

Mother-Coach Generated Strategies for Increasing Female Coaches in Youth Sport

ABSTRACT

It is estimated that less than 20% of youth sport coaches are female. The scarcity of female coaches within interscholastic and collegiate sport is well documented, but little research has examined this phenomena at the youth level. Given that female participation in sports across competitive levels is at an all time high it is disconcerting that more females are not entering the ranks of youth sport coaching. The current potential coaching pool includes Post-Title IX women and former female collegiate athletes who clearly have vast experiences and expertise to offer youth athletes, but are failing to enter the coaching ranks in proportion to their sport participation. While the role of the “team mom” is documented, voices of mother-coaches are scarce in the youth sport literature. Female coaches provide a rich opportunity to influence social change, challenge stereotypical beliefs pertaining to gender and leadership, and provide visible, active role models for children and youth—especially for girls.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To use the voices of mother-coaches to generate strategies to help recruit and retain females coaches in youth sport.

METHODS

Participants:

Four different groups of mothers ($N=16$) participated in the research: 1) mothers who coached their own children in soccer and had collegiate athletic experience in soccer ($N=5$), 2) mothers who coached their own children in soccer and were not collegiate athletes ($N=5$), 3) collegiate athletes who do not coach their children in soccer ($N=1$) and, 4) non-collegiate athletes who do not coach their children in soccer ($N=5$). Mothers ranged in age from 39-51, with an average age of 42.6 ($SD=3.5$). All but one participant, was White/Caucasian. Educational backgrounds varied from graduate ($N=7$), Bachelor ($N=7$), and Associate degrees ($N=1$), to some college credit ($N=1$). Some women worked full-time ($N=11$), others worked part-time ($N=2$), and some women identified as stay-at-home moms ($N=3$).

Measures:

The interview guide was developed specifically for mothers in youth sports and encompassed a variety of questions related to barriers to coaching, fears about coaching one's own children, and negative aspects to coaching one's own children, in addition to possible solutions that could be employed to help women overcome perceived barriers, fears and costs.



RESULTS

STRATEGIES	QUOTES FROM MOTHER-COACHES
ASK & INVITE WOMEN	“A lot of women are hesitant to coach because they think they’re not competent, but if you asked, just asked them...And people do it and you know they’re happy to do it if you just give them a little bit of confidence that you think they can do it”
INCLUDE FEMALE MENTORSHIP	“Do a mentorship program, where have you know, a more experienced female coach mentor the younger coaches”
INCLUDE CO-COACHING OPTION	“Again support I think is the main key, you know that you would have, that there would be other coaches that could step in if you needed to be home so that they would be flexible”
OFFER ALL-FEMALE COACHING CLINICS	“I think it would be beneficial if we had just mothers-only coaching clinics. I mean if a woman ran it, it would just be you know, teaching them that, yes you have the confidence, we have the confidence in you, you can do this...it is less intimidating if the men aren’t there”
PROMOTE EARLY INVOLVEMENT	“It might be that it’s the younger ages you start coaching the more inclined you are coaching your children. I think you would have some statistics, because the girls that coach when they are young, did camps, worked camps are going to be more inclined to coach their kids later”
HIGHLIGHT MOTHER SKILLS TRANSLATE	“I’m a mom while I coach and I use mom charm” “I would say um, management, mom’s who are managing their homes and etc...can usually manage a team.”
APPEAL TO ALTRUISM	“It’s good for my child and other children to see female role models, and good for connecting and serving the community”
REDUCE TIME COMMITMENT	“My girls were in a clinic and it was an hour and a half long. That’s a lot of time! They should make it shorter”
MAKE IT EASY	“You know distance was a problem...I coached about 20 miles from where I lived, so had I been in a community where I live I think that makes a big difference... had it been in my own community, I maybe could have pulled it off”, “offer childcare”

SUMMARY

The goal of this research was to devise solutions and work together with youth sport organizations to recruit mother-coaches—thereby hopefully increasing the number of women coaching in youth sports. Mother-coaches identified many creative ways to achieve this goal. Their voices compliment the work of Michael Messner (*Its All For the Kids: Gender, Families, and Youth Sports*, 2009) who argues that both individual and organizational strategies are needed in order for more females to successfully enter and remain in youth coaching. In order for the potential of youth sport to be realized in creating social change and challenging stereotypical beliefs of children and their families pertaining to gender, power, and leadership, females must be seen *in equal numbers* in all positions of power within one of our most important social institutions—youth sport. Much work remains in order for gender equity in youth sport leadership to be achieved.

