

**USTA
COACHING**

THE **TUCKER
CENTER** 
for Research on Girls & Women in Sport

USTA WOMEN IN COACHING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following list includes action items, more fully developed in the full report with examples and actions steps, for improving the sport coaching occupational landscape and changing the system for women coaches.

- **Change From The Top**
- **Ask Women**
- **Develop & Implement Parent-Coach Policies**
- **Involve Men**
- **Design Spaces For Her**
- **Provide Inclusive Access**
- **Allow Uniform Choice**
- **Foster An Empowering Work-Life Culture**
- **Adhere To Pay Equity**
- **Invest In Her**
- **Engage Girls And Women Early And Often**
- **Hold Women-Focused, Women-Led Programming**
- **Fund A National Media Campaign**
- **Sources And Additional Resources**

For more information about USTA Coaching,
contact Megan Rose at megan.rose@usta.com

For information about this report or other research,
contact Nicole M. LaVoi, PhD at nmlavoi@umn.edu

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CHANGE FROM THE TOP

Mandate accountability and leadership commitment to gender equity, recognizing that senior leaders set the standard and control the systems necessary for genuine, organization-wide change.



ASK WOMEN

Consult current and former women coaches to understand barriers and inform policy decisions.



PICK ONE

Focus on a single, high-impact barrier for a year to ensure measurable progress and full implementation.



DEVELOP & IMPLEMENT PARENT-COACH POLICIES

Establish supportive and flexible policies that address the challenges of balancing coaching with parenthood and family life.



INVOLVE MEN

Engage male coaches and administrators as sponsors, allies and advocates in achieving gender equity.



DESIGN SPACES FOR HER

Ensure equal quality and proximity in all facilities, ensuring women's spaces offer safety, convenience, accessibility, and privacy compared to existing standards.



PROVIDE INCLUSIVE ACCESS

Codify in policy that women coaches are fully included in critical decision-making and professional conversations, without bias or exclusion.



ALLOW UNIFORM CHOICE

Offer functional and comfortable uniform options that respect diverse body types, identities, and cultural needs.



FOSTER AN EMPOWERING WORK-LIFE CULTURE

Cultivate a flexible, supportive, and respectful work environment that prioritizes well-being over "always-on" availability.



ADHERE TO PAY EQUITY BEST PRACTICES

Commit to and enforce industry-leading financial standards and investment strategies to ensure zero pay disparity and equitable access to career advancement resources for all women coaches.



INVEST IN HER

Allocate dedicated funds for women-specific professional development, networking, and leadership training.



ENGAGE GIRLS AND WOMEN EARLY AND OFTEN

Create pipelines that introduce and support girls and young women in coaching roles from youth to professional levels.



HOLD WOMEN-FOCUSED, WOMEN-LED PROGRAMMING

Prioritize development programs designed by and for women.



FUND A NATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Launch a targeted campaign to showcase successful women coaches and normalize women's leadership in sport.



ABOUT THIS REPORT

On August 26, 2025, USTA Coaching invited a group of high-profile professional sport coaches from across a variety of sports to the US Open to discuss insights, experiences, and strategies that would help advance women in sport coaching. The purpose of this report includes actionable recommendations and a strategic blueprint for advancing women in coaching within professional sport organizations, that reflect the conversation and are informed by existing research.

The **Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport** at the University of Minnesota is the first interdisciplinary research center, thought leader and catalyst of systems change for girls and women in sport and physical activity in the world.

The mission of USTA Coaching is to educate and serve tennis coaches to create inspiring tennis experiences for players of all levels.

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All report inquiries please email Nicole M. LaVoi, PhD, Director of the Tucker Center, nmlavoi@umn.edu



3 KEY POINTS



FROM THE TOP

Valuing women must come from the top. Leaders set the standard, control the systems, and hold the power to enforce genuine, organization-wide accountability. Leaders who set inclusive policy, allocate resources, and become sponsors and allies model what is valued.



CHANGE THE CULTURE

Changing gender bias is fundamentally about changing the culture to where women are valued, supported, seen, heard, paid equally, and feel like they belong.



LISTEN TO WOMEN

Listening to women is important because their lived experiences related to space, policies, barriers, support and uniforms directly expose the systemic gender bias embedded in the organizational culture.

INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR THIS REPORT

Hiring women sport coaches is good business. Today's workforce, particularly younger generations, increasingly prioritize working for companies with strong ethical values, including diversity and inclusion. Companies that authentically commit to hiring women report higher employee engagement, lower turnover rates, and increased productivity and collective intelligence. More women as leaders provides diversity of thought and a wider range of perspectives and experiences which is a key driver of innovation. When employees feel that their company is an agent for positive change, their loyalty and motivation grow, which is a clear business win. For sport organizations who embrace an inclusive lens throughout all business processes, it can lead to increased participation, better understanding of the customer, and increased membership, brand loyalty, sales and viewership—a case study in action is the WNBA. This forward-thinking approach makes organizations more resilient in a rapidly changing socially-aware world.

Women sport coaches in almost every sport, at every level around the globe are underrepresented, marginalized, and face numerous barriers, and few supports, to entering and staying in coaching. The numerous and multilevel barriers women sport coaches face are well documented at every level of the system from societal (e.g, gender bias, gender stereotypes, homophobia, ageism), to organizational (e.g., male dominated culture, wage inequality, lack of upward mobility), to interpersonal (e.g., lack of access to mentorship/sponsorship, athlete preference for male coaches, Good 'Ole Boys network; See Figure 1. on page 7). Individual level barriers women sport coaches face are often false narratives layered in gender bias, lack empirical backing, and blame women for their occupational experiences. Such narratives include 'women lack skills and competence', 'women choose not to coach', 'women don't apply', 'women would rather raise a family, than coach' all which place the underrepresentation of women, on women, and fail to challenge the status quo of a system which privileges men (See Table 1 on next page).



Table 1. Blame the Women Narratives: Common Perceptions for the Underrepresentation of Women Coaches

Source: LaVoi, N. M. (2016). *Why women sport coaches matter*. In N. M. LaVoi (2016), *Women in Sport Coaching*. Routledge.

Women don't apply for open positions	Women lack the experience
Women choose other careers	Women are too "whiny" and demand resources
The quality of women in the labor pool is thin and weak	Women don't support each other and "eat their own"
Women aren't as interested in coaching as men	Women don't have a strong network or an "old girls' club"
Women don't want to or are less willing than men to move/uproot their families for a job	Women burnout and leave coaching sooner than males
Women "opt out" of coaching to start families	Women think they need to be overqualified to apply
Women with children have less time to devote to coaching	Women don't perceive coaching as a viable career pathway
Women with children are less committed	Women coaches are too "relational" (i.e., qualities that are devalued and naturalized as feminine)
Women lack the knowledge and expertise	Female athletes prefer male coaches
Women don't "lean in" and take responsibility for own careers	Women don't have thick skin and can't take the pressure
Women aren't confident or assertive enough	





When women are blamed, individuals in positions of power do not have to take accountability or strive to change the system to one where women feel safe, valued, and supported. For example, ‘women don’t apply’ is not only an individual choice. The woman’s choice to ‘not apply’ is based on factors such as: her perception she won’t be supported once hired, the culture of the organization, the structure of leadership, identities of the leadership, and the fact that people hire people like themselves. Given that most individuals in power in sport are men, it is not surprising that male dominance persists despite 50+ years of women’s success in sport due to Title IX and a large potential pool of applicants. In addition, at most levels of sport coaching, the person hired is someone that is known, recommended, or in the leader’s network... not because they merely applied. Simply put, women don’t apply because they know from experience they do not have a legitimate chance to be considered. Based on data, it is not that women lack skills, confidence or motivation to coach, they simply are not given or provided the opportunities to do so, or the support needed to thrive and survive once hired.

If change is to occur—meaning the percentage and number of women who coach increases—targeted, evidence-informed systemwide strategies have to be developed, committed to, and resourced—from the top. Developing strategies that take into account a variety of complex factors across the multilevel system is challenging work. A ‘one size fits all’ approach, will be insufficient and unsuccessful.

Given that most individuals in power in sport are men, it is not surprising that male dominance persists despite 50+ years of women’s success in sport due to Title IX and a large potential pool of applicants.

The following section provides some **Targets of Opportunity**, rational, actionable items, and examples of action where they exist.



CHANGE FROM THE TOP

Strategic initiatives to recruit, hire and retain women coaches must come from the top. If top-level leadership is not completely bought in, interest is inauthentic, or under-resourced, efforts will fail. Women-focused initiatives must be clearly and consistently communicated from the top down and within every vertical of communication.

