participants with varying skill levels.
- They work primarily in a non-competitive context.

There are three possible contexts for coaches involved in instruction, and each one reflects the performance level of the athletes with whom the coach is working - beginner, intermediate, or advanced.

Golf instructors are a good example: Participants take lessons mainly to improve their technical skills.

### Linkages between streams

These three streams and their corresponding types of coaches are not reflected in the hierarchical structure of today's model, under which coaches have to "pass" Level 1 before moving up to Level 2 and so on. The streams are not linked in this way. What coaches need is training required in light of the characteristics of the stream at hand. For example, a coach should not have to go through the Community Sport stream before taking Instruction-stream-centred training. In short, one stream is not a prerequisite for another stream; it is an independent whole, the main goal of which is to meet the needs of participants in that stream.

### Key Concepts of the Transition to CBET

- Training and certification of coaches are two separate concepts, and they are now recognized as such by the Canadian coach training system. They reflect the specific needs of the sport and the participants or athletes concerned, as determined by the characteristics of each training context.
- Training is the process by which coaches are prepared to (1) meet the needs of the participants or athletes with whom they are working and (2) meet current certification requirements.
- Coach training must be practical and centred on observable, measurable, anticipated outcomes. It must enable coaches to acquire or upgrade the knowledge, attitudes, and skills relevant to their context.
- To be certified, coaches must demonstrate the "abilities to do" considered essential in the context concerned.
- To be certified, coaches must be evaluated.

Competency-Based Education and Training
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• System reflecting the various types of coaches</li><li>• Coach training focused on improving "ability to do"</li><li>• Training focused more on practice</li><li>• Training ≠ Certification</li><li>• Evaluation required for certification</li></ul>

## Will the New Program Benefit Women Coaches or Will It Cause More Problems?

### A review of the situation of women coaches in Canada

Since it was launched in September 2000, the [Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching](#) has disseminated a considerable amount of information on the situation facing women coaches in Canada. The information has been gleaned from research, books, documents of various kinds, and women coaches' descriptions of their personal experiences. A brief review of all issues of the [Journal](#) gives an idea of the situation of women coaches in Canada:

- There are 400,000 coaches in the Canadian sport system. Within that number are three times as many men coaches as women.
- The number of women playing sports is on the rise. Indeed, 47 per cent of the members of national teams are now women. However, only 11 per cent of the coaches at the national level are women.
- Factors limiting the number of women coaches include male control of sports, a lack of role models for girls and women, the success of informal male networks, lack of time for women because of family responsibilities, stereotypes and preconceived ideas about women as coaches, employers' reluctance to risk hiring women coaches, and a lack of careful career planning by women coaches.
- Factors helping to increase the number of women coaches include women's skills and abilities, encouragement by family and friends, interest in coaching as a career, earlier positive experiences, personality, and a variety of situational and demographic factors such as being single and not having children.
- The main reasons why women give up coaching are burnout, lack of financial incentive, lack of experience, family conflicts, discrimination, the old boys' network, and expectations of success.
- The competence of women coaches is often challenged. Latent discrimination persists even today: In too many cases, women coaches are assessed against subjective criteria.
- Information from sport federations does not reach all women coaches. Some men coaches are apparently given preferential treatment in terms of access to information.
- Women coaches in Canada work with male sports training and management models.

Given the situation described above, what can we expect from the new NCCP? Will the program remove some of the barriers faced by women coaches, or will it cause even more problems?

## First major implication of the new NCCP: Training ≠ Certification

One of the fundamental changes reflected in the new NCCP is the distinction between training and certification. Coaches attending a clinic will not be automatically certified at the end of the process. They will be entered in the CAC database as trained but as yet uncertified coaches. To be certified, coaches will have to do, or show that they are able to do, a number of things (anticipated outcomes) deemed relevant to their context. They have to be evaluated against each anticipated outcome relevant to their context to earn certification. For example, a coach in the "Introduction to Competition" context will have to show that she can plan a safe, enjoyable coaching session enabling athletes to learn. The training-certification distinction is the starting point for my analysis of the potential advantages and disadvantages of the new NCCP for Canadian women coaches.

