

Hockey Coaches

Coach Us Like Men and Treat Us Like Women

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Girl's hockey in Texas, and all over the United States for that matter, is still flying under the radar of most people. Though the growth in the popularity of the sport has been exponential even in the past 5-7 years many when they hear about *girls* hockey say something like, "Really, girls play hockey?" or, "Oh, I didn't know there was college hockey for girls too." Yes, for us involved in the sport this sounds silly, but I'd be willing to bet we all have had an encounter like this, and it definitely won't be the last.

In most, or all, of my posts I find a way to relate the game of hockey to life, because hockey provides for everyone a chance to learn valuable lessons at a young age that can help later in life. Yet, for girls, I believe some lessons dig a little deeper.

Allow me to explain, Mia Hamm, a great athlete and leader for team USA's Olympic soccer team once said, "Coach us like men and treat us like women." Girls and women are constantly seeking to find a balance between being seen as a woman, but not having that held against them. Most of us want to be seen for the potential we have, and not just our gender. Though we are proud we are women, we truly want to be looked at as a person who has power, potential, and is capable of making an impact. Hockey gives young girls first hand experience at dealing with this ever-teetering balance.

Many girls growing up in small towns, or areas where girl's hockey isn't so common, often have to buckle their helmets and step onto the ice with the boys, and with a lot more to prove. We all would like to believe that the playing field is equal, that it really doesn't matter to young players, their parents, and coaches if there is a girl on the ice with the boys, but I think we know the truth. Some girls may have to work a little bit harder and give a little bit more in order to be seen as the hockey player they want to be. This lesson can either be incredibly helpful, or incredibly hurtful. However, it's a lesson nonetheless, and one that I am committed to helping my young players see.

Here in Texas we don't have any other all girls teams to play so we play against boys teams. At first some teams are skeptical to schedule games against our U14 team, but when they do, before we step on the ice I remind the girls to see the bigger picture. To prove to themselves, and everyone else in the rink that they will be competitive no matter who they are playing against, to show that it isn't a "girl's team" versus a "boy's team," but two hockey teams competing against each other. You may think asking 13 and 14 year olds to see the bigger picture is a lost cause, but it's really not, not for girls. These girls have chosen hockey for a reason, because it started as something unknown, because it's about hard work, because it's about their team, because it gives them a challenge and intrigues them, and more importantly because being defined as a *hockey player* is something that makes them so proud.

Young girls don't just want to be told what to do in a drill, they constantly want to know *why* they are doing the specific drill. And for a coach, who once was that young girl asking tons of questions, it's the greatest thing to be apart of. This is the perfect age to help them foster confidence in themselves any way possible. They need to be able to count on each other as a team, and also learn to trust themselves, and believe in what they personally can accomplish. Because if they can first learn these lessons within the walls of the rink, they will be more willing to have confidence in themselves and their potential when they take their gear off and head out into the world.

They really do need to be *coached like men, but treated like women*. They want to have fun, they want to be social, but they are also thirsting for hard work. There will always be assumptions, there will always be stereotypes, and many will never take girl's sports as seriously as they do men's sports, so it is up to the players, and the coaches to constantly prove the value and worth. As coaches of women's teams we should expect more, push more, find a balance between the details and having fun, and aim to show them that working hard as a team is what will ultimately make the season as fun as possible.

As we've heard before, hockey isn't all about winning, but for the girls who choose to wear their bows in the form of hockey laces, there is an incredible amount up for the taking.



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