ACTION: Hold organizational (i.e., NGBs) decision makers accountable by publishing an annual report card, that gives grades A through F, for the percentage of women coaches in their organization. The Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport has for the past 13 years released the annual [Women in College Coaching Report Card](#), that has been very effective in increasing the percentage of women head coaches of women's teams.

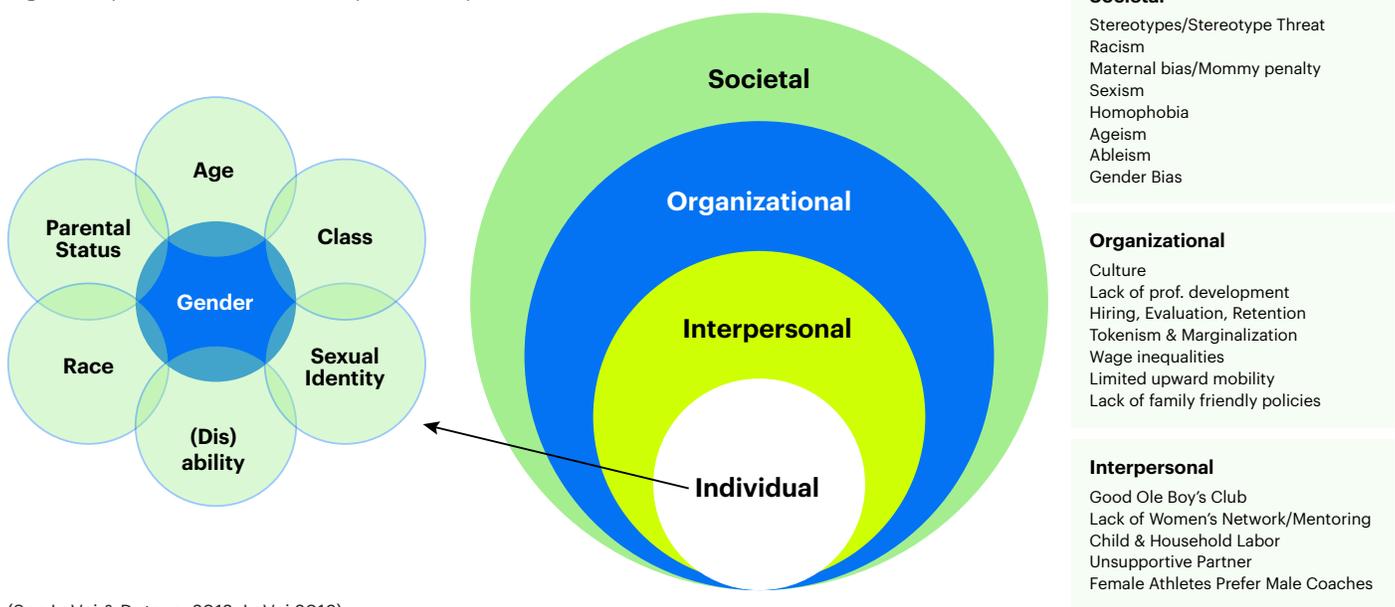


ASK WOMEN

Strategic initiatives to recruit, hire and retain women coaches must involve the voices of women. Women who are working in the system can provide possible solutions, but are rarely asked.

ACTION: Employ the **ABC Model**: **A**sk women for solutions. **B**elieve them. **C**hange.
 Questions may include: How are you doing? Are you satisfied working here? (why-why not). What is top of mind right now? How can I better support you? What issues can I help you with? What would help you be more successful? What professional development opportunities do you need? How can we recruit other women in our community to coach? What are your thoughts on growing girls' participation?

Figure 1. Systemic Barriers Faced by Women Sport Coaches



(See LaVoi & Dutove, 2012; LaVoi 2016)



PICK ONE.

The numerous barriers women sport coaches report and experience cannot be solved all at once.

ACTION: Pick 1-2 barriers from Figure 1, and develop a program, initiative or allocate resources to reduce or eliminate the barrier. Just start. Track and evaluate efficacy.



DEVELOP & IMPLEMENT PARENT-COACH POLICIES

ACTION: Create a culture and policies that support mother-coaches.

A more transformative approach proactively supports parent-coaches.