## Advantages of Certification Evaluation

### No more "paper coach"

In the world of sport coaching, the terms "experience" and "expertise" are often used interchangeably. In fact, there is a considerable difference between them, because experience does not guarantee expertise. I am not an expert because I have been coaching for 10 years; that just means that I am experienced. My expertise is based on a set of competencies that I can demonstrate in a given context. Henceforth, certification evaluations should help to make a clear differentiation between the two concepts. Coaches who earn certification under the new program will have had to prove, through a formal evaluation process, that they have mastered a number of "abilities to do." As a result, sport administrators will no longer be able to turn down the application of a woman coach by claiming that she is certified on paper only and has no experience, because certification will be proof of a specific level of expertise. Similarly, men "paper coaches", who have experience but not necessarily expertise, will be filtered out by this process. In my view, this is a step forward for women coaches who claim to be victims of discrimination because of their lack of expertise.

### Evaluation based on objective criteria

The fact that evaluation criteria will be made public is a very positive aspect of the new certification evaluation process. All coaches in the system will be informed of the criteria to be applied in evaluations and of the evaluation process itself. There will be no surprises and definitely no subjective criteria that might have been concocted by just one person.

### Evaluation recognizing individual differences

The new NCCP encourages administrators to take individual differences into account and put them to good use instead of seeking uniformity. The goal is not to train and certify coaches who do everything the same way; the goal is to train and certify coaches who have developed their critical faculties and who will make the right decisions for their athletes in their particular context. This aspect is very important for women coaches because we are doing our job in an androcentric world where the male sports model predominates.

## Certification recognizing the values of sport coaching

In the July 2001 issue of the *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching*, Rose Mercier asked two questions:

- Why do we continue to perpetuate the thinking and behaviours that say emotion and intense feeling are to be avoided in the coaching process and confine ourselves to the tangible quantitative measures and scientific research?
- Why do we continue to hire coaches on the sole basis of technical expertise, while almost universally ignoring the importance of effective interpersonal skills?

The new NCCP program provides some solutions to these problems by integrating values with training and certification. To be certified in any context, coaches must show that they coach ethically and convey NCCP values. Technical competence will no longer be enough. A certified coach will have shown that he or she can coach to a specific standard.

## Advantages of Competency-Based Training

### Training to develop women coaches' feeling of competence



Mariann Domonkos

Under the new NCCP program, learning experiences will factor in the characteristics of each coaching context and thus prepare coaches to meet standards specific to their context. Learning activities will be more relevant and more meaningful for all coaches. In my opinion, the new learning experiences should help to develop women coaches' feeling of competence, since they can continually refer to their own situation and what they know of their own context. Since the feeling of competence is one of the factors contributing to women's involvement as coaches, the new type of training may well have a positive impact in this respect.

### Training recognizing the importance of community sport

In Canada, a great number of women coaches work in the Community Sport stream. The training provided under the old NCCP program was not relevant to that stream. The new approach reflects the importance of the Community Sport stream, and specific training is provided for it. The change is indicative of the importance the Canadian sport system places on community sport and enhances the social recognition of women coaches working in it.



## Potential Disadvantages

I am drawing attention to potential problems solely for the purpose of alerting women coaches to the forthcoming changes. As the NCCP begins a major shift toward a competency-based model, we have a golden opportunity to become involved and to ensure that a number of the problems are overcome or avoided. I am in favour of a proactive approach - not a passive one where women coaches react to changes after the fact. So, as you read about the potential problems below, ask yourself this question: "What can I do as a coach to overcome these problems?"

## Validation of evaluation tools

My first concern is with the tools that will be developed for certification evaluation. The members of the committee developing those tools for the NCCP have only just started their work. Some tools have begun to take shape for the "Introduction to Competition" context, but they have yet to be validated. They will eventually be tested in pilot learning experiences and then by the sports themselves. It will be essential for women coaches to be active at that stage to ensure that the validation process involves women as well as men coaches. This will enable us to prevent the establishment of an evaluation structure that tends to reflect the male coaching model.

## Recruitment of men and women evaluators

Women coaches must be proactive and express an interest in being trained and accredited as evaluators. Because evaluation will have significant repercussions on coaches, it is essential for us to be represented to ensure that evaluations are fair to both men and women. The evaluator position is a powerful one, so we will have to keep a close watch on our respective NSFs to ensure that the coaches accredited as evaluators form not a clique, but a group representing all stakeholders, men and women alike, in each sport.

