

A Report on the 5th IWG World Conference on Women and Sport

Since it began in 1994, the IWG World Conference on Women and Sport has grown into the premier conference for leaders in women and sport. Each of the five conferences to date—in Brighton, England, in 1994, in Windhoek, Namibia, in 1998, in Montreal in 2002, in Kumamoto, Japan, in 2006, and in Sydney, Australia, in 2010—have brought bold initiatives and significant Declarations. The Brighton Declaration, with its “overriding aim to develop a sporting culture that enables and values the full involvement of women in every aspect of sport” (http://www.iwg-gti.org/@Bin/22427/Brighton_Declaration_e.pdf), has now been signed by 250 bodies, including international and regional governmental organizations or coalitions, international multisport organizations, international physical education organizations and forums, international and regional women and sport groups, international sport federations, and national organizations. Signatories within Canada are the Department of Canadian Heritage, Sport Canada, the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity, Commonwealth Games Canada, and the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta.

Guylaine Demers, a member of the editorial board of the *Canadian Journal for Women in Coaching*, was a presenter at the 2010 conference in Sydney. In the following article, she captures for *Journal* readers the essence of the conference. It is important reading for everyone who is committed to redressing imbalances that women face in their participation and involvement in sport. — Sheila Robertson

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by Guylaine Demers



Introduction

Every four years, the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG) organizes an international conference. The fifth conference was held in May 2010 in Sydney, Australia. This article contains a summary of the major themes discussed during those four days and will give readers an understanding of what is going on around the world in women and sport issues. It was interesting to note that the participants from 58 countries share many concerns and problems. Even if some progress has been made, it is obvious that much is needed in all parts of the world. The good news is that many best practices were shared, and I expect to see various positive impacts in the coming years.

Writing a clear summary is an almost impossible task, because there were more than 120 presentations as well as many panel discussions and keynote speakers. Therefore, I focus on the themes that relate to women coaches.

Before starting on the conference itself, it is important to understand who is doing what for women in sport at the international level. Here is a list and a short description of the major international organizations as well as some regional and national organizations that are recognized around the world for their major impact. Although we see some overlap in the descriptions, I kept it this way to be fair to all organizations. I thank **Karin Lofstrom**, the executive director of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) for her help with this section.

A picture of organizations for women and sport around the world

International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG): <http://www.iwg-gti.org/>

IWG was established in 1994 at the 1st World Conference on Women and Sport held in Brighton, England. IWG is an independent coordinating body consisting of representatives of key governmental and non-governmental organizations from different regions of the world. IWG has the overarching objective of promoting and facilitating the development of opportunities for girls and women in sport and physical activity globally.

International Association for Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women (IAPESGW): <http://www.iapesgw.org>

Founded in 1949, IAPESGW is an organization with a primary aim to support and bring together interested professionals from around the world who are working in the fields of women's and girls' sport, physical education, and dance. IAPESGW also promotes the interests of girls and women at all levels and in all areas of physical education, dance, and sport.

WomenSport International (WSI): <http://www.sportsbiz.bz/womensportinternational/>

WSI was formed in 1994 to meet the challenge of ensuring that sport and physical activity receive the attention and priority they deserve in the lives of girls and women. WSI's main purpose is to serve as an international umbrella organization that can bring about positive change for girls and women in these important areas of their lives. Its advocacy is strongly based on current research.

International Olympic Committee (IOC) Women and Sport Commission: <http://www.olympic.org/en/content/The-IOC/Commissions/Women-and-Sport/>

Established in 2004 (following a working group established in 1995), the Commission is a consultative body composed of the three components of the Olympic Movement—the IOC, international federations, and national Olympic committees—as well as representatives of athletes, the International Paralympic Committee, and independent members. On the basis of the Commission's recommendations, an action program is developed and implemented by the IOC through its Department of International Cooperation and Development.

