

## Online

### **Some Good News: Women Coaches as Coach Developers in the NCCP**

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“Since 1974, more than two million coaches and coach developers (CDs) have been trained through the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) to develop their coaching skills and improve the performance of their athletes and participants at all levels of sport.” Most Canadians are familiar with the role of the coach; few are aware of the CD role and its potential to contribute to a robust sport system. The authors build a compelling case for women (and others) to consider CD training as a viable option to rewarding and meaningful involvement through the NCCP. – Sheila Robertson, Journal Editor.

*The views expressed in the articles of the Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching are those of the authors and do not reflect the policies of the Coaching Association of Canada.*

### **Introduction**

Coaches play a vital role in the quality of the sport experience for participants. It is therefore important that they are well trained and supported through quality professional development initiatives led by knowledgeable and skilled professionals. A significant leadership role in Canada’s sport system is that of the coach developer (CD), referred to in the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) by three different names, according to role: Coach Evaluators (CEs) evaluate coaches for qualification or certification purposes, Learning Facilitators (LFs) help coaches to improve their coaching in different types of learning activities such as delivering NCCP modules, and Master Coach Developers (MCDs) train, mentor, and evaluate both LFs and CEs.

The influence of people fulfilling one or more of these roles is both immeasurable and exponential: an effective CD can positively impact the lives and work of many coaches, who in turn do the same for their athletes. Given the importance of these roles, the

representation and experiences of women in coach development are among the legitimate concerns of a sport system aiming for quality and equity in its workforce.

In recognition of the importance of CDs, increasing attention is being paid to their work, both internationally and within Canada. This can be seen in the exponential rise in recent years in publications about the work of the CD. In a recent review of research on CDs, 53 studies were identified since 2012. In 2019, a special issue was devoted to global perspectives in coach education for the CD in the *International Sport Coaching Journal*. Several recent books have been directed toward coach and CD education and development. Research relevant to the CD explores such themes as the various roles and responsibilities of CDs, the development of curriculum for CDs, delivery and instructional approaches, content expertise, and the evaluation of coach education. It has been noted that coach education is turning to high impact and deep learning initiatives that are learner-centred and flexible.

Most CDs have experiences as athletes and coaches or in higher education, but there is little understanding of their learning pathways. Women CDs appear to be underrepresented in the research, with a lack of training and lack of options for coach accreditation cited as possible reasons. Another reason may be the pathway from coach to CD. When women are underrepresented in coaching roles, there is a risk that they will also be underrepresented as CDs.

The Coaching Association of Canada (CAC), together with partner organisations, has led the development of the pathway to becoming a CD in the NCCP. This training includes completing an online evaluation of Make Ethical Decisions and demonstrating competency through a four-step pathway: core training, content-specific training, co-delivery, and evaluation. The CAC has also developed a CD policy document and standards. In Quebec, an initiative is underway to train and employ professional CDs to be social learning leaders with coaches in their communities. This complement to the NCCP offers customised support that is geared toward the problems of practice of active coaches in the field.

Indeed, there is evidence that interest in the role and the work of CDs is on the rise, a testament of sorts to an increasing awareness of the importance of this work. Canadian Women and Sport has noted the presence of women in leadership roles in sport creates pathways that expand equitable sporting opportunities for girls and women. The involvement of women in the three leadership roles of CD can be considered a significant marker of equity in the Canadian sport system. However, we know little about the presence of women in these roles, and even less about their experiences in these roles.

Our purpose is to provide a portrait of the involvement of women as CDs in coach education and development in the NCCP. We first present a snapshot of the presence of women in the CD roles from the limited data available. Secondly, based on interviews with three women who have been involved extensively as CDs in all three roles, we propose promising practices toward recruiting, supporting, and sustaining the involvement of women in these leadership capacities.