- Have clear parent-coach policies in place (i.e., parental leave, travel)
- Provide funding for a caretaker to travel
- Allow family members on charter/team flights
- Provide on-site childcare
- Provide funding for partner/caretaker to travel to watch the child/children why mother is coaching
- Allow parent-coach to bring baby/children to practice
- Allow parent-coach to bring their baby on team trips especially when nursing
- Include money for daycare and/or family travel in contract
- Provide a clearly marked, well-designed, conveniently located lactation room



INVOLVE MEN

Strategic initiatives to recruit, hire and retain women coaches must include, at minimum, one male champion. Sports culture has historically been male dominated, which can lead to environments where women feel unheard, marginalized or unsafe. Male allies are uniquely positioned to challenge this culture from within. Many men are supportive of gender equity but may not fully understand the challenges women face or how they can help. Allyship programs provide a structured environment to educate men on topics like unconscious bias and systemic inequality. Better yet, a sponsor uses his influence and network to advocate for a woman's career advancement, promotions, and visibility. When men confront biased behavior, they are not penalized. This moves them from passive supporters to active agents of change.





ACTION: Develop a male allyship/sponsorship program in sport (sport agnostic or sport specific) that invites men to be part of the solution.

ACTION: Organizations should identify male allies and sponsors and amplify their voices, as men can directly challenge systemic biases and accelerate the pace of change.

ACTION: Hold an annual event where vetted prospective women coaches have the opportunity to develop relationships and network with owners, front office staff, the coaching staff and other key individuals in positions of power. As one coach said, “Just put them in the damn room!,” it is that simple.

EXAMPLE: The Adidas Allyship Toolkit: Adidas created a toolkit to address gender-based violence and promote healthy masculinities within the running community.

EXAMPLE: NFL Women’s Forum is a proactive and strategic initiative that applies the principles of evidence-based business rationale—that diversity in leadership and talent leads to a stronger, more innovative, and more successful organization—to the world of professional football. It directly addresses the “inner circles” issue that often prevents women from getting a foot in the door and creates a visible, intentional pathway for their professional advancement. Often held in conjunction with the NFL Scouting Combine, is a multi-day program that connects women who are working in or aspire to work in football with owners, general managers, head coaches, and other high-level executives from the NFL and college programs.



DESIGN SPACES FOR HER

Many sport spaces, and nearly all professional men’s sport spaces do not account for women staff and were not designed with the needs, health, wellbeing and success of women in mind. A professional sports organization is a business, and its staff—from coaches to trainers to administrative leaders—are its most valuable asset. The lack of proper facilities, such as gender-specific locker rooms, private restrooms, and lactation spaces, can be a major deterrent for talented women considering a job. When women on staff do not feel valued or accommodated, they are more likely to leave. Investing in an inclusive facility sends a clear message that the organization is committed to providing a respectful and equitable work environment, making it more competitive in attracting and retaining the best talent.

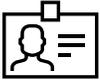
Spaces for women should provide an equal experience, and not be lesser in quality, convenience, accessibility, privacy, and proximity to the team and coaching functions. One coach reported, “I can’t pee at halftime!” She doesn’t hydrate during games because at half time she can’t have a bio-break because the women’s restroom is too far away and she has duties and obligations at half time. She reported experiencing migraines due to dehydration, not to mention research clearly demonstrates physical and cognitive functions decline due to dehydration. Her male colleagues are not impacted by a facility issue that limits her ability to be effective.

ACTION: Proactively design, transform or retrofit spaces and facilities for women. Employ the ABC Model outlined in page 9. Ask women what they need. Ask women for actionable suggestions.

EXAMPLE: Design a coach locker room to accommodate all coaches. Perhaps there are two separate and private gender-specific showers and bathroom spaces, and a common space where all coaches gather to talk, debrief, plan, and relax together.

ACTION: Incentivize owners of professional leagues to upgrade and make facilities gender inclusive. A Sport Space Gender Report Card could be designed for accountability or to celebrate the ‘best in class’ facilities.





PROVIDE INCLUSIVE ACCESS

ACTION: Develop and implement expectations of behavior (pre-during-postgame) that includes all coaches, and does not limit women's ability to access or be a part of key conversations.

EXAMPLE: We don't talk about the game, strategy or players without everyone in the room (This eliminates 'shower or locker room' talk that excludes women coaches). One coach would send in a male colleague 'scout' to listen in on male colleagues post-game conversations, and reported back so she was in the know.

