

Advancing Women in Coaching: An Evaluation of Guelph Soccer's "She's Got Game – She Can Coach" Pilot Program

Year 2/Cohort 2

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the well-documented paucity of women coaches at all levels of sport, Guelph Soccer designed and delivered a program to increase the representation of girls and women coaches through the provision of key supports to reduce previously identified barriers, including, financial support to cover the costs associated with coaching training, a women's soccer league with free childcare for parents, and a local network of support through monthly Coach huddles, where participants of the program gathered to learn and create a sense of community. In total, 34 participants comprised the second of three cohorts that occurred from October 2022 - September 2023. Evaluation of the program included pre- and post-participation surveys and mid-point focus groups. Results of the pre-participation survey indicated that the most significant barriers to coaching reported by participants were caregiving responsibilities (e.g., management of household, childcare responsibilities), lack of confidence, employment responsibilities, personal time restrictions, and cost of certification. In contrast, similar to Cohort 1, participants reported that the funding of coach certifications, knowledge of the sport, and financial support were facilitators to their coaching journeys. Participants were reportedly motivated to engage in the program to learn more about soccer, increase women in the sport, and spend more time with their children. In their evaluation of *"She's Got Game – She Can Coach"* Cohort 2 participants shared Cohort 1's positive appraisal of the design and delivery of the program, including the value of informational and instrumental supports provided by Guelph Soccer and the flexibility to participate in different aspects of the program. The coaches felt that they developed professionally and personally throughout their engagement in the program. Specifically, participants suggested that their general coaching skills were improved through the program, especially as it relates to the knowledge, emotional intelligence, social skills, and organizational skills required to be a coach. Participants also reported enhancements to their self-efficacy and sense of community through the program, as well as the application of skills learned in the program to their personal lives. Throughout the program, some participants found it challenging to balance and attend to the diverse interests and skill levels of players on their teams, as well as understand the application of rules and soccer terminology, and confront the perceived persistent inequities of women in sport. Following the Cohort 1 evaluation, Guelph Soccer made a few program adjustments based on the feedback from participants in the inaugural cohort, including creating a timeline and coach checklist to assist participants in navigating program components and facilitating an 8-week skills program for learning basic soccer knowledge for those new to the sport. Both of these key program refinements were appreciated by participants in Cohort 2 and alleviated these challenges for them. In terms of further tweaks to the program, Cohort 2 participants suggested Guelph Soccer coordinate the release of competitive and recreational schedules in advance of registration to mitigate scheduling complexities for women coaches who have children enrolled in Guelph Soccer programs, scheduling the in-person trainings further apart and creating soft deadlines for the online components to encourage a more balanced workload, offering more in-person opportunities to connect with the network of women, and increased marketing efforts amongst

the club. To assess the overall effectiveness of recruiting and retaining women coaches, we conducted a check-in survey with participants of Cohort 1 for an update on their current coaching status. Of the 10 respondents, 60% have remained actively engaged in coaching since involvement in *“She’s Got Game – She Can Coach”*. Of the 40% who were not actively coaching, all participants indicated that they intend to coach in the foreseeable future. These results demonstrate that the program is effective in recruiting and retaining women in coaching roles one year beyond their involvement in the program.

INTRODUCTION

The underrepresentation of women in coaching is seen at all sport levels in Canada and the world (Banwell, 2020). Historically, in Canada, male coaches outnumber women coaches, especially at the more competitive levels of sport, and women rarely coach men (Demers, 2019; Reade et al., 2009; Robertson, 2010). While the sport system in Canada has advanced to include more public policies for sport organizations, better sport programs for athletes, more competitive sport opportunities for women, and more women athletes performing at elite levels, a paucity of women in coaching persists (Demers et al., 2019). According to the 2021-2022 Coaching Association of Canada annual report, 58% of new National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) coaches identified as men, showing that there is still a discrepancy in the number of men to women coaches in Canada and necessary work in order to achieve gender equity in coaching (Demers et al., 2019).

The low number of women coaches worldwide is a significant issue facing the sport community. Women in sport leadership positions, such as coaching, bring countless benefits to athletes and their sport careers. For example, research shows that women coaches bring a passion to the role of coaching that not only enables athletes to reach their full potential as athletes, but also develop as people (Norman, 2013). Women coaches tend to not hold a ‘winning is everything’ mentality, but rather focus on long-term athlete improvement (Norman, 2013). It is important to have women in coaching so that women athletes have role models to encourage sport participation and recruitment into the coaching profession (Kerr & Ali, 2012) and challenge the negative stereotypes in sport concerning gender and leadership in a male-dominated environment (LaVoi, 2016). The increased appearance of women in coaching roles will not only lead to more girls and women joining sport, but also remaining in sport (Meier, 2015).