European Women and Sport (EWS): <http://www.ews-online.org/en>

EWS is an independent group consisting of representatives and contact persons related to or interested in the gender equality work of non-governmental and governmental sport organizations and bodies in their respective countries. EWS aims to promote national equality work in sports and to disseminate information to European sport organizations, non-governmental organizations and governmental bodies.

The main goal of EWS is a sport culture of practised gender equality in terms of equal opportunities for girls and boys and women and men in education and training, participation, and promotion as well as co-determination in the decision-making processes in sport.

International Paralympic Committee (IPC) Women in Sport Committee (WISC): http://www.paralympic.org/IPC/Organization/Standing_Committees/Women_In_Sport_Committee.html

WISC is an IPC Standing Committee established to provide advice and consultation to the IPC on issues of gender equity in Paralympic sport. WISC also advocates and advises on strategies and policies to obtain the full inclusion of women and girls at all levels of Paralympic sport and the Paralympic Movement. It identifies barriers that restrict participation and recommends policies and initiatives to increase participation. WISC was formed in response to concerns about the low participation of women within the Paralympic Movement. The committee also reviews existing IPC initiatives and policies, including research and data collection, universality, the wild card system, publications, and solidarity funding allocation.

The International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE): <http://www.icsspe.org/>

Established in 1958, ICSSPE's founders recognized a widening gap between the fields of sport, sport science, and physical education and sought to reinforce the links between these areas and develop a more inclusive perspective. Its main purpose is to serve as an international umbrella organization concerned with the promotion and dissemination of results and findings in the field of sport science and their practical application in cultural and educational contexts.

Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS): <http://www.caaws.ca/>

As a leader in Canadian sport and physical activity, CAAWS fosters quality experiences and equitable support for girls and women. It envisions a sport and physical activity system where girls and women are actively engaged. A not-for-profit organization, CAAWS offers a number of services, programs, and resources to a variety of clients, including sport and physical activity organizations, teachers, coaches, health professionals, and recreation leaders. CAAWS works in close co-operation with governmental and non-governmental organizations on activities and initiatives that advocate positive change for young girls and women in the sport and physical activity communities.

Women's Sports Foundation - USA (WSF): <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/>

The U.S. WSF, founded in 1974 by Billie Jean King, is a national charitable educational organization dedicated to advancing the lives of girls and women through physical activity. WSF is the only national organization in the United States promoting all sports and physical activities for women of all ages and skill levels and is acknowledged by the media as the expert resource on all women's sport issues.

The history of the World Conferences on Women and Sport hosted by the IWG

Date	Location	Theme	Countries	Participants	Legacy
5–8 May 1994	Brighton, United Kingdom	"The Challenge of Change"	83	282	Brighton Declaration
19–22 May 1998	Windhoek, Namibia	"Reaching out for Change"	74	400	Windhoek Call for Action
16–19 May 2002	Montreal, Canada	"Investing in Change"	97	550	Montreal Toolkit / Montreal Communiqué
11–14 May 2006	Kumamoto, Japan	"Participating in Change"	100	700	Kumamoto Commitment to Collaboration
20–23 May 2010	Sydney, Australia	"Play, Think, Change"	60	500	Sydney Scoreboard

The aim of the Sydney Conference

Reflecting the theme, "Play, Think, Change", the conference program was designed with a unique blend of presentations about best practices and cutting-edge research to stimulate debate and explore positive change for women and sport.

The conference aimed to

- review the progress for women and sport since the 4th World Conference on Women and Sport in Kumamoto, Japan, in 2006, sharing experiences and celebrating achievements
- build a global community of practice for women, sport, and human rights
- strengthen and support the development of women and sport in Oceania
- provide a vision for sustained development and progress of the global women and sport movement from 2010 to 2014.

The conference theme and sub-themes

The main theme of the conference was "Play, Think, Change".

(View an inspiring short video clip about the conference theme on YouTube:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZEYU63Hbq8&feature=player_embedded)

The conference program had five sub-themes addressing the tremendous and varied challenges to the participation of girls and women in sport across the world. To access all the speaker abstracts, visit: <https://iwg--gti-org.directo.fi/iwg-world-conferences/2010-world-conference/>.

