

Positive and Energizing: 2011 Coaching Association of Canada's Women in Coaching Workshop

By Sheila Robertson

Each year, the Coaching Association of Canada's (CAC) Women in Coaching (WiC) program holds a workshop for Canada's top female coaches. Initially aimed at female national team coaches, the workshop has evolved into an intensive, three-day professional development and leadership opportunity for female coaches from across the country whose work ranges from Canada Games athletes to Olympic medallists. Also open to participants in WiC's National Team Coaching Apprenticeship Program (<http://www.coach.ca/apprenticeship-program-s12526>), the 2011 workshop included a number of up-and-coming coaches coming off successful experiences at the recent Canada Winter Games in Halifax as participants in WiC's Canada Games Apprenticeship Program (<http://www.coach.ca/apprenticeship-program-s12526>).

"The workshop is a unique opportunity for some of Canada's most talented coaches to share experiences and expertise," says workshop organizer Sheilagh Croxon, a two-time Olympic coach and head coach of synchronized swimming at the Granite Club in Toronto. "Every workshop is unique, but this year it was particularly rewarding to welcome up-and-coming coaches in addition to some of Canada's most experienced and successful female coaches. This powerful combination will help to ensure a strong transfer of knowledge to the next generation, which is so vital to changing the numbers at the top of the profession."

The workshop was guided by top sport leaders, including Dr. Dru Marshall, Dr. Guylaine Demers, and Dr. Penny Werthner.

Special Speakers

The carefully crafted workshop agenda included discussion on strategies to increase the numbers of women in coaching and leadership, presentations by WiC partners – including Karin Lofstrom, executive director of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS), and Liz Hoffman, representing Coaches of Canada. There were also in-depth debriefing sessions with the Canada Games apprentices, facilitated by Demers, and the national team apprentices, led by Croxon and CAC coaching consultant Isabelle Cayer whose portfolio includes WiC.

The final session featured two of Canada's most esteemed coaches, Melody Davidson, and Manon Perron.

Davidson has recorded numerous victories in her years behind the bench. In 2008, she guided Canada to silver medals at the world championship, the 4 Nations Cup, and the under-18 world championship. Led by her, the national team won gold at the 2007 world championship and the 2006 Olympic Winter Games, and silver at the 2005 world championship. She was an assistant coach when the team won the gold medal at the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. Since 2006, she has been an assistant coach with the Junior A Calgary Canucks. From 2003 to 2006, she was the head coach of Cornell University's women's Division 1 team and, prior to that, led Connecticut College's women's team. She graduated from the University of Alberta in 1986 with a physical education degree in coaching and sport administration and from the National Coaching Institute-Calgary in 1995. She is a National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) Level 4 certified coach. Davidson won Petro-Canada Coaching Excellence Awards in 2005, 2006, and 2007, and the 2010 Jack Donohue Coach of the Year award. She is now the head scout of Hockey Canada's national women's hockey programs.

Perron coached figure skating for 30 years from her own school, the CPA St-Léonard. An NCCP Level 4 certified coach, she specialized in singles and pairs. Among her outstanding skaters were Joannie Rochette, the silver medallist at the 2009 world championships, and pair skaters Meagan Duhamel and Craig Buntin, national and world championships competitors. Perron has a stellar reputation for dedication and leadership and was a recipient of the 2007 Skate Canada Competitive Coach Excellence Award and, in 2007, 2008, and 2009, a GM Making Dreams Possible grant. She coached at two Olympic Winter Games and numerous world championships, Four Continents championships, and Grand Prix Competitions, and is an Expert Coach with the Quebec Section of Skate Canada.

Overcoming tragedy, Perron coached Rochette to the bronze medal at the 2010 Olympic Winter Games, following the tragic death of her mother, Thérèse Rochette, on the eve of competition. Davidson was head coach of the 2010 national women's hockey team, winners of Olympic gold for the second consecutive time. In moving, frank, and

compelling presentations, Perron and Davidson outlined their respective Olympic preparations and Olympic experiences and offered indepth reflections of their Olympic journey from the perspective of one year later.

Expert Facilitators

Dru Marshall is deputy provost at the University of Alberta and has a doctorate in exercise physiology. The head coach of the national women's field hockey team from 1996 to 2001, she is the 2010 winner of the Geoff Gowan Award for lifetime contribution to coaching development. Marshall is currently the chair of CAAWS. She is also a member of the editorial board of the *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching* (<http://www.coach.ca/canadian-journal-for-women-in-coaching-s12541>).