EXAMPLE: All coaches and staff will enter team spaces at the same time. Designate a 15mn Freeze after practice or competitions where only athletes are in the locker room, so that all staff enter simultaneously.

EXAMPLE: Establish a "No Meeting after 7 PM" Rule: This is not about being overly rigid, but about respecting work-life balance. Women coaches, who often have greater household and family responsibilities, are disproportionately affected by late-night meetings. By establishing an expectation that all essential discussions happen during business hours, you ensure that no one is excluded due to personal obligations.

EXAMPLE: Ensure that social events, networking and informal conversations are accessible to everyone, not just those who can attend specific, exclusive time sensitive events. Rotate when and where events are held (i.e., team lunches, coffee meetings, family-friendly picnics, bar, golf course). If coaches only meet for dinner, single parents, or women with childcare or eldercare obligations may not be able to attend.





ALLOW UNIFORM CHOICE

Offering uniform choices demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and respect for diverse body types.

It shows that the organization values its women coaches and is willing to invest in their well-being and professional appearance. An ill-fitting uniform can undermine a coach's professional image and presence. When a woman coach is forced to wear a uniform that's too baggy, too tight, or simply not designed for her body type, it can send a subtle message of being an afterthought or not fully valued. Conversely, a well-fitting, professionally designed uniform reinforces her authority and expertise, signaling to athletes, parents, fans, officials, and colleagues that she is a respected professional—this is especially important in sports where women coaches are still underrepresented. To quote a coach, “We don't put a man in a women's XXL, so why is it okay to put a woman in a man's small?”

ACTION: Provide uniform/professional clothing options for women to choose from so they feel on brand, comfortable and confident.



FOSTER AN EMPOWERING WORK-LIFE CULTURE

To be effective, the culture must normalize and reward flexibility. The culture of sport coaching is very

Unbalanced. Sports coaching, particularly at higher levels, is a profession that often lacks work-life balance due to its demanding, non-traditional hours. This is a well-documented issue supported by research that highlights coaches work far beyond the typical 40-hour workweek. Some coaches reported working an average of 60 to 80 hours per week, with some working even more during their competitive seasons. These hours are not confined to a regular schedule, as they include early morning practices, late-night games, extensive travel from youth to professional levels for games, tournaments, recruiting trips, professional development, and weekend events. This unpredictable nature makes it difficult for coaches to plan personal or family time. Some suggestions include:

ACTION: Create a culture of work-life balance.

Research consistently shows that fostering work-family balance is not a perk but a critical business strategy that benefits both employees and organizations. Work-family balance is important to job satisfaction, wellbeing and retention. A culture that values “face time” over outcomes or rewards or glorifies working long hours (e.g., sleeping in your office), regardless of productivity, will undermine any work-life balance initiatives.

Flexibility:

This is the most sought-after benefit. Flexible hours, remote work options, and compressed work weeks allow coaches to better manage personal responsibilities like childcare, eldercare, or appointments without compromising their work. One coach shared that she turned down high-visibility promotion because she wanted to spend time with her dying grandfather. The organization could have offered her a family-leave to retain her talent. Instead she quit.

Demand & Model Work-Life Balance:

One coach shared he told his staff that they would be fired if they missed one of their kid’s events.

Communication Boundaries:

Policies that discourage after-hours communication and promote the idea that employees are not expected to be “on” 24/7 creates balanced boundaries. That includes boundaries with coach-athlete communication.





ADHERE TO PAY EQUITY

Despite the false, persistent, blame the women narrative that women will not move their family to take a new coaching position, data indicates the number one reason women collegiate coaches turn down job offers is: insufficient pay.

Women tennis coaches who perceive insufficient support (i.e. limited, unfair, or unequal pay, no benefits, no professional development or mentorship) and a male culture (i.e., men are paid more for the same job, given the best positions) report less job satisfaction and higher intention to leave their current job within 12 months. Occupational turnover is costly, undermines continuity for culture and athlete experience, and detracts from growth. If talent leaves, the product suffers.

ACTION: Employ pay transparency and publish pay data. One coach said women in her sport created a spreadsheet that was shared when other women were negotiating salary and benefits.

ACTION: Employ a pay equity audit every 2-3 years—a systematic and data-driven analysis of an organization’s compensation structure to identify and correct pay disparities

ACTION: Create a Developmental Fund that provides support, grants, scholarships or resources for women to earn sport licenses and attend professional development opportunities.