1. Women, sport, and human rights

- UN Millennium Development Goals, UN charters and conventions
- Empowering women and girls through sport
- Challenging gender stereotypes in sport

2. Financing and media for gender equality in sport

- Gender budgeting
- Quality media coverage
- Women, sport, and the social media
- Marketing and sponsorship

3. Physical activity and health for women

- Health benefits and risks
- Physical activity and mental health
- Lifelong participation
- Energy and nutrition

4. Sport and social change

- Sport, peace, and development
- Inclusive/exclusive practices
- Women in sport governance and other leadership positions
- Trafficking, sexual harassment, and abuse in sport

5. Engaging Generation Y and Z in sport and physical activity

- Girls' motivations and aspirations
- Quality physical education
- Extreme sports
- Role models for girls in sport

Session on the roles and barriers for female coaches

An entire session discussed the situation of female coaches with presentations from Australia, Canada (myself), New Zealand, and the United States. Here are the (slightly modified) program abstracts.

Description of the first two years of experiences of novice female coaches, [Guylaine Demers](#), Laval University, Canada

The objective of this study was to better understand the experiences of novice female coaches during their first two years of coaching. Conclusions of previous studies have shown an under-representation as well as a decreasing number of female coaches over the last 30 years. Not only are there fewer female coaches, but those who do choose to stay in this profession do so for approximately four years, in comparison to their male counterparts who remain in coaching for 11 years. Building on these conclusions, we chose a multiple case study in order to better understand the experiences of novice female coaches by describing their first two years of coaching experience. Twelve novice female coaches from six sports were studied using the critical incident technique to collect data on their problems and successes. The analysis of negative incidents led to a grouping in two categories: those

related to the athletes (affective, cognitive, or motor-related) and those related to the coach herself (pedagogical, organizational, or affective-related). For the positive incidents, results showed clearly that the female coaches associated their successes with those of their athletes. All coaches also identified that the help of a female mentor coach was directly related to their successes. Novice female coaches seemed very much focused on athlete learning and athlete well-being. The situations described by the coaches referred mainly to athlete technical successes or difficulties, increased or decreased practice time, and the coach's feeling of pride following athlete success or feeling of powerlessness when she felt she did not have the tools needed to help her athletes. Finally, we presented conclusions specific to female coaches, those related to the training of female coaches, and those related to the support offered to female novice coaches.

Women effecting social change in sport: the coaching influence, Stephanie Gabbert, Smith College, United States

There has been an enormous increase in the participation of girls and women in sport since the passage of Title IX in 1972 in the United States as well as the endorsement of the Brighton Declaration on Women in Sport in 1994 in the United Kingdom. Opportunities have been and continue to be created to meet the demand of girls who now see involvement in sport as their right, a human right. For the female athlete, this has resulted in an exponential increase in university scholarships in the United States, organized and professional training by experienced coaches, and for some, a professional athletic career. Paradoxically, growth in the number of female coaches for girls and women has not occurred and, in fact, there has been a significant decrease in opportunities for women as sport leaders. The rise of economic opportunity through sport involvement for women and increased prestige of women's sport ushered in an influx of male coaches. As a result, women have found it increasingly difficult to compete in an arena controlled and now dominated by men. To reverse this trend, programs and practices have been established to provide the necessary training and resources to retain and encourage women to continue in the coaching profession. This session presented findings and recommendations for the recruitment and retention of women in coaching based on current research and the experiences of professional female coaches. The presenter explored best practices to develop, support, and retain women in coaching positions, the social benefits of women coaching women, and the importance of women in leadership positions to positively affect this change.

