

# Coaching + Women + Sport

Are you looking for all the answers to your questions, awaiting a ray of light to provide inspiration for coaching? Are you thinking this is going to answer all your questions to 'what women are thinking'? Or are you reluctantly reading this and a big skeptic thinking that women who play sport should just get on with it?

Look at coaching like baking a cake. If 'coaching factors' and 'key considerations' to why women play sport are the ingredients, and the finished cake is the team or individual then the following may evolve...

If you only add ¾ of the ingredients, you will come out with something that might be edible. But it's not the cake. It could be our participant, not enjoying the sport to the fullest or achieving their personal or team's goals.

If we look at all of the aspects (ingredients) of why women play sports we are more likely to produce a team or individual that is coachable. In doing so the participant is likely to enjoy their sporting experience and reach the desired outcome for participating in the first place.

## **So what are all of these “key ingredients”? What makes a successful coach in women's sport?**

This document hopes to enlighten you through the following topics, providing information that you may need or at minimum consider when coaching females in sport.

- A brief review of women's sport in NZ
- Benefits of female participation in sport?
- Coach ability factor of women

## **A brief review of women's sport in NZ**

New Zealanders like to think that we are sporty bunch, successful on the world stage in what we achieve in relation to population, funding and accessibility to major events.

While men's sport was recognised and a part of daily life pre WW2, it wasn't until WW2 that women's sport started to flourish due to increased mobility options and a huge leap in participation amongst the interprovincial competitions.

Women's Sport started to be noticed in the public arena through significant input from sports journalist Dot Simons as women started to provide standout results both nationally and internationally.

Bowls and marching became hugely popular and sports matches on the International scene started to appear i.e. hockey & basketball. The darling of athletics, Yvette Williams, who won gold in the long jump at the Helsinki Olympics back in 1952 become a household name.

It is great to see the profile of women's sport make leaps and bounds in terms of participation and recognition via the media, but is women's sport as rosy as we perceive?



Yvette Williams

At the 2004 Athens Olympics, Pirkko Markula undertook research (A whole other ball game) showing men's sport still gained more media attention than women's sport. Research concluded in NZ showed similar results even though NZ had stellar performances from women such as Sarah Ulmer, Valerie Adams, and the Ever-Swindell twins.

However...In 2008, the Beijing Summer Olympics boasted an increase in female participation. This may have been due to the promotion of women's sports, one of the main mission statements of the IOC.



Valerie Adams

The success and growing participation in women's sport started to raise questions around the various coaching styles and if there is any difference between coaching women and men, boys and girls.

Should coaches re-evaluate the methods and approaches they are using? Is there more than just on field issues that coaches need to consider when coaching females to get the most out of their athletes? Or do coaches need to understand that not all participants in sport solely want to win?

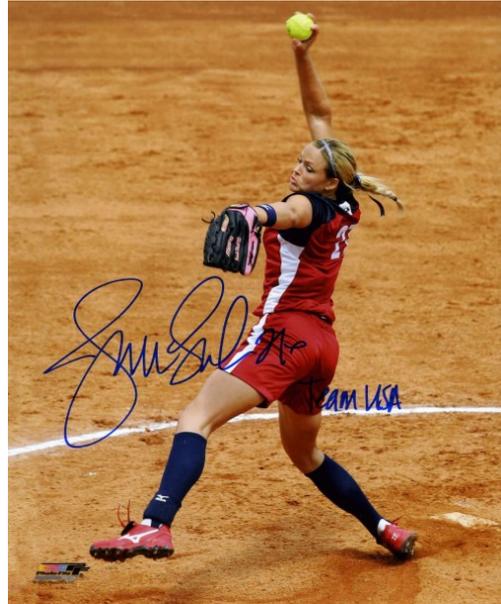
### **Benefits of female participation in sport?**

"Girls playing sports is not about winning gold medals. It's about self-esteem, learning to compete and learning how hard you have to work in order to achieve your goals."

*Jackie Joyner-Kersey, member of the International Women's Sports Hall of Fame and three-time Olympic gold medalist in track and field*

Below are some thoughts that you as a coach may consider as to why females benefit through sport. I know what some of you are thinking...if the benefits aren't winning, why do we have goals, runs we count, lines we need to cross in order to score, why is there a score? Fair questions; however all that is being suggested, is that winning isn't the only benefit for females participating in sport.

- Exercise provides females a boost required for work or school? Exercise is proven to boost memory, learning capabilities and concentration.
- Sport requires teamwork to reach goals (whether it's to win, or gain or defend points), to work together with fellow team mates, coaches, trainers etc. These teamwork skills are transferrable into our everyday life.
- Health benefits are a definite draw card including fitness levels, weight loss, and decreased risks of breast cancer and other medical issues which could cause problems later in life.
- The big C...Confidence. Self confidence generally increases as a result of participating with others. The spinoff is a more self confident person in social settings.
- Sport can be a major mood lifter. Exercise helps increase endorphins which are the chemicals in our brain that make us happier. Exercise is more likely to decrease stress levels and/or depression and generally lift the mood.



Jenny Finch, Team USA

“An athlete gains so much knowledge by just participating in a sport. Focus, discipline, hard work, goal setting and, of course, the thrill of finally achieving your goals. These are all lessons in life.” *Kristi Yamaguchi, world champion figure skater*

### **Coach ability factor of women?**

"I don't think there's a prescription, other than common sense"

*Ben Smith, directed the US women's ice hockey team to medals at the last three Olympics.*

Sure, men are from Mars and women are from Venus but when it comes to coaching the two sexes, there is little in it. Let's just say, "Most of the time our coach can sit on Saturn and effectively coach both genders".

Ok, so some coaches (whether they be male or female coaches) can relate to male players better than female players and vice versa. It comes down to the coach's personality and how they communicate or address the group of players along with their coaching style.

Females do have a tendency to take a coaches analysis or criticism more personally than their male counterparts. It's not always the case, but often females are more sensitive to negative comments directed at them and will over think those comments. Often when sportsmen are given negative feedback from their coach, they will analyse and attempt to correct the fault without taking the negative comment to heart.

We see this particularly in male sport. How often is there an altercation during a rugby game and afterwards those same players will share a beer and a laugh. However, if that was to happen in a women's game there would be a different outcome. Females tend to take the situation personally and hold a grudge against their opponent rather than a heated, competitive moment that doesn't matter off the field. Of course this doesn't apply to all females, and is a rather 'generalised' statement.

However, there are some positives that may prove apparent when coaching women;

- Women are more prepared to try new things, especially if it makes them perform better as an individual or team.
- Girls tend to have a greater respect for the coach, which has positive spin offs e.g. more appreciative of good coaching and as a result a higher work ethic.
- Positive reinforcement or constructive criticism is received better than negative comments from coaches.

Of course there are subtle differences in coaching which can be substantial to a coach's approach;

- As a coach, look at how you provide information to the athlete based upon the physical dimensions of the athlete. Does it differ when you coach male or female?
- An "in your face" style is likely to be shut down by women. Not all coaches have this form of approach to coaching but those that do are likely to persevere with it.

"A coach is someone who can give correction without causing resentment". *John Wooden, basketball coach*