INVEST IN HER

Investing in strengthening the sport coaching pipeline for women is good for business as it directly supports the rapid commercial growth of women’s sports, enhances brand image through association with equity, and supplies a valuable pool of women leaders to the entire sports ecosystem. Investment in women’s sport, athletes, and teams is growing exponentially, but similar investment in women sport coaches is lagging behind.

ACTION: Recruit private equity and for-profit companies to invest in supporting strategic initiatives and programming for women sport coaches.

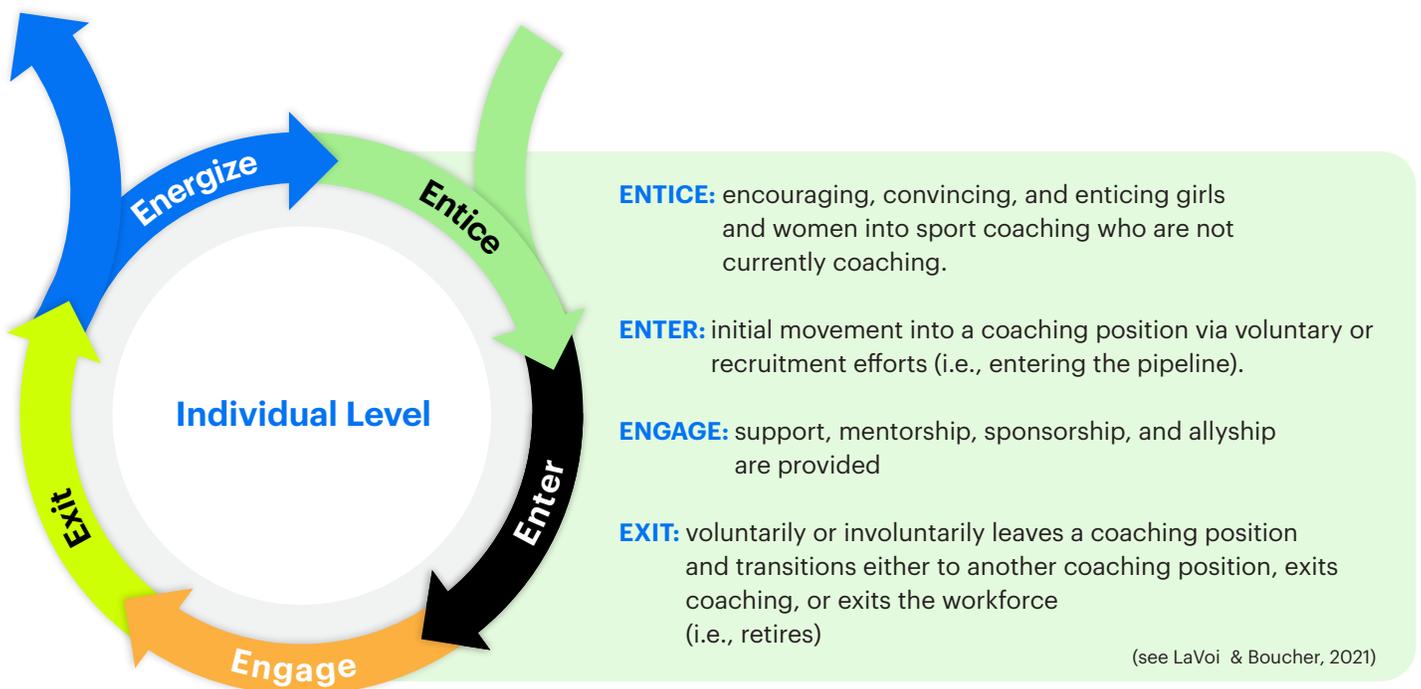


ENGAGE GIRLS AND WOMEN EARLY AND OFTEN

Engage current—and former—athletes at every level from grassroots to high performance.

How do we get former and current athletes, adolescent girls and young women, mothers, retiring/retired professional female athletes, encore career women coaches, recreational adult league players, and grandmothers interested in sport coaching? Very little research exists but programs that target a specific group, are starting to be developed to fill this gap.

See Figure 2 (below) for a model that helps inform development of strategic initiatives across the stages of career progression for coaches. Strategic initiatives must meet women coaches at the stage they are at! A young woman who has never coached is different from a retiring professional athlete is different from a mother-coach. Similarly, a volunteer coach is different from a head coach who makes her career and living from sport coaching.