Guylaine Demers is a professor in the Department of Physical Education at Laval University. She is the director of its undergraduate competency-based coach education program. A member of CAC's Coaching Research Committee and the editorial board of the Journal, she leads the research in CAC's *We are coaches* program and was involved in the development and implementation of the new NCCP. Demers is the chair of Égale-Action and a member of the Quebec Council of Sport Leaders. She was a coach for nearly 15 years and was technical director of the Quebec Basketball Federation. She is assisting the Qatar Women's Sport Committee in developing a sport system for girls and women.

Penny Werthner is director and associate dean of the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa. She works with a number of national coaches, athletes, and teams in their preparation for the Olympic Games. She serves on national committees for sport science and sport psychology, is a regular presenter at national and international conferences on coaching, women and coaching and physical activity, and is a member of the International Council for Coach Education. A former middle distance runner and 1976 Olympian, she is chair of the Review Committee of the Canadian Sport Psychology Association.

In Their Own Words

Wisdom from the Leaders

Dru Marshall

The workshop is a terrific event. Women from both team and individual sports come together to learn from one another, mentor each other, reflect on their past experiences to consolidate their own learning, and develop important supportive networks that last beyond coaching. Annually, they also identify critical individual and sport issues that need to be examined and solved in order to enable future female leaders.

Penny Werthner

The workshop weekend is an opportunity to connect with women coaches, some who have been coaching for many years and others who are just beginning their competitive careers. While coaching in sport is a complex and unique profession, and one that has its own special challenges – not the least of which is being paid adequately for the work – it is, in its simplest terms, about working with young individuals who are striving to achieve something in competitive sport. And competitive sport is inherently stressful. So for a coach to be effective, she needs a huge amount of specific sport technical skills – that is crucial – and needs to understand who she is working with, from an emotional and psychological perspective, and to understand that each athlete is unique; what may work with one, may not with another. What worked one season with a team, may not work so well the next season. The workshop allows coaches both the opportunity to share with each other their issues and successes and to learn from experienced coaches who have themselves learned so much and are willing to share that expertise. It is always a pleasure to be part of it, and lend my expertise where I can.

Guylaine Demers

The first impact is definitely the expansion of my network with women involved at different levels of the sport system. The quality of the group was amazing, from grass roots to high performance.

The second impact is more about what I would call a reality check for me: the situation of women coaches in Canada is still very precarious. I was discouraged at some points during the weekend as I realized there is still so much to do. It became very clear that this kind of workshop is essential, but is definitely not enough to make the situation change. I also noticed that too many women feel isolated.

The third impact is the connection I felt with all the women. It is very empowering when you belong, when you share the same type of experiences. The support everyone gave to each other, the confidence in each other, and the generosity to share ideas were key elements of my positive experience.

I learned a lot from our two keynote speakers, Mel and Manon. We have so much to learn from women who have been through a lot in different ways. They are so humble, authentic, and generous; I will remember their speeches for years to come.

A final word: a workshop like this is a no-brainer: it is absolutely essential and crucial to recruit and more importantly to retain women in coaching positions.

Manon Perron

I went to the first workshop in 2002 and my English was not that great so I found it hard because I could not express myself and there were not a lot of people who could translate when I was stuck. I remember feeling at night, 'Oh, my god, it's hard.'

This time, there were a lot of women who were able to help us, and that made a big difference. Someone said that when she is surrounded by male coaches, she feels they are not listening to her. Well, it is almost the same when French-speaking women are surrounded by English-speaking women. At this workshop, the difference was big because I am better in English and can help those who speak mostly French.

The workshop was awesome. I don't have a lot of time available and I thought, there goes another weekend. But the sharing with the other coaches, the fun I had, it was completely worth it. I loved it. It is so good to share. We share the same obstacles. We live through the same issues – family, sport, and being at the top – and it is such a relief to share with other sports.

I remember that at my first Canada Games, many years ago, I wanted to know all about boxing so I went to the venue all the time, observing the way they train, and I learned so much. It was the same at the Torino Olympics in 2006, only this time I chose the sport of short track speed skating; I wanted to know everything about that sport. Why? By learning how other sports train, I learn a lot about the coaching side. It can be really good when the sport is very different from your own. Each sport is different and it is important to learn the culture of each one of them.

Mel Davidson

The workshop is important because it provides an environment for female coaches to share some of the common challenges they face, ensuring that all female coaches have the support and guidance they need to be successful. The opportunity to learn from top female leaders in Canada's sport system is a unique one and the workshop provides this on a yearly basis.

Karin Lofstrom

I look forward to the workshop each year as it provides a great opportunity to hear firsthand the experiences of the women coaches and areas where CAAWS can continue to support their development. The workshop provides a wonderful opportunity for information sharing and creating a support network across the country with other women coaches and supporters. Often the women coaches are one of few women in their sports so having a support network outside of their sport is a real benefit.