Athlete-centred coaching for Generation Y athletes, Liz Hanson, Athlete Assessments, Australia

The presentation began by examining the critical challenges of most coaches today (based on a survey of coaches from a variety of sports). These include coaching Generation Y athletes (particularly for coaches who are not also Generation Y), the coach-athlete relationship, and communicating effectively with athletes. A very effective approach to coaching Generation Y athletes is athlete-centred coaching. A fundamental quality to be athlete-centred is a high level of coach self-awareness and having a trusting and respectful coach-athlete relationship with each individual athlete in the team or squad. This means coaches are to understand their own unique personality and subsequent coaching styles. The next step is to understand how to get the best from their athletes by knowing "what makes them tick" on an individual basis. Knowing this enables coaches to effectively meet their athletes' needs by tailoring their coaching style to suit each individual athlete. There is no longer an effective "one size fits all" coaching style. During the presentation, Hanson examined the critical nature of the coach-athlete relationship and, as an example, one study that found that more than 42 per cent of 9,000 female NCAA student-athletes would

not consider a future in college sport because of their poor relationship with either their current college coach or their previous coach before college. The presentation also provided an analysis of “what great coaches get right” as a means to model the most effective coach behaviours. Once again, this was supported with global statistics that demonstrated the critical role that effective communication plays in being an expert coach.

The occupational sex segregation of female youth soccer coaches, Nicole LaVoi, Tucker Centre for Research on Girls & Women In Sport, United States

Given that youth sport is an important social institution in the lives of many children around the world, sport potentially provides a rich opportunity for creating social change. The institution of sport is well documented as a male-dominated domain, one that makes it difficult for females to obtain and remain in positions of power—including coaching positions in youth sport. When women are visible and active role models in a context important to youth (such as sport), outdated stereotypes and beliefs pertaining to gender, power, and leadership can be challenged. To achieve social change, the socio-cultural and structural barriers that impede females from coaching must be documented and illuminated. Data were presented from two studies of youth soccer coaches in the United States, in which Kanter’s occupational sex segregation theoretical framework was used. Specifically, marginalization, tokenism, and homologous reproduction were quantitatively examined by age, level of competition, sex of coach, and sex of athlete. Based on the data, female coaches were marginalized and occupational tokens within youth soccer, but homologous reproduction did not occur. Findings in these studies built upon other recent research showing a gender sorting system in youth sports. One goal of this study was to document a baseline of females in positions of power within youth soccer so that similar trends can be monitored over time, mirroring the longitudinal work of Acosta and Carpenter at the intercollegiate level in the United States. A baseline provides evidence of the efficacy of future policies, educational efforts, and recruitment efforts aimed at attracting and retaining more women in youth soccer coaching.

Mothers as youth sport coaches: barriers and strategies, Sarah Leberman, Massey University, New Zealand

Youth sport offers a rich opportunity for creating social change and challenging stereotypical beliefs of children and their families pertaining to gender, power, and leadership. However, the dominant meanings associated with sport mean that mothers are rarely seen in youth sport leadership positions. For example, in the United States, less than 20 per cent of youth sport coaches are women. Research suggests that the absence of female role models affects children’s expectations of women’s roles in sport. This presentation focused on the experiences of 16 mothers in youth soccer in the American Midwest, highlighting barriers to becoming youth sport coaches and identifying strategies that would work for them. A phenomenological paradigm using semi-structured interviews was adopted. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed into a Word document, and imported into QRS NVIVO (v.7). A three-step process was used to analyse the data—familiarization with the data, open coding, and axial coding. The overwhelming reason why mothers did not coach was a lack of knowledge and confidence. Other personal barriers included favouritism, role conflict between being a mother and being a coach, and a lack of time. Societal barriers focused on the fact that most participants perceived men as the norm in coaching and the women felt uncomfortable being the minority. Strategies proposed to increase the number of mothers coaching included offering women-only education and training, facilitating co-coaching, encouraging mothers to start coaching when their children are young, and providing ongoing support once they start coaching. Given that youth sport is an important social institution in many countries, understanding the barriers and strategies for female coaches

will assist sport managers in creating a more inclusive youth sport environment and go some way to challenging existing gender norms.