## Opportunities for coaching at higher levels

I stated earlier that certification evaluation is a plus for women coaches. There is a potential downside, however. To be certified, a woman coach must show that she has mastered a number of "abilities to do". This is predicated on the notion that she has already had the opportunity to develop those skills through coaching. One of the potential barriers to the certification of women coaches at the higher levels could be the difficulty they face in finding a coaching position that gives them an opportunity to develop competencies and prepare to meet evaluation requirements. This barrier is particularly germane in today's context, where women coaches in Canada enjoy limited access to high-level positions, as the percentage of women national team coaches illustrates. We must therefore be ready to expose any practice that is a barrier to certification and is likely to perpetuate the under-representation of women coaches at the higher levels.

## Let's Be Leaders during the Transition Phase

The changes currently taking place within the NCCP provide a wonderful opportunity to place more women in leadership roles, whether as trainers, evaluators, or mentors. For that to happen, however, we have to understand the context wherein

this transition is occurring. There are key issues to be addressed if we want women in Canadian sport to play a front-line role in that transition, but there are also strategies that could be used to promote the presence of women in the new NCCP structure.

### Why are women not being recruited for leadership roles?



Mariann Domonkos

Over the past 20 years, we have seen a major increase in the number of women and girls in sport. Ironically, during this period, the number of women fulfilling leadership roles as coaches or sports administrators has decreased dramatically (Kane 2001). This indicates the extent to which the world of sport is still very much androcentric (Werthner and Mercier 2001). One possible explanation is the difference between what women actually experience in sports and the way that that experience is perceived by male athletic directors. According to the latter, the small number of women in leadership roles is due to four factors: lack of qualified female coaches, failure of women to apply for coaching or administrative positions, lack of qualified female administrative staff, and time constraints because of women's family obligations. In fact, the study by Hasbrook and colleagues (1990) showed that female coaches were more qualified than their male counterparts in terms of professional training, professional experience and coaching experience with female teams. Those results clearly show that the perceptions of male sport administrators are wrong, and that what is keeping women from leadership positions is not their lack of competence. The employment decline has more to do with institutional factors than individual factors.

### How are women to be recruited for the transition and influence change?

Male sport administrators tend not to recruit women for leadership roles because they think they are not interested, do not have the time, or do not possess the requisite competence. Therefore, it is up to you to take action, and here are some strategies you can try:

**First strategy: Be informed.** The first step to being a part of this change is to get the required information from your sport federation and CAC. If you are familiar with your sport federation's approach, you will be in a better position to make a contribution. Get information on the development of the CBET process, identify the people involved, ask whether any women coaches are participating, and get to know the next steps. Contact the people involved in the transition to get a clear understanding of events and how you can contribute.

**Second strategy: Use the old boys' network** to let people know that you want to be a part of the transition and that, if jobs are available, you want to apply. Research shows that male administrators make many more hirings through their unofficial network than through formal channels (posting of jobs and interviews). Speak to the key players in your sport federation, making it clear that you want to be a part of the transition.

**Third strategy: Be prepared.** Learning experiences will soon be offered in the various provinces for learning facilitators of both genders. Tell your sport federation that you are interested in receiving this training. Later on, training will be provided for evaluators as well. If you are already in the system, getting this information will be easy. Again, the best way to stay informed is to stay involved.

**Fourth strategy: Recruit other women.** If you know other women coaches who have the potential to get involved in the transition, bring them onto your bandwagon. When you get information, share it with women coaches you know. We cannot underestimate the power of a network - our male counterparts have known that for a long, long time. Through networks, we can ensure that women coaches have a voice.

## Conclusion

I am enthusiastic about the coming change. I truly believe that the new NCCP will benefit all coaches, especially women coaches. We should not underestimate the significance of coaching experience to the advancement of women in sport leadership roles. Your commitment as a coach is the most common predictor for becoming a sport leader (Fitzgerald and colleagues 1994), for example as a sport coordinator or as the technical director of a sport federation. You have a lot of impact, and the transition is a golden opportunity to add to that impact.

