

WSLA

Coaching for Change

What can we do together to
help build coaching wealth
(volume, knowledge, pathways)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Zealand has long held a positive association with athletic pursuits. From Jean Stewart, one of our first Olympic female medalists, through to Lisa Carrington our current Olympic Champion, sport has been a major part of all our communities growing up as young women

What is the current state of female coaching across our country and internationally? This report highlights some of the challenges and possible solutions to how we increase women's choices to coach, coaching development opportunities and the pathway towards the top of elite sport coaching.

Current State

A high level review of available information was completed to generate a national picture of current female elite coaching. This included: browsing the High Performance Sport New Zealand (HPSNZ) website, analysis of the participant lists for the last four years of the Coach Accelerator Programmes, reflecting on our own preferred sports, and using the NZOCs public released information on female coaches involved with national representative teams. Although this is just a starting point, it is alarming how few females are involved in coaching at elite level or even at sub elite level. The only exception is the female dominated sport of Netball where almost all coaches are female.

Challenges to pursuing Elite Coaching

Several challenges exist to pursuing a career in elite coaching, and these are represented in multiple ways depending on the sport.

- Perceived adoption of Male Traits to be successful
- Coaching pathways are not flexible enough
- Women need to be asked
- Not actively recruiting women to coaching career paths
- Support structure to move from junior to elite

Support the conversation and change in NZ

There are a number of initiatives in New Zealand and beyond that are talking about addressing the lack of female coaches, including those led by organisations such as the Female Coaching Network, Australia and New Zealand Women's Coaching Academy, Women in Sport Aotearoa. Increasing the promotion and selling the messages of these organisations will see more engagement, greater exposure and ultimately more female coaches across all sports and at all levels. We are excited by

changes in our own sports regarding the development of coaches; while they are not female exclusive, they are building capability of coaches to lead at the top level.

Recommendations

1. **Development** - Provide female only coach development and accelerator programmes.
2. **Experience** - Give females development opportunities to gain the experiences they need to earn Olympic or pinnacle team roles.
3. **Mentoring** - Establish a coach mentoring programme with women coaches supporting developing women coaches.
4. **Marketing** - Market our outstanding female coaches for what they produce and build rather than looks and masculinity traits is the next step in this process
5. **Collaboration** - Collaboration and promotion of like-minded organisations to help broaden the voice and advocacy of female coaching locally and globally.

Summary

New Zealand sport can lead in the development of equal opportunities pathways for male and female coaches, encouraging more females into coaching and providing tailored support to suit their unique lifestyle challenges. Developing and supporting more robust, flexible, encouraging and dynamic female and male coaching pathways to elite level will support our athletes to continue to fight above our weight and continue our drive to be world class in every aspect of sport delivery.

INTRODUCTION

New Zealand has long held a positive association with athletic pursuits. From Jean Stewart, one of our first Olympic female medalists, through to Lisa Carrington our current Olympic Champion, sport has been a major part of all our communities growing up as young women. In comparison, we have few examples of elite women coaches.

Concerns regarding the invisibility of women on the global coaching stage are such that alliances including the Female Coaching Network, Australia and New Zealand Women's Coaching Academy and Women in Sport Aotearoa are starting to raise the level of conversation and advocacy, internationally and now within NZ.

This report captures personal experiences from active involvement in coaching at various levels in the sports that we love, focusing on the following four codes: swimming, hockey, rowing and basketball. We have reflected on our unique environments and pathways and have linked these to selected literature.

This paper explores the following key questions:

- What is the current state of female coaching across our country and internationally?
- What are some of the challenges facing increasing women as coaches?
- What possible solutions are available to increase women's choices to coach?
- How can we create development opportunities to coach and the pathway(s) towards the top of elite coaching across sport?

We will tell our stories and those of our coaching colleagues to emphasise the challenges female coaches face and how we can be encouraged to coach. We will share a few key ideas to help encourage female coaching at elite and sub-elite level.

We want to positively present some of the emerging initiatives and showcase key areas where a shift in focus and creative approaches by both males and females involved in coaching can help change the mindset toward a more equal coaching canvas. From our experiences, we have all received a great amount of help from open-minded males in our sporting fields to help support our coaching direction. We must all work together to help shape our vision, the direction to take and how to keep moving forward with purpose.