What the National Coaches Say

Michelle Darvill, Rowing, National Women's Development Coach, London, Ont.

The workshop stresses the importance of learning effective communication and how to negotiate the importance of asking for things you need. It's also an excellent professional development opportunity. When I first started coming several years ago, I was overwhelmed by all the new information, not knowing what to expect, and meeting fabulous top coaches, but now I am in a comfort zone coming here.

I wish the workshop leaders could do similar workshops for sport organizations on how to promote women in sport, how to treat us fairly, and what our rights are. Family is a recurring key issue and we need to know what we are entitled to. In other words, educate the employer.

Brenda Van Tighem, Athletics, National Team Coaching Apprenticeship Program Coach, Calgary, Alta.

The workshop is great at linking women coaches and is an opportunity to connect and reflect. The main benefit for me is hearing about the accomplishments. In my situation, with two athletes likely to compete at the 2012 London Olympic Games, hearing Mel Davidson and Xiuli Wang last year, and Mel and Manon Perron this year is empowering as each has done an incredible job at the Olympics. So many of the coaches said how lonely they are; that's where I am right now and I am going to do something about that as well as sorting out my role.

We have to remember that things have come a long way, but there are still huge issues, and these are discussed at the workshop. It is important to deal with the extreme cases, especially with the young coaches just coming up. The advice of the facilitators is really helpful. We find ways to support each other, move forward, and embrace what's happening. Supporting each other is really important, and Mel and others really stressed that. It is also important to celebrate women coaches when they have success.

Helen Radford, Curling, National Team Coach, Mixed Doubles World Championships, Halifax, N.S.

The workshop provided an additional opportunity for me to network with the top female coaches in the country. It is always inspiring to communicate with those coaches who share the same passion for their sport and continue to strive to find that work/life balance. It gave me an opportunity to reflect on my own goals in coaching and listening to Manon and Mel speak was the highlight of the weekend for sure.

Lynn Séguin, Fencing, National Team Coaching Apprenticeship Program Coach, Saskatoon, Sask.

What I learned from the workshop is that the sport I love so much is really very unfair to its women. The workshop has made me question everything I have always known and loved about my sport. Things have just got to change. I'm not sure I can be the one to make the changes needed at home in Canada, but the workshop has made me want to try. I can't believe just one short weekend could have this effect on me. Usually things have to be proven to me before I take action. Well, things are going to change from here on in. I can't believe I have been so closed-minded up to this point, wow! Thanks! I really needed that weekend!

Melissa Soligo, Curling, National Team Coaching Apprenticeship Program Coach, Victoria, B.C.

The workshop is at both the end of the season and start of my new season, and wraps up where I was and allows me to meet with specific people who are always involved and who help me take a good hard look at myself and my coaching. By the end of the weekend, this helps me make better decisions for myself personally and professionally going forward. What I've taken from the workshop is that I don't have to be everything to everybody; it's okay to pick and choose what I need to do. Someone said that when you're tired and burnt out, you're not as good a coach, and I think that, very importantly, I'm learning that.

Susan Lemke, Archery, 2012 Paralympic Coach, Abbotsford, B.C.

"The impact of the workshop on me personally, besides a renewed commitment to archery at the grassroots in British Columbia and to women in my community, is that I came to some acceptances:

- I cannot continue to be invisible in my province and provincial sport organization.
- I need to know more about CAAWS.
- I am not unlike any other women working to be recognized for what I do.
- I use the same thought processes as many high performance coaches across the country; I am not alone.

At one point, I stood up to commit to what I would do when I returned home. At that moment, while speaking, I was moved with emotion because of both realization and dismay. My voice was weak and shook as though I was on the verge of tears. In fact, I was on the verge of an overwhelming realization, a dawning on me that I needed to stop running from my responsibilities to my passion. The trick now will most definitely be maintaining a work/passion/life balance, which many of us face. To be really good at something means that you are not very good at others, and my family/life relationships have priority."

Beth Barz, Rugby, Assistant Coach, U20 National Women's Team, Head Coach, Queen's University Women's Team, Kingston, Ont.

The biggest part about the weekend is that I end up in a room filled with other people who have the same approach to life in general that I do. You so rarely run across people who aren't in it for themselves. These women really care about developing other women as well as their athletes and not only believe in it, but live it. It's one thing for people

to believe something is a good idea, but to dedicate a significant portion of their lives to doing it, that's rare and to be valued. It's so empowering and comes at the right time of year, as winter ends and you can use some wind in your sails.