The speakers, from left to right: Session chairwoman Etsuko Ogasawara, president of the Japanese Association for Women in Sport; Nicole LaVoi, United States; Sarah Leberman, New Zealand; Guylaine Demers, Canada; Stephanie Gabbert, United States; and Liz Hanson, Australia.

My personal remarks

One common theme that emerged from all the presentations is the fact that women bring something unique to coaching. That “thing” is, in part, the athlete-centred approach. Listening to the various presentations, it became quite clear that this characteristic is more and more important to Generation Y, which expects a strong coach–athlete relationship. For me, this means a window of opportunity to promote the contribution of female coaches to the coaching profession, especially in the 21st century. Now, more than ever, the sport system needs more women coaches to fit the needs of the new generation. We need to market, lobby, and be more political.

In her session, Stephanie Gabbert introduced an interesting three-step strategy to promote women’s influence in coaching:

1. Demonstrate the importance of female coaches using research data around what women bring to coaching.
2. Identify best practices for development and retention, to provide educational opportunities, to establish coaching networks and structured mentoring, to create opportunities for young coaches, and to incorporate the development of female coaches, officials, and administrators along with the sport itself.
3. Document and demonstrate the impacts on social change, such as a shift from the traditional power structure in society and sport.

Another interesting observation, common to New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and Canada, is that we share the same difficulties when it comes to recruiting more mothers as youth sport coaches. These include

- gender norms and the lack of role models: "Coaching is a dad thing."
- a lack of knowledge: "I don't feel that I am qualified."
- favouritism and role conflict that occur when parents are either hard or too easy on their own children when in a coaching role: "You're not the parent now; you're the coach."
- lack of time and a second shift for women: "We are still in charge of cooking dinner, helping with homework, preparing tomorrow's lunches ..."

The good news is that the Canadian program, "We are coaches" tackles all of those issues. It made me realize that we are on the right track to bringing more mothers into coaching (<http://www.coach.ca/WOMEN/e/journal/april2009/index.htm>).

Finally, it was nice to learn that Canada is seen as a leader in the promotion of women coaches.

An interesting initiative from the Government of Australia

Australian sport minister **Kate Ellis** explained a new initiative from her government: "Too often we have heard excuses for the frequently dismal representation of women on sporting board, like 'If there was a woman with the appropriate skills, we'd appoint her.' Well, I'm sorry, but I do not accept that with over half the population, we cannot find women with business expertise, marketing expertise, accounting expertise, or sporting expertise. I just don't, but if it is really hard for sport, then we are happy to help."

As a result, the government will establish the Women in Sport Register of women with the appropriate skills and experience to assist sport in improving its record in this area. The Register will enable women to describe their skills and interest in being involved in sport. Sport organizations will be able to readily access potential candidates and find a match for their needs. Minister Ellis said the initiative is not only about growing the numbers of women on Australia's sport boards, but it is also about working from within to promote healthy sport cultures—and that requires women.

I suggest that we might want to push this idea forward in Canada.

... To be continued.

About the author



Guylaine Demers, PhD, has been a professor at the Department of Physical Education of Laval University since September 2001. She is the director of the Baccalaureate in Sport Intervention program, undergraduate competency-based coach education. She takes particular interest in issues of women in sport, coach education, and homophobia in sport. She was actively involved in the development and implementation of the competency-based National Coaching Certification Program. She is the chair of Égale-Action, the Quebec association for the advancement of women in sport and physical activity, and sits on the board of CAAWS. Guylaine also sits on the Coaching Association of Canada's

Coaching Research Committee and is a member of the Quebec Council of Sport Leaders, which serves as the orientation committee on coaches' development in Quebec. In 2007,

she was named one of the most influential women in sport and physical activity in Canada. She was a coach for nearly 15 years and was also the technical director of the Quebec Basketball Federation. Her latest challenge is the Qatar women's sport committee, which she is helping to develop a sport system for girls and women.