THE GLOBAL PICTURE

Internationally, swimming celebrated that the 2014 Coach of the Year was a female – British born Mel Marshall who coaches world record holder Adam Peaty. Being a success however does not always generate universal acclaim. Online comments that haunt Mel with reference to gender stereo-typed looks and sexual persuasion seem to be acceptable in the public realm. This honour sits alongside the less glorious statistic that Mel is one of only nine female coaches of pool swimming from a wider group of 245 swimming coaches granted pool access rights at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games (FINA athletes commission internal document issued to me by a Matt Dunn who is a friend on the FINA commission). This is despite 51% of the pool-swimming field of athletes consisting of the female gender. These numbers exclude the FINA disciplines of synchronized swimming and diving: synchronized swimming is a female only contested sport at the Olympics, which is largely coached by female; diving has approximately 80% male coaches.

These kinds of discrepancies are also found in Hockey. Most of the top tier female hockey nations, including New Zealand, have male coaches across the female teams or have females in minor roles. Internationally there is only 1 top tier nation currently with a female coach in a senior position (the Netherlands)

Basketball is improving, and in the United States, there is a wider coverage of the W league of the US National Basketball League (NBL) and a huge college (university) sport for females that have games televised weekly. There are more pathways into coaching for females; however, women's remuneration is still dwarfed by the total employment packages offered to males in the NBL and college systems with Male coaches being paid in many cases 4.1 with incentives being offered and opportunities to progress and be involved at a higher level linked to these coaching roles. In a large number of cases, males are coaching female teams as well as they see it as opportunities for media success, which may lead onto bigger opportunities on the national and international stages.

Rowing coaches internationally are predominately male – even through the US College, system has a 50/50 split of male and female rowers – 85% of the lead coaching is done by men¹.

¹ Rowing coaching information accessed from: <https://www.ncaa.com/>

CURRENT STATE - FEMALE COACHES IN NZ

National research on current female elite coaching highlights some key findings. The NZ Women in Coaching Academy has done a lot of worthwhile research in accurately tracking our local numbers and looking at reasons for the low level of elite female coaching and have doggedly gone about the country doing in depth discussions with females involved in coaching to understand the local challenges and barriers that may exist here in NZ.

Much of their research backs up analysis already done by many leading researchers such as Sarah Leberman at Massey University who so passionately spearheads advocacy, research and leading developmental pathways to enhance access for female elite coaching.

There are low levels of female coaches working at a high level both within NZ and internationally. The numbers of females involved in coaching at elite level or even at sub elite level is alarmingly small. Analysis of the High Performance New Zealand Coach Accelerator Programmes² (2014 – 2018), and Olympic coaching cohorts (London 2012, Rio 2016) showed that there are alarmingly few females coaches involved. The only exception is netball, a female sport, where almost all coaches are female.

More female coaches were coaching locally, typically at a junior level. This requires a smaller time commitment, and they were more likely coaching to support their own children. Some coaches are operating at young adult/teenage level, and in the ever-increasing school sport plethora of sub-elite level. For some codes, these people were undertaking the role as dual manager/coach positions and are in many cases focused more on the logistics of game day rather than developing and educating young athletes in the next step and holistic look of the game.

In New Zealand, all of the lead professional coaching positions at elite level are filled by men³. The numbers modify a little at school level where more females have coaching roles but in rowing⁴, a school sport with increasing participation from young women, the numbers of female coaches are dwarfed by male representation at top coaching level. The Maadi Cup rowing regatta is one of the largest school events in New Zealand and yet over 85% of the coaches were Male.

There are around 300,000 coaches in New Zealand⁵, with most of these coaching at the foundation or grassroots level. At the high performance or elite level, it is estimated that there are around 500 coaches⁶. However, there is limited data available, particularly with respect to gender and ethnicity.

² High Performance Sport New Zealand, Coach Accelerator Programme, High Performance Sport NZ (2011). New Zealand high performance coaching plan 2011-2020. Accessed from: <https://www.hpsnz.org.nz/coaches/coach-accelerator-programme>

³ Leberman, S. and J. Hurst Massey University paper (2018) Women and Elite coaching in New Zealand: Challenges, Benefits and opportunities

⁴ School rowing statistics accessed from <http://www.nzsssc.org.nz/>

⁵ Sport New Zealand Community Sport, 2016a).