Alison Purkiss, Figure Skating, Senior National Team Coach, London, Ont.

The workshop has had a profound impact on me both personally and professionally. This was my first experience at any kind of multi-sport conference and I had no idea what to expect. I was amazed to find the similarities between my day-to-day challenges and those of hockey coaches, diving coaches, and sprint coaches! Sharing ideas and training tips with these women felt like a breath of fresh air. I came away with so many new ideas, ways to develop my athletes further, and plans for my future in the sport that I had to write everything down in a plan and have already started to implement my changes. I am currently focused on three main points as a result of this workshop.

#1 - After hearing from Manon and Mel about how they needed support and sought out people for advice, I realized that asking for help is not a sign of inexperience or weakness, but rather an acknowledgment of our responsibility as coaches to be well informed and confident in our decisions.

#2 - Plan, Plan, Plan! Plan to recruit and retain coaches, to celebrate successes, to debrief, to ask for what you want, to negotiate, plan for the unexpected, and hopefully you'll be so experienced at planning that when you have to change the plan when the unexpected happens, you'll be ready!

#3 - "Sit at the Table". I can't afford to be patient or wait for someone else to effect the changes I would like to see. I also know that I can't change anything by complaining about it; I need to get involved.

Obviously, there are more steps to implement, but hopefully all work into my "plan". I thoroughly enjoyed the workshop and all of the incredible women who attended and presented. I left feeling energized, connected, supported, and very inspired.

Patricia Landry, Baseball, National Team Assistant Coach; Head Coach, Quebec's Senior Women's Team, Trois-Rivières, Que.

The workshop was a great opportunity for me to meet coaches who are newly retired athletes like me since we can understand each other and the changes we are going through. It allowed me to get more knowledge to help the development of my sport and my athletes and gave me the opportunity to hear about the experiences, philosophy, and different aspects of other sports. I also enjoyed talking with coaches who have many years of experience as they have gained important knowledge that they share with us. It was also impressive to see so many women who are involved in sport at a high level, and how they juggle with every aspect of their life; they travel around the world, they have children, they have another job, and they are doing this for the same reason – passion. I know that if I need advice, I can contact some of the women I met at the workshop. Also, I have learned about associations that can help the coaches in different aspects and I found that helpful.

Sian Bagshawe, Soccer, National Team Coaching Apprenticeship Program Coach, North Vancouver, B.C.

It was a wonderful experience to be part of something bigger than the 'bubble' I am in within my sport. The workshop was an amazing opportunity to connect with peers across the country and across different sports. Not only do they understand the trials and tribulations of sport at a high level, but they are all invested and passionate about making a difference for other female coaches in the country.

I learned that there are many ways I can make an impact within the coaching community and within my sport. The opportunity to make a difference off the field is sometimes just as important as the impact we can make on the field of play!

Denise Kelly, Cycling, National Team Endurance Development Coach, Toronto, Ont.

The biggest impact the workshop has on me personally is that I feel overwhelmingly rejuvenated and motivated for the upcoming cycling season and positive that we CAN make a difference in the following ways:

1. Working with other like-minded coaches when trying to solve issues that face women within the coaching realm. For example, the lack of female coaches opens up my mind to solutions and leaves me in awe of what we eventually come up with.
2. The workshop reinforces that it is our responsibility to 'pay it forward' to other female coaches by making the way smoother for them by addressing the issues and being part of the solution.
3. The individual speakers inspire me to take the learnings (plan, plan, plan) and apply them to my coaching.

4. The stories of all the coaches, whether they are formal speakers or not, inspire me to further excel in my career.
5. The knowledge the main presenters have is awe-inspiring and motivates me to educate myself further in areas that apply to my coaching.
6. The connections I make at this workshop last from one year to the next and the recharge from this weekend lasts me until partway through the season when I review my notes, make some calls, or send emails to receive renewed motivation for the rest of the season.

Lynsday Wheelans, Ringette, Head Coach, Team Canada, Toronto, Ont.

What always amazes (and it shouldn't) and stays with me is how decorated, intelligent, talented, and competent this group of women coaches is, but more that they are so down-to-earth and real. It is this down-to-earth and real part that I appreciate the most about attending the workshop. The stories and the debriefs really show that women coaches understand that sport is about people, passion, and performance. I love this common connection even though we are all from different sports. There is so much overlap and so many little things that I pick up by listening and chatting with the other coaches.

On the flip side I relate to and continue to feel frustrated about how challenging it is to be a professional coach in Canada and more specifically to be a woman, have incredible coaching skills, but have limited opportunities and constant uphill battles. If Mel Davidson is starting out again like it was 1997, then, wow, we have a long way to go!

