

# The National Coaching School for Women

## *A Little History and a Bright Future*

*by Jennifer Brenning and Kathy McDonald*

*En plus de tracer un bref historique de l'École nationale d'entraînement pour les femmes, cet article passe brièvement en revue les objectifs de l'école et donne un bref aperçu de ses projets pour le futur.*

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The first National Coaching School was held in 1987 at the University of Alberta. Betty Baxter was the driving visionary who recognized the need for women coaches to develop stronger technical expertise, better self-esteem and confidence, and more effective career strategies in order to coach at the National level.

In the first year of operating the "school" eight women coaches participated in what was then called "an enriching experience in coaching development" in the sports of volleyball and basketball. The following year saw a more formalized planning approach to the development of the school. The Canadian Interuniversity Athletic Union (CIAU) assumed the dual roles of administrator/coordinator. The "School" was then primarily targeted at university and college coaches. Those involved at the time determined that the school was to provide women with an opportunity to learn in an environment that values their experience and provides them with the confidence to increase their expertise.

In 1988 the objectives of the National Coaching School for Women (NCSW) were: to improve coaching at the University and College level; to provide a vehicle for women coaches to network; to expose women to a learning model that is in harmony with their own needs and experiences—a woman-centred approach; to increase the number of women certified at upper levels of NCCP (National Coaching Certification Programme), and to provide women with an opportunity to improve their leadership skills and build confidence. The 1988 School was held at Dalhousie University and successfully delivered NCCP technical certification to 25 women. In addition, enrichment theory specifically focusing on issues facing women in sport, was also offered.

In 1989, the NCSW Working Committee recognized a need for an expanded curriculum that specifically ad-

ressed women's concerns and issues related to coaching female athletes. This curriculum was elaborated based on evaluations and feedback from NCSW participants. It was also recognized that women must have greater access to full certification (theory and technical) in order to maintain and obtain coaching positions.

McMaster University hosted a very successful 1989 NCSW and for the first time modified the delivery model for the School by partnering with the organizers of the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations (OFSAA) Women Coaches Clinic. Twenty-six participants received volleyball and basketball instruction. It was in 1989 that planning began for the "pilot" participation of women's soccer in 1990.

In 1990, the CIAU, because of internal re-structuring requirements, temporarily withdrew their responsibility for the administration and coordination role of the School. The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport (CAAWS) hired an interim coordinator to organize and operate the school at the University of Victoria. Twenty-one coaches participated in the School.

In 1991, the CIAU again undertook the coordinating role and began developing a formal partnership as a key organizational component for the future development of the School. This partnership involved Sport Canada, Women's Program, the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC), participating NSO's, and the CCAA Canadian Colleges Athletic Association. The same year the NCSW Working Committee outlined a five year plan for the development and delivery of curriculum that specifically addresses the needs of women coaches. The 1991 School, hosted by the University of Manitoba, offered level two and three theory NCCP certification, and level two and three technical certification. Thirty-one coaches participated in basketball, volleyball, and soccer. The School was extensively evaluated and the result of the evaluation provided crucial data for ongoing curriculum development and delivery.

In 1992, the NCSW was hosted by the Truro Agricultural College, in Truro, Nova Scotia, with 46 coaches participating in the three sports. For the first time the School enjoyed promotional resources from the CAC and their various Provincial Coaching Coordinators in the Atlantic Region. This collaboration contributed greatly to the success of the School.

Even though 40 and 46 coaches participated in the 1993 and 1994 Schools respectively and, for the most part, the personal evaluations remained positive, there were several logistical problems in the operation of both these Schools that gave rise to concerns with regard to the effectiveness of the delivery model. These problems led to a high level of frustration and, at times, a defensive

communication climate. As well, in the 1994 School, there was a lack of promotion and a less than expected level of support from British Columbia provincial sport associations. In a sense, the review of these difficulties led to the determination that an opportunity audit for the delivery of the School was in order. A key delivery question needed to be answered. Is the School trying to deliver too much, in too short a time period? The School had become a seven day, 50 hour event, limited to only a few sports and, by extension, a restricted number of women coaches. Also, there was an increasing concern that the social process and climate of the NCSW, one that was supportive

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and conducive to learning, was being jeopardized.

The National Coaching School has certified approximately 300 women coaches in NCCP levels two, three and four over the past five years. As well, it has been extremely well received by the participants who have indicated repeatedly in their evaluations that the School has consistently met their needs for technical certification, as well as providing the information necessary to survive and thrive in the coaching environment, and for establishing support networks with other women in coaching. The objectives established in 1988 are as relevant now as they were then. But concerns have been expressed by NCSW partner organizations for the need to look at innovative ways to better deliver these objectives. This is especially critical given the rather desperate economic conditions, the need for the sport community to provide more and better leadership with less resources, and the requirement for more collaborative ways of providing sport development opportunities to participants.