⁶ (Sport New Zealand Community Sport, 2015)

Many national sports organisations collect little data about coaches and do not track coaches after they have completed training courses, resulting in a lack of information on the number of women coaching in New Zealand at any level. A survey in 2013⁷ did conclude that of the 6,000 adults surveyed, men were more likely than women to be volunteer coaches, with women more likely to be parent helpers⁸.

Perhaps unconscious bias plays a role in the challenges females face. Men in decision making roles (interview panels, on project committees etc.) supporting and tending towards what they know making assessments of people and situations, influenced by their background, cultural environment and personal experiences.

Sport NZ and High Performance Sport promote the importance of the coach as a central cog in the wheel of athlete-centric support. However there is little information about how this is activated, and outside of the targeted sports in New Zealand there seems to be very little coaching resource help provided to National Sports Organisations (NSOs). It is exciting to see Sport NZ and HPSNZ directing NSOs to providing more coaching development over the next 5 years.⁹

I was reminded of this when visiting my old 'teenage' bedroom and on my dresser drawers was the sticker 'Girls can do anything' the slogan bandied about in the 1990s.

This is a stark reminder of how far we have come in many areas. We still have far to go in ensuring an equal playing field, equal opportunities and supported pathways for females in coaching.

7 (Sport New Zealand, 2015a)

8 Leberman, S and Hurst J; Women and elite coaching in New Zealand: Challenges, benefits and opportunities, Massey University, 2017

9 SportNZ, New Zealand Coaching Strategy accessed from <https://sportnz.org.nz/assets/Uploads/The-New-Zealand-Coaching-Strategy-2016.pdf>.

There are wide-ranging reasons for the current state of female coaching. These issues can be linked of course to the numbers of females who go into coaching and it would be unfair to say that this does not hinder some of that development. With only a small number of female coaches to choose from, then of course males need to fill the spots. However, a systemic issue of unequal pathways, barriers to entry, perceived inequality and the perceived 'uncoolness' of coaching for females all cause our numbers to be as low as they are.

WHAT'S HAPPENING INTERNATIONALLY?

There are increasing numbers of groups globally who are driving a new agenda that prioritises growing female coaches. This movement is gaining traction throughout countries with the resource and capability to make change. The International council for coaching excellence has committed to globally lifting the number of female coaches working at all levels of sport. The IOC gender equality review project which is a working group to support more female coaches at the games. The Female Coaching Network¹⁰ connects female coaches worldwide, although it is largely focused on Europe. The Coaching Association of Canada¹¹ have picked up the lead in understanding female coaches and the challenges they face, establishing a separate department in their organisation for courses and resources devoted to helping develop and support female coaches. They have made a clear statement of intent to have more professional female coaches, involved in decisions at the highest sporting level by 2028, and are committed to develop coaching skills as well as paid coaching positions.

The Japanese, in the build up to the Tokyo Olympics (<https://www.mofa.go.jp>) have been very proactive in pushing the fast track development of female coaches. They are supporting sports to build female capability with the intent to try and double their number of female coach representatives on the Olympic team, and then, try and double again in the next Olympic cycle. Their ultimate goal is that they will continue to focus in increasing the number of female coaches until they have parity of capability and choice selection.

The growth of professional sport internationally particularly with regard to females has increased with great speed and variety and along with that growth new opportunities to develop – The W league in USA basketball, Women's AFL has increased the coaching pathways, and created more opportunities for women. New female rugby and rugby league competitions run in parallel with their male counterparts will continue to offer new opportunities for development. These sports have an opportunity to show leadership and direction for female elite coaching pathways. The women's AFL

¹⁰ <https://femalecoachingnetwork.com/>

¹¹ Coaching Association of Canada (2017). Women in coaching. <https://www.coach.ca/women-in-coaching-s16529>

competition provides a strong example, as each team must have a female coach on staff, reflecting the sport's commitment to developing female coaches.

What are the challenges to getting more women into elite coaching?

Several challenges exist and are represented in multiple ways depending on the sport throughout NZ.