ACTION: Pick a demographic group as a growth target to develop programming, strategies and support for that specific group across the stages of career progression. Start with ABC Model...ASK them what programs and support they need take on role as coach, BELIEVE THEM, CHANGE.

EXAMPLE: The Women Basketball Coaches Association’s “So You Want to Be a Coach” program is a professional development initiative for women collegiate basketball players interested in a coaching career, that provides education, networking, and skills enhancement at the annual WBCA Convention.

EXAMPLE: Intercollegiate Women’s Lacrosse Coaches Association (IWLCA) ASPIRE Program, develops assistant coaches by cohort.

Researchers asked former collegiate women athletes who are mothers for suggestions on how to recruit more women into youth sport coaching. [A full paper on what they learned can be found here.](#)

ACTION: One simple, cost-effective strategy is to simply ask her and/or invite her to think about or consider coaching. Sport leaders can leverage women and those with social and athletic capital (e.g., elite female athletes, coaches) to perform ‘The Ask’ which provides the social encouragement and motivational direction toward a goal, and positively influences self-efficacy and outcome expectations about the consequences of engagement in coaching. Other strategies included offering a co-coaching option, offering women-only, women-lead coach development sessions, appealing to altruism, and being a role model and mother-to-coach skills translation and more.

ACTION: Communities need collaboration to create localized, grassroots strategies that inspire and encourage more women to become youth and developmental level sport coaches, so coaches reflect and look like the athletes they coach. Same identity role models matter, and women coaches are no exception.



HOLD WOMEN-FOCUSED, WOMEN-LED PROGRAMMING

Based on the data women want educational and networking spaces that are women-focused and delivered by women. Such spaces create psychological safety allowing for open and honest conversations about experiences with sexism, microaggressions, and other forms of discrimination.

ACTION: Develop, resource and sustain women-focused, women-lead spaces, groups, events, networks, and educational opportunities.

ACTION: Every professional league, NGB, and coaching association has the opportunity to establish a talent development program specifically for women, and retiring women-identifying athletes who want to coach.



EXAMPLE: The NFL Women’s Forum (est. 2018,) is designed to increase the participation of women in football, particularly in coaching, scouting, and other front-office roles.

EXAMPLE: The WTA Coach Inclusion Program (est. 2022) aims to break down barriers and provide opportunities for women looking to enter coaching at the professional level.

EXAMPLE: The LPGA’s Teacher Education Program (TEP) provides comprehensive training for those aspiring to become certified LPGA Professionals.

EXAMPLE: WeCOACH holds the annual in person Women Coaches Academy dedicated to recruiting, advancing, and retaining women coaches through professional growth & leadership development.



FUND A NATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

A coordinated, collaborative national media campaign is needed to increase awareness, and market and promote sport coaching to engage women of all ages. Coaching is a ‘real job’ and numerous career pathways exist, but many women and girls don’t perceive that to be true. For example, within tennis data a large majority of women tennis coaches initially entered coaching through summer recreational programs. Research and insights are needed to determine which appeals entice and engage different audiences of women to enter coaching (e.g., high school girls, college women athletes, retired professional athletes, mothers, grandmothers, recreational players, women of color).

ACTION: Clearly, boldly and consistently communicate women sport coaches matter and that coaching is a viable career pathway.

A national media campaign can be initiated with investment and partnerships between brands, sport properties, NGBs, and industry partners to target and entice different demographic groups of women into coaching. A national media campaign would help entice and create awareness that sport coaching is a viable career endeavor.

EXAMPLE: In an effort to increase the number of women in the coaching profession and help fill the pipeline, the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport created the #SheCanCoach® project. SHECANCOACH® posters were developed from our research. We interviewed women and mother-coaches on how to get more women involved in coaching. We used their responses to develop the #SheCanCoach® campaign. [Download our free posters.](#)

If you play(ed), coach.

SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you would like to dive deeper, here are some evidence-informed resources about women in sport coaching.

- Figure 1 Source: LaVoi, N. M., & Dutove, J. K. (2012). Barriers and supports for female coaches: An ecological model. *Sports Coaching Review*, 1(1), 17-37.
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Please direct all inquiries to:

Nicole M. LaVoi, PhD

Director, The Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport

School of Kinesiology, University of Minnesota

nmlavoi@umn.edu