The NCSW partnership is now investigating the development of a new model for the enhanced delivery of the technical and leadership curriculum. It is exploring opportunities and readiness for the design and effective delivery of a community based learning structure to women athletes, coaches, and administrators. Essentially, the School wants to find ways to determine a "fit" between leadership and competency needs through a learning model that encourages women to develop essential understandings, knowledge bases, and skills necessary to not only survive but possibly renew the sport culture.

Aware that resources at all levels of government for the support of women's access to and leadership development in sport is gradually being eroded, it was felt that a broader focus, a School for all women in a variety of leadership capacities, should be embraced. Seeking answers to the

following questions will give rise to strategies, tools, and models for delivery that will address the needs identified above and possibly ensure the creation of new and exciting opportunities for inclusive, continuous learning within the sport community.

Does the current structure of the School limit its ability to reach larger numbers of participants? What are the options for delivering the content to larger numbers of participants in a more cost-effective manner? Does the current delivery model of the School limit its capacity to develop learning communities? What can be done to build more community ownership for the School? Have the attempts to deliver a substantial amount of content in a short period of time, compromised continuous learning? How does the School sustain the value base and ensure that it continues to meet its objective through any restructuring of the delivery system?

The School's priority focus for coaching development must still be on technical certification. Care should be taken to protect the uniqueness of the way this technical component is delivered, that is, within an environment that supports and celebrates the leadership of women in sport. An experiential learning perspective which honours the experience of women and supports life-long learning for women must remain an essential building block for developing and delivering any and all curriculum.

Elements in an innovative delivery model for the NCSW would assist women coaches in the following ways: to provide orientation to what is required in theory certification and how to advance through the NCCP certification program; to develop an understanding, knowledge bases, and skills required to maintain and evolve in their positions; to build confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of being essential to the enterprise of sport; to provide an environment which will carry on meaningful conversation and dialogue, and to share experiences in supportive ways; to document their experiences in order to support attaining upper levels of coaching certification and experience.

The National Coaching School for Women has been a very successful and innovative example of how a "partnership" made up of key organizations can collectively create, develop, and deliver a program that meets the needs of women. Essential to any partnership model is the effective management of the social process as well as management of issues critical to the maintenance of the partnership. The success of the NCSW in these efforts over the past eight years has provided the NCSW partnership with the opportunity to see close up, and hear first hand, what women in the sport community need and require in order to play a central role the development and delivery of sport. The response to these observations, coupled with an appreciation of sport delivery improvement or enhancing initiatives that are or will be required in the future, underscores the drive to look at new, more effective approaches to learning.

The sport system is undergoing major changes in

response to the current economic environment. An unusual degree of mutual understanding, respect, diplomacy, generosity of spirit, and a partnered leadership is, and will continue to be, required. Efforts to build community can help ensure these requirements emerge as sport leaders, women and men, plan and build the future of sport.

These next few years will be crucial for the survival and revival of sport as a viable community. The abilities and capacities needed to lead and manage during this transitional period and, at the same time effectively manage the current financial crisis, will be varied and unique.

Unfortunately, sport leaders have been successful in creating barriers to community. Sport seems to encourage isolation rather than affiliation and unity, and to foster exclusivity rather than inclusivity, enclaves rather than community, and conflict rather than collaboration. Efforts to build community is a practical requirement for maintaining the health, vitality, and productivity of all members of the sport community. Essentially, it is engaging a large number of people to work together, to be enabled to respond to shifts in structure, expectations, and external demands, and move collectively toward a shared vision of a better future. Community development helps to break down the organizational barriers that slow down effective action and change.

Learning can only occur in a receptive environment. There must be a readiness to become a learning community, and to be successful in the challenge of continuous learning we must foster an environment that is conducive to learning. This kind of environment allows time for reflection and analysis, to think about strategic plans, dissect athlete needs, assess current work systems, and

invent new products. Learning communities are skilled at systematic problem solving, experimentation with new approaches, learning from their own experiences and the best practices of others, and transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the system. The NCSW want to investigate models of delivery that allow for the elaboration of systems and processes to support these activities and integrate them into the daily operations of sport. Sport, and the women leading sport, will then be able to manage its internal learning and become essential to the future of sport. The NCSW has a proven track record in creating a learning environment. It is now time to look at expanding this concept.

The Sport Canada Women's Program has to date provided financial support for the NCSW. Unfortunately, these funds have dried up. The NCSW partnership is now exploring other funding sources to carry out the necessary renewal research. Women will then be able to continue to be innovative in creating opportunities for learning and developing in sport.

*NOTE: As of August 1995, Sport Canada Funding for this program was pulled. CIAU has not included funding for the School in their budget.*

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