1. Perceived adoption of Male Traits to be successful.

There is substantial academic research^{12 13} confirming that many stereotypes exist around the kind of values that women need to adopt to coach. The models of successful female coaches seems to be attaching a masculinity to the way they behave. Is this because of needing to fit in around a largely male dominated set-up? Is it because the more male traits of confidence/perceived arrogance show more decisiveness therefore more authority that what you are saying is correct? This parallels the research¹⁴ that sport reflects the masculine. Women have had to fight to gain leadership roles within sport.¹⁵

Research by Merrilees¹⁶ highlights the characteristics that still dog the way female coaches are portrayed today. Many female coaches are judged by the way they look, and many successful female coaches are seen to adopt more masculine traits (aggression, confidence/arrogance, bolshiness). To balance these male traits out and feel pressure to conform to a certain female look, and feminise themselves – they pretty themselves up, grow and paint their nails.

¹² Imeson, Taylor D; Leberman, S., & Lavoij, N (2011)

¹³ Robertson, S. (2016); Lavoij, N)

¹⁴ (Fredericks & Eccles, 2005; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar & Kauer, 2004; Kerr & Marshall, 2007; King & McDonald, 2007; Pringle, 2005).

¹⁵ (Coakley et al., 2009) (Merrilees, J; Women experiences in becoming elite track and field coaches – dissertation thesis, Otago University).

¹⁶ Merrilees, J; Women experiences in becoming elite track and field coaches – dissertation thesis, Otago University

2. Coaching pathways are not flexible enough

Many coaching progression models are not encouraging for the type of lifestyle stress and load that females still largely take on. Should females wish to have children there are challenges¹⁷ around childminding, breastfeeding, and general household organisation which is still driven largely by female focus. With the all-encompassing nature of elite coaching in particular it causes high levels of stress which can result in a high level of pathway drop out.

3. Women need to be asked

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that women are reluctant to put themselves forward and will wait to be asked. There are many great women actively volunteering in sport who are coaching progressively and positively at grassroots level. They are not confident enough or feel pressured to hold back their progression against what is perceived as 'better male' coaches. It is very challenging to be actively competing against males for roles in coaching when the support for them from their fellow male coaches seems far louder and more attentive.

"The swimming pool-deck is a very male dominated work place, with conversations largely sexist or sexually driven (discussions around the attractiveness of the female coaches, bloke talk, how good do athletes look in swimsuits most often this is directed around the female athletes and always of swimmers they don't coach). As a coach I generally must adapt my conversations to be included in pool-deck banter on most occasions and generally feel that conversations are held back until I leave as they don't want to offend me. Yet I then miss out on the collegial learning you get from a shared experience."

Lack of confidence to move forward and take opportunities is commonplace amongst female coaches. This is evidenced in:

- a lack of faith in their own capability and how it matches to their male counterparts;
- an apprehension towards the commitment to coaching and how that fits into their home lifestyle;
- the feeling that they are uneducated and not skilled enough in coaching; and
- being unsure of who or where to get help from.

¹⁷ (Leberman, S., & Lavoie, N (2011))

4. Not actively recruiting women to coaching career paths

In rugby, as an example, ex-All Blacks are picked up post-retirement and slotted into professional coaching roles and pathways if they show any personal inclination towards coaching. Should NSO's be actively recruiting athletes or female volunteer coaches or managers who show aptitude towards the skill and putting them into coaching development programmes? Currently many sports operate a seemingly ad-hoc coaching entry model with no focus on targeting females who could be developed and supported to further their coaching. This is largely because there is non-existent coach education systems in a large number of sports. Of the Olympic sports in NZ only six seem to have any form of published coaching pathway, and of those five sports were employing or selecting over 90% male coaches on their pinnacle teams (Rowing, Swimming, Athletics, Hockey, Yachting). To be clear, females need to be selected on merit to coach on elite or sub elite teams, but they need opportunities to be involved in the production of elite athletes and teams.

5. Support structure to move from junior to elite

With very few NSO's providing coaching pathway systems (whether male or female) the invisibility of key steps needed to find the way to the top is a deterrent. This is further challenged by Leberman and others^{18 19 20}, that although development opportunities are taken by women, they are then leapfrogged over by male ex-athletes or coaches who seemingly get opportunities despite having committed less time.

A stronger culture of sharing and collegiality should be introduced and fostered in the New Zealand coaching environment²¹. This collegiality would be a learning opportunity that all coaches at all levels – both male and female – contribute to, develop and learn from. Coaches hold an incredible teaching and leading influence in our communities – they build confidence, faith, values and passion for the sports they work in. Female participation in sport is declining²². We could work to stem this decline if young athletes could see themselves involved in sport into later life, they could see themselves valued, sharing their experiences and being visible²³.