Dallas Ludwick, Diving, National Team Coaching Apprenticeship Program Coach, Winnipeg, Man.

For me, the greatest impact was just being there. I had never been to the workshop before, and really had no idea what to expect. Frankly, at first I wasn't exactly excited about another weekend on the road. That being said, as soon as I was in the company of the first coaches I met at the airport, I knew instantly that I was going to get a lot out of the weekend. Just being in the presence of so many great coaches who are going through many of the same challenges I am – albeit all in different circumstances – was refreshing and encouraging. I do feel rather alone in my career a lot of the time. It was great to be in a network of amazing coaches at a variety of performance levels. I could see myself in so many of them.

When I read the list of coaches a few days before the workshop, I was really excited to see some very big names on the list. For example, I've admired Manon Perron for years, and have only ever seen her on TV or on stage during awards ceremonies! To be able to listen to and share with women of her calibre as a group as well as one-on-one was a major highlight for me. Talk about insight!

I found every section and activity of the weekend meaningful. I usually find at least a couple of "nuggets" at every professional development opportunity, but this was non-stop relevant and practical information, advice, and inspiration!

Just being with the other coaches really affected me. I realized how much I need this type of environment as a professional coach. It has inspired me to seek out other female coaches in Winnipeg and to put together a group that meets regularly, so that we can all benefit from sharing, encouraging, and learning from each other on an ongoing basis.

Shelley Coolidge, Hockey, Head Coach, Carleton University, Ottawa, Ont.

I find the expertise and passion in the room inspiring. Spending time with other female coaches who are so driven gives me optimism and energy. My personal goal is to get more young women into coaching so I took a lot from our recruitment discussions.

Danielle Bouchard, Boxing, National Team Assistant Coach, Montreal, Que.

For me, this workshop was a new experience, enriching and destabilizing at times. It is interesting to be around women who live their passion for sport, to see their dedication, and to realize we share the same challenges on different levels. The expertise of the guest speakers was amazing; hearing the stories of women who lived the Olympic Games experience fascinates me. It is a source of motivation, shows examples of success stories, and allows me to believe that it is possible to make it there.

Also, the workshop gives us a chance to make new contacts; you never know where this can lead you. I am confident that the future will give me opportunities to cross paths with some of these women. The sports world isn't that big, after all. In short, these wonderful moments and memories are still very present in my day-to-day life.

Tami Rainer, Lacrosse, Assistant Coach, Women's Field, Oshawa, Ont.

I found the workshop very inspiring and refreshing. It was amazing to share philosophies, strategies, and game day/competition stories with outstanding women who are of similar high-achieving character. It opened my eyes to the obstacles that many women face within their respective sports and our discussions encouraged me to want to become more involved within the structure of my national sport organization.

Rising Stars Reflect

Angie Shen, Beach Development Coach, National Beach Volleyball Practice Centre – Ontario, Toronto, Ont.

The workshop introduced me to a network of resources and other women who are in the same situation as I was. I had been feeling lonely and isolated, not realizing that what I needed was a connection to others who could easily understand the challenges I face on a regular basis. Asking for support from friends and family was difficult as it always required me to attempt to describe what the atmosphere of high performance sport is like before attempting to share any difficulties I was having. Today I am able to perform my job trusting that I have the support of other women coaching leaders behind me.

Abby Ennis, Speed Skating, Olympic Oval Program Coach, Calgary, Alta.

I learned many lessons over the course of the weekend as it was the first workshop I have attended; that I am not alone; others are out there with the same struggles as me and who face some of the same day-to-day experiences as I do; I need to be connected to and in contact with other women in coaching, that communication and support from other women in sport is very important, and to accept guidance and wisdom from those who are ahead of me.

I really enjoyed the talks from Manon and Mel. Manon especially struck a chord with me in the planning and re-planning that happened before and during the Olympics. It truly made me realize how much I have to learn and develop as a coach. It isn't just writing a training program or giving technical advice. I believe she said 'to leave no stone unturned'. Coaching is much more than people realize and the workshop ignited the passion I have to continue on down this road.

Alison Johnston, Racquetball, National Team Coaching Pool, Saskatoon, Sask.

"I was the least experienced coach at the workshop and was a little intimidated when I heard that many of the coaches have been to events like the Olympics and Canada Games. A lot of the discussion was based around getting more women involved in coaching. Racquetball does need that, but we need women involved in the sport first! I learned the importance of a personal support system, knowing your athlete, planning and preparation, and debriefing, all of which I will be using in the future.