However, the new certification does not do away with all discrimination issues. As Werthner and Mercier (2001) said, "Recognize that there will always be athletes and colleagues who question your expertise, which means you must always be prepared to act in your defence, without being aggressive." We must remain vigilant to ensure that existing inequities are not perpetuated in the new system.

Mary Jo Kane (2001), director of the University of Minnesota's Tucker Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sport, offers an inspiring message: "The history of women's sport involvement has been a history of overcoming challenges. There was a time when our popular images of sport leaders were exclusively male. But in the wake of Title IX, and the recent accomplishments of sportswomen at all levels of competition, some of those images now include Mia Hamm, Cynthia Cooper, Jackie Joyner-Kersey, and Pat Summitt. As we begin the 21st century, women will continue to face and defeat the next round of challenges. This is because women have always made significant contributions as warriors and leaders. Their contributions in sport have been, and will continue to be, no exception."

Special thanks to Alain Marion for his thoughtful comments on the first part of the text on the new NCCP.

## References

Fitzgerald, M.P., Sagaria, M.A., and Nelson, B. 1994. Career patterns of athletic directors: Challenging the conventional wisdom. *Journal of Sport Management* 8: 14-26.

Hasbrook, C.A., Hart, B.A., Mathes, S.A., and True, S. 1990. Sex bias and the validity of believed differences between male and female interscholastic athletic coaches. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 63(3): 259-67.

Kane, M.J. 2001. Leadership, sport and gender. In *Women on Power: Leadership Redefined*. Edited by Freeman, S.J.M., Bourque, S.C., and Shelton, C.M. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 114-146.

Werthner, P., and Mercier, R. 2001. *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching* 1(5).

Werthner, P., and Mercier, R. 2001. *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching* 1(6).

### Appendix 1: Comparison between Current NCCP and NCCP/CBET Model

Current NCCP	NCCP/CBET model
Identical structure for all sports	Structure adapted to each sport, based on a thorough systemic analysis (Participant Development Model)
Training and certification organized by level	Training and certification organized by type of coach
Only way to learn more is to move up to "higher level"	Coaches can become better at what they do in their own context through adapted ongoing development opportunities or access to training available to coaches from other contexts
Training and certification primarily based on what program designers believe coaches should know	Education and training based on "ability to do", consistent with job-task analyses of the most important coaching functions and tasks performed in the sport and context concerned Education and training based on anticipated outcomes that are adapted to the sport and the type of coach
All coaches are exposed to the same content, regardless of its usefulness	Content is presented if it is useful to the coaching context and if it supports achievement of the outcomes
Education = Certification	Education = Process to prepare a coach to meet the certification requirements established for his or her sport or context

	Certification = Demonstrated "ability to do" as determined through evaluation
Values and ethics are dealt with as general concepts	Values and ethics are an integral part of coach education and certification, through the application of an ethical decision-making framework
Concepts are dealt with in isolation from each other, and coaches are expected to integrate them	Through the use of a problem-based approach, coaches are trained on how to integrate many concepts to produce a coaching response adapted to the situation
Content focuses on the "what"	Content is a blend of "what", "for whom", "how to", and "when"
Limited recognition of previously acquired abilities, experience, and education; course attendance mandatory for all except in rare instances	Coaches who have the knowledge and skills through experience or prior education can go straight to the evaluation stage
No real fit for community coaches; entry point too demanding in course hours (training at Level 1 requires 24 hours of course attendance) and depth of content	Community coaches identified as a key type of coach for some sports; training tailored to their needs through a 10-hour learning experience featuring two practical sessions

### About the Author



Guylaine Demers

Guylaine Demers, PhD, has been a professor at the Department of Physical Education of Laval University since September 2001. She takes particular interest in issues of women in sport, sports education, and the planning of sports training. She takes an active part in NCCP as a Course Conductor and a Master Course Conductor for Levels 1, 2, and 3 and in the development and implementation of the new competency-based NCCP. She sits on the National Coaching Certification Council competency committee. Guylaine was a coach for nearly 15 years and was also a technical director of the Quebec Basketball Federation. She wore Laval's red and gold in basketball from 1983 to 1988.