18 Rainham, A (2017) Research into women in sport. Women in Sport Aotearoa, New Zealand

19 <https://www.coach.ca/women-in-coaching-s16529>

20 Leberman, S and Hurst J, Imeson, Taylor D, Merrilees, J, 21 (Imeson 2016).

22 (Sport NZ, 2014, Active NZ

23 (Imeson, T, 2016)

RECOMMENDATIONS

We have developed four key recommendations that will aim to help females navigate the challenges in the system.

Marketing of female coaches

How is the coaching career pathway fostered within our sporting landscape?
Which sports showcase coaching as a professional and sustainable career pathway?
The growth of professional women's sports leagues and the media coverage of these globally is increasing as more young women are exposed to a wider varieties of sports. As these strong women's competitions are becoming more popular worldwide, more people are asking questions about the presence of female coaches. For some leagues each team must have a female coach on staff, reflecting the sport's commitment to developing female coaches.

Recommendation: *Market our outstanding female coaches for what they produce and build rather than looks and masculinity traits is the next step in this process.*

See her – Be her

There is a clear lack of female mentors for those young and not so young passionate sport educators to follow behind, emulate and build and develop skills from. In order for females to see coaching as a viable pathway they need to see females actively involved in all levels of sport. This can be at a board level, CEO, senior leadership and coaching.
Promoting female coaches and entrusting them with the development of other female coaches provides a learning experience and access to a trusted ally. It also provides learning coaches with a pathway to follow and helps those that follow to find a clear path. Those that lead from the front provide valuable lessons and experiences that allow those that follow a chance to further refine. The challenges become easier to navigate.

Recommendation: *Establish a coach mentoring programme with women coaches supporting developing women coaches.*

Female only programmes

Female only programmes²⁴ provide a more comfortable environment for females to build and refine their skills. More importantly, it also creates a vital support network of like-minded people who can help push and advocate for all female coaches in the pathway. Being able to solve issues in a group, provide robust debate, support for increasing recognition of female coaches and be actively engaged in providing development plans and contribution to pathway directions across multiple sports. One pinnacle team selection a year will have a development coach position on the team (age, junior worlds and our senior pinnacle team so in theory three positions a year) which allows them to work with a more experienced lead coach and develop their skills. There is some discussion amongst other sports around implementing a similar system. Giving one male and one female an opportunity each year to be on the Coach Accelerator Programmes, for example, starts fostering a better, more representative pathway and helps ease some of the perceived barriers to having more female coaches.

Recommendation: *Provide female only development coaching or accelerator programmes.*

Recommendation: *Give females development opportunities to gain the experiences they need to earn Olympic or pinnacle team roles.*

How can we further support the conversation and the change in NZ?

Greater promotion and selling the messages of organisations such as the Female Coaching Network, Australia and New Zealand Women's Coaching Academy, Women in Sport Aotearoa will see more engagement, greater exposure and ultimately more information available across all sports and at all levels. We are excited by changes in our own sports regarding the development of coaches. While they are not female exclusive, they are building capability of coaches to lead at the top level.

Recommendation: *Collaboration and promotion of like minded organisations to help broaden the voice and advocacy of female coaching locally and globally.*

²⁴ (Coaching association of Canada (2017). Women in coaching)

²⁵ <https://sportnz.org.nz/assets/Uploads/The-New-Zealand-Coaching-Strategy-2016.pdf>

SUMMARY

There are many stories of the challenges that female coaches face, and how it reflects our current coaching climate. This paper provides some discussion on how we can all actively contribute to create change. We want to positively promote how all coaches can work together to build more robust and representative sports.

Interviews and discussions with both males and females involved in the coaching field, highlight both the challenges but also provide opportunities for change. We believe that there is a groundswell of support.

New Zealand sport can lead in the development of equal opportunities pathways for male and female coaches, encouraging more females into coaching and being providing tailored support to suit their unique lifestyle challenges. Developing and supporting a more robust, flexible, encouraging and dynamic female and male coaching pathway to elite level will support our athletes to continue to fight above our weight and continue our drive to be world class in every aspect of Sport delivery.

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Women in Sport Aotearoa <https://www.facebook.com/WomeninSportAotearoa/>