It was truly an honour to be in the presence of some of these well-established coaches and hearing their stories. It was important for me to meet this network of women as it will help me to continue coaching. Everyone was very nice and very accommodating and I am motivated to continue my NCCP training."

Tracy Angus, Judo, World Master's Coach, Burlington, Ont.

I was really pleased to have the opportunity to attend, reconnecting with some people from the past and networking with new people such as rowing coach Michelle Darvill, whom I plan to visit as we are nearby. Listening to Manon and Mel really hit home because it reinforced some of the things you're doing when you are preparing your athletes and how things can change and then you have to be able to adjust and re-focus your program and your mental preparation because something unexpected has come up. Sport is fluid and things happen in life that require change, and that really hit home especially when Mel said they had talked about what would happen if someone close to a team member died. And of course it did happen, even though it was an athlete [Joannie Rochette] in another sport.

When you talk to coaches at that level, you realize how much preparation is required. At the developmental level, we don't necessarily think about all those things. Hearing the Olympic coaches speak, many had a long history with their athletes, which doesn't often happen with provincial coaches so we may not have the opportunity to prepare them the same way. Although I've competed and coached at the world level, now, as a provincial coach, I've reinstated women-only training, not to take anything away from the mixed training, but to build self-esteem and cohesion. I can use that opportunity to apply what I learned at the workshop and my new book – *Taking the Lead* <http://www.coach.ca/-p138263>.

Kyla Rollinson, Triathlon, Provincial Junior U23 Development Coach, Montreal, Que.

"I realized the importance of building bridges, not just within my sport, but with people from other sports. Had I realized my athletic career was going to evolve into coaching, I would have been more conscientious about networking. It is important to sensitize the young women we are coaching to the idea of coaching after they finish their athletic careers and encouraging that networking. A coach can end up fairly isolated within her own sport, and there are important things we can learn from coaches in other sports.

I realized that most of the challenges I face as a female in coaching, everyone else does, too. The challenges are not sport-specific and include being marginalized within your sport and your federation because of your gender. Age is another challenge – I'm younger than a lot of other coaches and that can have an impact on credibility, at least in the athletes' eyes.

Work/life balance is a huge factor for almost everyone. I also realized how fragile the life of a coach is. When an athlete retires, there are issues of self-identity and self-worth, and that is also true for a coach. Most of us are former athletes who give back to our sport and then suddenly it can be over and we go through the same issues for the second time. It may be worse because people may not recognize a coach's accomplishments. If we are going to coach, we have to be aware of where it's taking us.

The workshop was a really important opportunity for self-reflection. I came away knowing there is a network of women who are very motivated, very selfless, and are doing a tremendous amount for their athletes, and I am proud to be a part of that. I've decided I really want to continue working on my NCCP accreditation. I now also have a sense of belonging.

Jill Leonard, Figure Skating, Canada Games Apprenticeship Program Coach, Trenton, Ont.

The workshop gave me time out of my busy life to connect with fellow coaches and discuss new coaching ideas. The intimacy allowed everyone to state ideas and points of view, and I left feeling that I had a chance to contribute. Manon's and Mel's talks were very inspiring. It's great to hear how an Olympic coach handles difficult situations. It's interesting how similar issues can be at all levels of sport. I was very happy that the Canada Games apprentice coaches also had a chance to debrief our experiences at the Games and celebrate how far we've come this year as coaches. Overall, the conference gave me a great sense of confidence. Being among an amazing group of female coaches made me feel that I could do anything because others have accomplished so much. It's so important to have those female role models to look up to and to have them believe in you.

Christina Sharun, Hockey, Canada Games Apprenticeship Program Coach, Nanaimo, B.C.

The workshop had a huge impact on me. As an apprentice coach, having an opportunity like that, surrounded by such an empowering group of women, was phenomenal and hugely valuable from a learning perspective and in terms of getting to better know the climate of women's coaching in Canada, the networking, and meeting so many fantastic people from different sports, an opportunity that doesn't happen very often.

I am going to continue to work on the Competition – Development level of the NCCP. My intention is to attend the National Coaching Institute (NCI) and being able to talk to people who have done it was phenomenal. It really gave me a better idea of what it's all about and renewed my energy to achieve my goal of completing Level 4. I would love to make coaching a career, realizing there are not a lot of opportunities in women's hockey, especially in Canada, but my goal is to be involved at the national level. I love coaching, and being able to expand my academic training as much as possible is one of the steps I'm taking to make sure I am in a really good spot to work with higher level teams and help to develop the grassroots as well.

Kateri Mills, Cross Country Skiing, Provincial Coach, Collingwood, Ont.