## **Moving the Needle: What the Data Show about Women CDs in the NCCP**

CDs in Canada are active within at least four types of organisations: In a sport-specific capacity with either or both their national and provincial/territorial sport organisations, in a multi-sport capacity with either their provincial or territorial NCCP representative organisation, in college or university coaching courses or programs, or in private businesses that work in coach education and development. A complete portrait of women involved as CDs in Canada would require knowing the number and nature of women involved in all these contexts of practice, and how both evolve over time. At present, two cautions are required regarding the data available to provide such information.

Firstly, to our knowledge, the only data currently available are those that can be extracted from The Locker, the NCCP database. Therefore, the conclusions drawn are limited to NCCP involvement and may exclude some women working as CDs in colleges and universities but who are not active CDs in the NCCP and women who are not currently active CDs within the NCCP but who may have been involved in the past. Nevertheless, what conclusions can be drawn with some confidence and what work is underway regarding the involvement of women CDs in the NCCP?

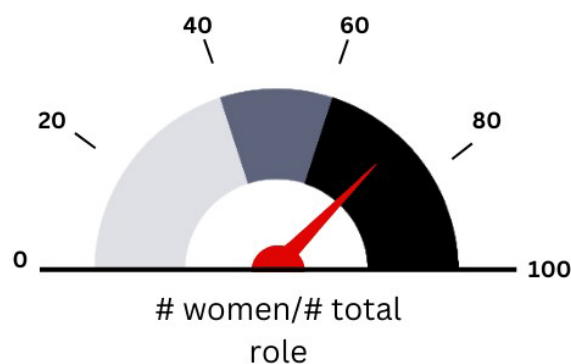
The CAC began a gap analysis process with national sport organisations (NSOs) in the fall of 2021 regarding each NSO's CD workforce capacity. Each NSO was provided with a snapshot of their CD workforce data from a five-year window between 2015 and 2020. This system-wide assessment inspired two sets of actions.

Firstly, NCCP partner organisations are paying particular attention to ensuring the accuracy of CD transcripts in The Locker; that is, the data entry process. Secondly, sport-specific initiatives by various NSOs are being implemented that aim at increasing the number of women involved as CDs. Both efforts will make important contributions to fostering the participation of women as CDs and tracking their involvement in these roles over time. What follows is a modest portrait that can be drawn with a measure of

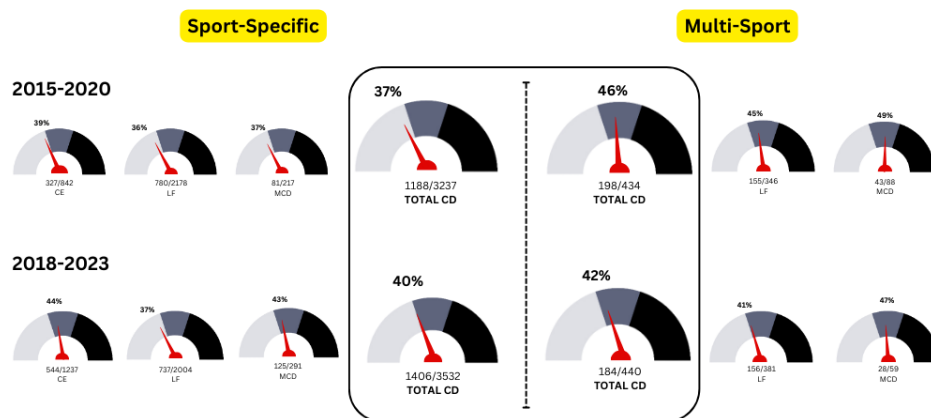
confidence, made possible by the initial work initiated by the CAC and a query of The Locker in the fall of 2023 to determine if any change has taken place in recent years.

Figure 1 shows the numbers and percentages of women who actively delivered or took part in CD training in any of the CD roles in either a sport-specific or multi-sport capacity in two windows of time: from 2015 to 2020 and from 2018 to 2023. The choice of 40 to 60% as the target range for representation of women as CDs is consistent with what others have advanced as reasonable targets for gender equity in leadership roles such as on corporate boards.