A substantial body of research addresses the barriers women face entering and staying in coaching. For example, an individual barrier might be lack of self-efficacy in coaching abilities, an interpersonal barrier could be family-work balance, an organizational barrier could be low pay or an unclear career pathway, and a sociocultural barrier could be gender role assumptions and marginalization. These barriers limit the number of women entering and staying in coaching; as a result, more efforts are necessary to recruit and retain women in sport leadership positions such as coaching (Demers et al., 2019).

In the Guelph Soccer community specifically, there has been a 60:40 boy to girl participation ratio for over 20 years and, as of 2019, there was a 5:1 men to women coach ratio. Despite attempts to increase women participation in the Guelph Soccer community, these numbers have not changed. The *“She’s Got Game – She Can Coach”* program is focused on alleviating the barriers that women face when entering and remaining in the coaching profession in order to advance women in coaching.

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM

The overarching purpose of the Guelph Soccer *“She’s Got Game – She Can Coach”* program is to mitigate key barriers to achieving gender parity in soccer participation and in coaching. This program specifically addresses challenges to women in coaching such as, lack of confidence in coaching abilities, childcare, time scarcity, and the financial burden of coaching certification costs. In order to overcome these barriers, the program offers a breadth of resources to all participants. For example, the *“She’s Got Game - She Can Coach”* program funds NCCP online and practical in-person courses for all participants to allow them to maximize their potential as a coach and receive the education necessary to develop their coaching skills. Programs such as Active Start (U4-6), Fundamentals (U6-9 for boys, U6-8 for girls), Learn to Train (U9-12 for boys, U8-11 for girls), Soccer for Life (U13+ for boys, U12+ for girls), and C-License are offered. In addition to funding coach certifications, the *“She’s Got Game – She Can Coach”* program also offers mandatory and optional online modules (e.g., Respect in Sport, Making Headway – Concussion E-Learning, Keeping Girls in Sport, and NCCP Emergency Action Plan Workshop) and monthly coach huddles for further education and participant connection. Sample topics covered in coach huddles included learning about the coach education pathway in Canadian soccer, open dialogue regarding the challenges faced as women athletes and leaders in sport, and insights on research related to advancing and supporting women in sport, particularly as it relates to the creation and implementation of *“She’s Got Game – She Can Coach.”* Examples of invited speakers for the coach huddles included Canada Soccer personnel, women student-athletes from the University of Guelph Gyphons varsity soccer team, women leaders from other soccer clubs, and researchers and professors who specialize in gender equity in sport. To build community and support for women learning or developing skills of the game, the program offers a women’s league for participants. During all of the women’s league games, the *“She’s Got Game – She Can Coach”* program provides childcare for participants’ children to assist in eliminating this barrier.

At the outset of the program, it was anticipated that decreasing the existing barriers to women in coaching would increase the potential for women to begin or continue their coaching journeys. While the program aims to increase the number of girls and women coaching, it also hopes to decrease the gender gap of participation in soccer and increase the rates and retention of girls and women players in Guelph Soccer programs.

The “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program is a three-year pilot funded by Sport Canada through their Innovation Initiative. As part of the funding agreement, Guelph Soccer arranged an independent evaluation of the pilot through the E-Alliance Gender Equity+ Research Hub. The following report details the evaluation of Year 2/Cohort 2 of the pilot program.

Year 2 of the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program took place from October 2022–September 2023. In the summer of 2022, Guelph Soccer initiated the program by engaging in the process of participant recruitment and program marketing. Cohort 2 consisted of 34 registrants and their ages ranged from 16 – 48 years old. Once participants were registered for the program, they were invited to participate in a pre-participation survey facilitated by the research team that occurred in the Fall of 2022. While the pre-participation surveys were conducted, Guelph Soccer began program implementation, which included coordination of online coaching certification courses, in-person modules, coach huddles, facilitation of the winter women’s league, and marketing program activities. These core components of program implementation occurred between Fall/Winter 2022 and Spring 2023. During this time, participants completed all program requirements and the newly trained coaches were integrated into the club to begin their coaching journeys. Following engagement in the core components, the research team conducted focus groups in Summer 2023 to learn about participant experiences and then invited participants to complete post-participation surveys following summer coaching experiences. The information gathered from focus groups and survey data were analyzed to provide recommendations to program facilitators regarding possible refinements to the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” pilot program as recruitment began for Year 3/Cohort 3. The following report is an overview of the evaluation results and recommendations at the culmination of Year 2/Cohort 2.