I loved the workshop. I've come four of the last five years and have loved it every time. This year, it showed me how much I've grown as a coach and as a professional. There is so much to gain from the wealth of experience and knowledge in that room; the workshop is an invaluable resource. I felt refreshed and rejuvenated after the weekend and am armed with so many more tools.

Trina Snooks, Archery, Canada Games Apprenticeship Program Coach, Riverview, N.B.

The workshop was a fantastic networking opportunity. Not only that, I feel that I have made many new friends who I can talk to and who understand the coaching challenges I might be experiencing that my male coaching friends just would not understand.

This workshop, along with all the others I have attended through the apprenticeship program, has made me more aware of how I feel about coaching, and also introduced ideas I would not have been exposed to elsewhere, such as how to network, self-reflection, and how to advocate for myself, which I learned just from talking to the other coaches and hearing their stories. Also, having a chance to talk and bond with two of the best archery coaches in Canada – Joan McDonald and Susan Lemke – for a weekend was fantastic. I feel I can now approach them with matters that I would not have felt so comfortable doing before. That alone made the weekend worth it. I will now strive to make it to a level where I will be invited back for another weekend with Canada's best female coaches.

Melissa Hill, Badminton, Canada Games Apprenticeship Program Coach, Oakville, Ont.

Two things stood out for me in terms of the impact of the workshop. First and foremost was the opportunity to meet other female coaches from a variety of sports, and to share experiences with them through one-on-one personal discussions. The secluded setting of the workshop, the relatively small size of the group, and the well-planned schedule created an atmosphere that encouraged uninhibited conversation. It was not always even what was said in these discussions that promoted my own learning, but rather it was what I observed about personality traits that allowed me to understand why these women are great coaches.

Secondly, for me the weekend was much-needed time for personal reflection on my own development as a coach. This sort of reflection is really a necessity for personal growth, but in my busy life, I rarely allow myself the privilege of time for self-reflection. I came away from the weekend refreshed and inspired, and ready to take on new challenges in the coming year.

Manon Losier, Cross Country Skiing, Canada Games Apprenticeship Program Coach, Tracadie-Sheila, N.B.

The workshop was incredible for me. Before I got there, I thought, oh, my god, national coaches! They're way up there, but in fact, I found I had a lot in common with them. It gave me a chance to see for myself what I want to do in coaching in the future and how I should organize myself so I can make it work for me in the long run. I'm going to meet with my female coaches and define their roles clearly. We also need someone to take care of our kids because we need to take into consideration all the different aspects a female coach has to deal with on a daily basis. If we organize child care as a group, the kids will have much more fun and the coaches will be less stressed knowing their kids are having a super day. Things like that can make a huge difference.

Asking Manon Perron what she did with her kids when she was coaching was a big surprise. She told me a number of little, specific points. For example, she said her kids were her number one priority and she made sure she had a really good support system. She did not compromise on that. It was confirmation that it is possible to coach and have a family life.

There was a lot of discussion about recruiting and retention; retention is a big issue for me. I had a very busy winter and wasn't sure how I was going to be able to continue for 20 years. I came home with lots of good ideas, such as delegating more. That was my big lesson.

I have a specific mission for my club that comes from when I was an athlete. I was from a small community and so did not have a coach. I was focused and driven and could have gone higher had I had a good coach. So I want to give my community the best possible coaching and if anyone wants to advance to higher levels, they won't be held back because of poor or no coaching.

Nicole Czajka, Judo, Canada Games Apprenticeship Program Coach, Winnipeg, Man.

The workshop has provided me with an insight into the talent and experience the female national team coaches have. It made me realize that, despite my own experience and knowledge, there is still so much more to learn and so much room to grow. Meeting the other coaches, talking about their experiences, and hearing the stories of how they got to where they are was really helpful. It also inspired some ideas about creating coaching workshops within my own province and sport to discuss and share best practices. Knowing there are coaches who have been where I am and have been through the same situations brought on a strength in knowing I'm not alone. It was really inspiring for me to hear Mel and Manon tell their Olympic stories. My fiancé is an Olympic target shooting coach who will be attending the 2012 Olympics with his athlete and it helped to provide more insight into his journey. Hearing about their experiences also helped to solidify my own goals and career path as a coach.

Carol Ferris, Curling, Canada Games Apprenticeship Program Coach, Martensville, Sask.

Learnings: Feelings of isolation are present at all levels and sports; the struggles are common across the board. I need to be part of the solution in the area of recruitment and retention. The grassroots level needs to be the proving ground for female coaches and there is a need for more support at this level. The presence of curling mentors helped me see the political barriers that exist in my sport.