## Legend



Coach Evaluators	CE	0-39%	
Learning Facilitators	LF	40-60% (Target Zone)	
Master Coach Developers	MCD	61-100%	
Coach Developers	CD		



**Figure 1.**

*How are we doing? Barometers for the representation of women as sport-specific and multi-sport coach developers in the NCCP for two time periods*

Figure 1 shows two pieces of good news. Firstly, although there is still much room to improve, percentages are within target for multi-sport CDs and close for sport-specific CDs for both time periods. Secondly, initiatives by the NSOs to increase the number of women involved in the three CD roles appear to be working. When comparing the total number of women CDs between the two overlapping time periods, the number of women in these roles is trending upward, from 1386 to 1590. This trend appears to be due to an increase in sport-specific women CDs (1188 compared to 1406) over multi-sport (a slight drop from 198 to 184).

Some specific examples, and there are others, support this encouraging story. Alpine skiing, a sport that has historically struggled with respect to the involvement of women as CDs, has seen the number of women CEs double from 11 to 23. This positive trend is also true for athletics, with the number of women CEs rising from five to 19. Rugby has made a deliberate effort to recruit more women as CDs, resulting in an increase in women MCDs from one to three and their percentage of women LFs from 30 to 35%.

Moving forward, this positive trend can be further encouraged by NSOs sharing initiatives that show evidence of working. Also, in the next section are some concrete ideas that come from the experiences of three women who are extensively involved as CDs.

## A Passion for People and for Learning: Lessons from the Journeys of Three CDs

We recently interviewed three women who are extensively involved as CDs to understand how they became involved in this work, what has kept them involved, and what will keep them involved moving forward. Although each journey is unique, some common themes provide insight into how women might be recruited to the role of CD and what might ensure a quality experience, so they stay involved.

		
Beth Barz	Kathy Brook	Martine Pépin
Consultant, Coach+ Assistant coach, Men's Rugby, The Royal Military College of Canada	Educator, Executive Director, Racquetball Canada; Secondary school basketball coach	Teacher, Centre d'éducation des adultes; Secondary school badminton coach
<i>Current involvement in the NCCP:</i> Learning facilitator, Coach Evaluator, and Master Coach Developer, and NCCP curriculum development. Beth has been involved in the NCCP for 30 years, 16 of which as a CD.	<i>Current involvement in the NCCP:</i> Learning facilitator, Coach Evaluator, and Master Coach Developer, and in NCCP curriculum development. Kathy has been involved in the NCCP for 36 years, 30 of which as a CD.	<i>Current involvement in the NCCP:</i> Learning facilitator and Master Coach Developer, and in NCCP curriculum development. Martine has been involved in the NCCP for 27 years, 26 of which as a CD.
Sport that got Beth started in coaching: Rugby	Sport that got Kathy started in coaching: Basketball	Sport that got Martine started in coaching: Handball

## *Recruit Experienced Candidates to Become CDs.*

Sustained engagement in coaching at various levels is a big part of the journeys of all three. Each felt this experience was essential to her work as a CD for various reasons, including being able to “speak coach” thereby communicating in such a way that coaches can apply the content to their own practice, and ensuring that coaches trust them as a CD because they are or were coaches themselves. In other words, coaching experience makes a CD more credible. The answers to how much experience would be essential were not unanimous, although each felt that being able to understand first-hand what coaches may be going through would be the minimum.

## *Recruit Teachers.*

In addition to their coaching experience, all three have extensive, parallel teaching experience in various settings including high school, college, or university, and adult continuing education. All hold undergraduate teaching-related degrees, and all have progressed to higher education. Teaching and mentoring have been at the heart of their professional work, their coaching work, and their work as CDs. Although not the only relevant background, teaching shares many competencies with those of an effective CD. Finding coaches whose career pathway and educational histories demonstrate a passion for teaching and learning and who may already possess the relevant competencies required for success as a CD is a promising avenue for recruitment, regardless of gender. Given that women tend to be overrepresented in the teaching profession, this bodes well for recruiting more women as CDs from the pool of coaches who may also be professional teachers.