Networking: I now value any and all time spent with coaches, and especially the talented and successful group that were at the workshop. I have learned that common goals are present in all sports and that listening to discussions provides great insights. I was especially lucky to have a chance to spend time with Melissa Soligo and Helen Radford, who were willing to share some of the challenges they face and how they see their role in the sport having to change.

Professional Development: Mel and Manon, in addition to sharing their inspiration and emotional journeys, brought an awareness of the need for developing and continually working on the basic framework of a great coach: planning, knowing your athletes and, as importantly, yourself, communicating, and developing a support network.

The Apprenticeship Debrief Session: The program provided us with an opportunity to grow and develop our coaching talents and style. The debriefing session gave us the chance to highlight the entire experience and bring out the major learnings. I came into the program without a grasp of my personal style or values. I now feel I have an understanding of who I am and what I value as a coach and person. Communication strategies have also benefited me in both coaching and my personal life. The national experience and multi-sport event will open doors for me as I advance in my provincial sport organization.

Overall, A+ for the weekend.

Heather Hennigar, Athletics National Team Assistant Coach, Head Coach Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S.

The biggest impact of the workshop is just beginning to become apparent. I enjoyed the weekend and getting to know such a talented and interesting group of individuals. And I realized that finding the time to make contact and connect with other women in coaching is pretty much essential to survival in this career. But it has been the past few days that the impact of making those connections has really sunk in.

I flew directly from the workshop to an Athletics Canada Olympic Development Camp. I find in these intensive environments, it is easy to fall back into some of the thinking patterns that many women coaches seem to experience. At home in Halifax, when I am running my own programs at Dalhousie and the Canadian Sport Centre Atlantic, and where all the responsibility falls on my shoulders to develop and sustain these programs, I may sometimes feel overwhelmed and somewhat isolated, but I forget about some of the more systemic challenges. Coaching is a male-dominated profession, and although I am surrounded by great male coaches and mentors at the moment, many of the messages from the workshop keep echoing in the back of my mind. I feel less like taking a back seat, more like speaking up and voicing opinions, more aware of how I will deal with challenges, more apt to set limits to protect myself. Also, I am far more cognizant of seeing the barriers for other women in coaching, and therefore being open to offering support.

More than anything, feeling the background support of this particular network of women coaches, and knowing there is direct access to professional support, gives me more confidence in my career. I want to thank everyone involved in the workshop for making it happen and recognizing the importance of providing an opportunity for connection.

Peggy Falkenham-Boutilier, Canada Games Apprenticeship Program Coach, Lunenburg, N.S.

The workshop and WIC has been a validating experience. The last 13 months encouraged me to reach beyond my comfort zone. We are all capable of so much more. In particular, the workshop confirmed a community of knowledge and support. Having this support and knowing where to access it is a tool I do not take for granted. It is humbling to be welcomed into a higher group, share their stories, and feel their emotions. It provided networking opportunities that otherwise would have never been realized. It opened doors to access other women, their wisdom, and their experience that would under other circumstances never been explored. Sometimes, knowing where to ask is half the battle. From a professional development point of view, the entire experience has been more than I expected. I quickly moved through NCCP Level 2 and Level 3 of technical skills with confidence. Workshops provide valuable tools. The learnings and the development books are all encouraging and help along the journey

Kathy Ludwig, Wheelchair Basketball, Canada Games Apprenticeship Program Coach, Brampton, Ont.

I was very excited about attending the workshop weekend. It gave me an opportunity to reflect on my Canada Games experience with my fellow WiC friends. I learned things about myself that I had not even thought about. I am not as shy and unsure of myself as I was when I started this journey. It was exciting to be part of the larger group as well. To really think about how we could help develop more women in coaching and subsequently support them was invigorating. I stood in awe as I realized that I was in the room with such amazing women, women who had been to the Olympics and who had succeeded so much. What a fantastic weekend and I hope to get another chance to network with these incredible people.

About CAC's Women in Coaching Program

The Women in Coaching program is a national campaign to increase the number of coaching opportunities for women at all levels of sport. Since 1987, women coaches across Canada have benefited from professional development grants, National Team Coaching Apprenticeship Program grants, and National Coaching Institute scholarships. The program also develops resources for women coaches including the *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching*.

About the Coaching Association of Canada

The Coaching Association of Canada unites stakeholders and partners in its commitment to raising the skills and stature of coaches, and ultimately expanding their reach and influence. Through its programs, CAC empowers coaches with knowledge and skills, promotes ethics, fosters positive attitudes, builds competence, and increases the credibility and recognition of coaches. Visit www.coach.ca for more information about coach education and training.

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