## *Personalise Recruitment.*

A personalised recruitment process appears to be a third promising practice. Each CD named a specific person who invited her to get involved, and all began in the role of LF, delivering NCCP modules. This personal invitation clearly stands out in each of their memories as being significant. Having someone suggest that you would be a great candidate can be a strong incentive for initial involvement and in transitioning to the role of MCD.

Beth’s invitation came from a Rugby Canada staff member for sport-specific delivery; in Martine’s case, the invitation came from a Sports Québec staff member for multi-sport delivery. Kathy spoke of a CAC staff member who promoted, encouraged, and supported her in this role. Given these experiences, perhaps more importance should be placed on using networks and local knowledge to identify those who are already making a difference in their coaching environments and reach out to them personally, providing an opportunity to give CD work a go, and supporting them in doing so. When looking for CDs, chances are better if seeking coaches who are already demonstrating their commitment to coaching, and even better if they are also involved in mentoring other

coaches. The lesson: fewer general calls for CDs and more targeted invitations and customized support. As Beth pointed out, active CDs could be invited to identify potential recruits and make the initial contact.

### ***Retain Excellent CDs.***

Beth, Kathy, and Martine have been committed CDs for many years. Their answers to two of the questions asked - *What has kept you involved thus far?* and *What would keep you involved moving forward?* - provided more promising practices, this time for keeping excellent CDs engaged.

Without hesitation, and the first aspect mentioned by all three in response to both questions was the same – the people and the relationships they developed with coaches and other CDs in their role as MCD. Although they didn't speak directly about this, there may be a clue in their stories for the design of future NCCP learning activities. Their answers suggest it would be wise to avoid cramming too much into one learning activity for the time available. More does not mean better. Allowing space to connect and build relationships is important not only to the coaches, but also to the enjoyment and the effectiveness of CDs.

*It is the people...I love the interactions I have with people. It's almost like my cup is getting filled and filled over several days.*  
(BB)

*I don't think I've ever taught a class or worked with a group of people and not walked away feeling empowered. I love interacting with the coaches or CDs in the room. Everyone in sport is passionate. They care about what they are doing, and they typically want to be better so that's a fun place to be.* (KB)

### ***CDs as Learners Themselves***

Also evident is that all three consider themselves as learners in their work with coaches, and as life-long learners in general. This model is being proposed for coaches within the NCCP and is likely a factor in why the work of the three is valued by coaches. For Beth, Kathy, and Martine, this also sustains them in their work, because learning is nourishing to them, both the coaches' learning and their own.

*I would say I am a much better CD than when I started. You know, the people who I interact with, it is so enriching, all the time...I have fun doing this.* (MP)



*I get to live out my values...lifelong learning, collaboration, challenge, and support. These things are the essence of coach development. (BB)*

*I constantly learn from others I'm working with. Sometimes as an MCD, I get to work with some of the best coaches in the country and get to learn from them and develop relationships with some pretty cool people. (KB)*

### ***Latitude in Delivery, Particularly for Expert CDs***

Given that all three are teachers by profession as well as expert CDs, it was unsurprising that a learner-centered approach was evident in their answers to these questions. All spoke of the importance of, while staying consistent with the intention and content, having the freedom to adapt what they are doing to the needs of the coaches they are working with.

*As long as I have a certain latitude in my teaching strategies, I will continue to love this work and have fun doing it. (MP)*

Each reported ways they enriched the modules while aiming to meet the needs of the coaches they work with. Two examples regarding the Teaching and Learning module: Beth invited the coaches to her practices with athletes to micro-coach together, and Martine, while beginning to deliver this module online during the Covid-19 pandemic, began incorporating micro-coaching moments into her delivery as well.

*I enrich it a lot. I will often start from the reality of the coach. 'What are you experiencing in your day-to-day? What is happening in your gym?' (MP)*

As CDs become experts in their role, not constraining the delivery approaches too rigidly appears to be an important part of keeping quality people involved. Though novice CDs are likely to appreciate more guidance and structure, experts are likely to respond better to a measure of flexibility so they can best align what they are doing with the needs of the learners and be creative in doing so. Doing both made the module better for the coaches, not worse.

## ***Feeling Valued by Sport Organisations***

Beth, Kathy, and Martine all expressed feeling valued and supported by the organisations for which they delivered the NCCP, albeit in different ways. Firstly, they feel valued because the organisation's staff explicitly tell them that they and their work are important.

*For me, it's about value. And I think a lot of people feel that way - you want to feel valued. (BB)*

Secondly, their needs are met such that they can include this work in their lives. For example, Beth spoke of her child being welcome and the sport organisation accommodating her scheduling needs; Kathy mentioned having sufficient time to prepare.

Thirdly, their expertise is utilised in designing and revising NCCP modules, and they are often asked for their advice in matters concerning NCCP programming.

*The organisations I work for have been great. They have always asked me for input, taken my feedback, and treated me well. I have had many opportunities through this work. (KB)*

Based on these experiences, concrete actions by sport organisations can play a big part in keeping CDs engaged long enough for them to develop their expertise and remain involved. These actions appear to consist of communicating explicitly to CDs that they and their work matter, accommodating their needs, soliciting their input and expertise in initiatives concerning NCCP development and delivery, and providing opportunities and enough freedom to learn and grow themselves.

## ***Advice for Women Who May Want to Get Involved as a CD***

Interestingly, all three CDs stated that they did not feel they had faced discrimination or barriers to their involvement as CDs. Beth explained that being a woman with extensive coaching experience may have been an advantage in her initial recruitment as a CD. They encouraged other women to get involved, saying that it is an excellent opportunity to express one's leadership and that the work is fulfilling. Kathy pointed out that the work can fit into a busy schedule and can co-exist well alongside family life and other responsibilities.

## *Advice for Decision Makers Regarding the Recruitment and Support of Women as CDs*

Though much of the advice had already been discussed at this point in the interview, several more gems emerged.

As Beth pointed out, getting more women into CD work is tied to getting more women involved in coaching. So, getting more women involved in coaching should be an organisational priority.

Martine spoke of the importance of proper integration of new CDs, suggesting a trial period consisting of observation to see what the work is like, followed by some co-delivery with experienced CDs, and then a gradual and supported shift to full independence when they feel ready. Too often, as she points out, due to a shortage of CDs, new CDs can be pushed into taking on too much, too soon. As Kathy echoed, this can lead to early drop out.

Finally, continue to compensate CDs fairly. This is professional work that is important to a healthy sport system and should be valued as such.

## **Conclusion**

CDs are in many ways the faces and hearts of the NCCP partnership with coaches. Given the importance of the work, it is imperative that women be well represented among them. There are grounds for cautious optimism when we consider the data presented herein. This article is also an encouragement to the NCCP partnership to continue its efforts toward improving the quality of data entry in The Locker. The better this database, the more accurate and nuanced will be our understanding of the evolution of the CD workforce, including the involvement of women.

There are additional grounds for optimism when we hear the stories of women CDs who are leaders in this work. We can learn much from their experiences and wisdom regarding recruiting and retaining more women as CDs. Though we initially were looking for ideas for recruiting and keeping women engaged as CDs, the stories of Beth, Kathy, and Martine show that carefully developed practices for the recruitment and retention of women as CDs are ultimately good for all.

## About the Authors

Andrea Woodburn is Associate Professor in the Département d'éducation physique at Université Laval in Quebec, Canada. Her research interests include coach learning and professional development and socio-economic barriers to inclusion in competitive sport. She has worked extensively as a CD in the NCCP.

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Chris Wellsman is a Coaching Consultant with the CAC. His work involves supporting the enhancement of NSOs and their coaching programs through collaborative partnership. His primary interest is growing sport in his community and across Canada by being involved in coaching and sharing education and resources with coaches and athletes whenever possible.

## References Available Upon Request