DESIGN OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

Methodology and Methods

For the purpose of this evaluation, we implemented an ethics-approved mixed-methods design that included quantitative pre- and post-participation surveys and qualitative semi-structured interviews. The qualitative interviews were implemented through focus groups, although there was one individual interview conducted to accommodate a participant who was unavailable for the focus group dates. A mixed-methods design allowed us to obtain an initial broad assessment of participants’ perspectives as they began the pilot program. The surveys assessed perceived barriers and facilitators to coaching, participants’ feelings towards the program prior to participation, and anticipated benefits of the program. Then, we used the information gleaned from the survey to refine the interview guide with the purpose of probing more specifically about these constructs in focus groups at the mid- to end-point of the program. We concluded the evaluation of Cohort 2’s experiences with the program through a post-participation survey that explored participants’ perceptions of the ways in which the program potentially influenced barriers and facilitators to coaching, their feelings toward coaching

following engagement in the program, the potential benefits of engagement, and future plans for coaching. To ensure the relevance and applicability of the data gathered through the surveys and interviews, we engaged in a collaborative development process with Guelph Soccer where we created initial drafts of the surveys and interview guides, Guelph Soccer staff provided feedback and suggested revisions, and we incorporated their input into the final versions. The evaluation is critical to assess the effectiveness of the program and inform future initiatives of this nature for programs across Canada.

Overarching Evaluation Questions

This report addresses Year 2/Cohort 2 of the three-year pilot program. The overarching research questions explored in this comprehensive evaluation include:

1. What are the general barriers and facilitators experienced by women in coaching?
2. What is the nature of the participants' experiences with the pilot program? Do participants' feelings or attitudes towards or about coaching change over the course of participation, and if so, in what ways?
3. What are the perceived benefits of participation in the pilot program?
4. Are targeted program supports effective in recruiting, training, and retaining women coaches?

Demographics of Cohort 2 Participants

With the assistance of Guelph Soccer, we recruited seventeen participants for the pre-participation survey, seven participants for the focus groups, three focus group supplementary forms, and seven participants for the post-participation survey. For the pre-participation survey, the demographics of the participant sample included seventeen participants who identified as women between the ages of 21 to 45 years old. The highest level of education varied amongst participants, with the majority having completed a college or university undergraduate degree, three who participants completed a university graduate degree, and three participants who completed a post-graduate diploma/certificate. Of the seventeen participants who completed the pre-participation survey, eight had previous coaching experience. The seven participants who completed the post-participation survey all identified as women between the ages of 22 to 43 years old. Only one participant who completed the post-participation survey had previous coaching experience.

RESULTS OF EVALUATION: COHORT 2/YEAR 2

The results of the evaluation of Year 2/Cohort 2 confirm that *"She's Got Game – She Can Coach"* is successful in recruiting, training, and developing women coaches. Through pre- and post-participation surveys and mid-point focus groups, participants identified the barriers, facilitators and key motivators of their coaching journeys and suggested the ways in which *"She's Got Game*

– *She Can Coach*” alleviated these barriers and offered key supports that facilitated engagement through the design and delivery of the program. Participants also reported personal and professional development gleaned through their participation in the program. Each of these broad themes will be discussed in detail in the following section. Further, a “key takeaways” section will follow the descriptions of each of the broad themes to summarize the major findings of the evaluation.

Barriers, Facilitators, and Motivators for Women in Coaching

The purpose of the pre- and post-participation surveys and focus groups was to obtain participants’ perspectives on the barriers and facilitators of their coaching journeys, and the ways in which *“She’s Got Game – She Can Coach”* eliminated these reported barriers and supported engagement in the program.

Perceived Barriers to Coaching Prior to Participation in Program

To identify the barriers perceived by the participants in Year 2/Cohort 2, questions were asked related to their current caregiving responsibilities and the personal and professional factors that would make it challenging to engage in coaching. The following chart demonstrates participants’ self-identified current caregiving responsibilities:

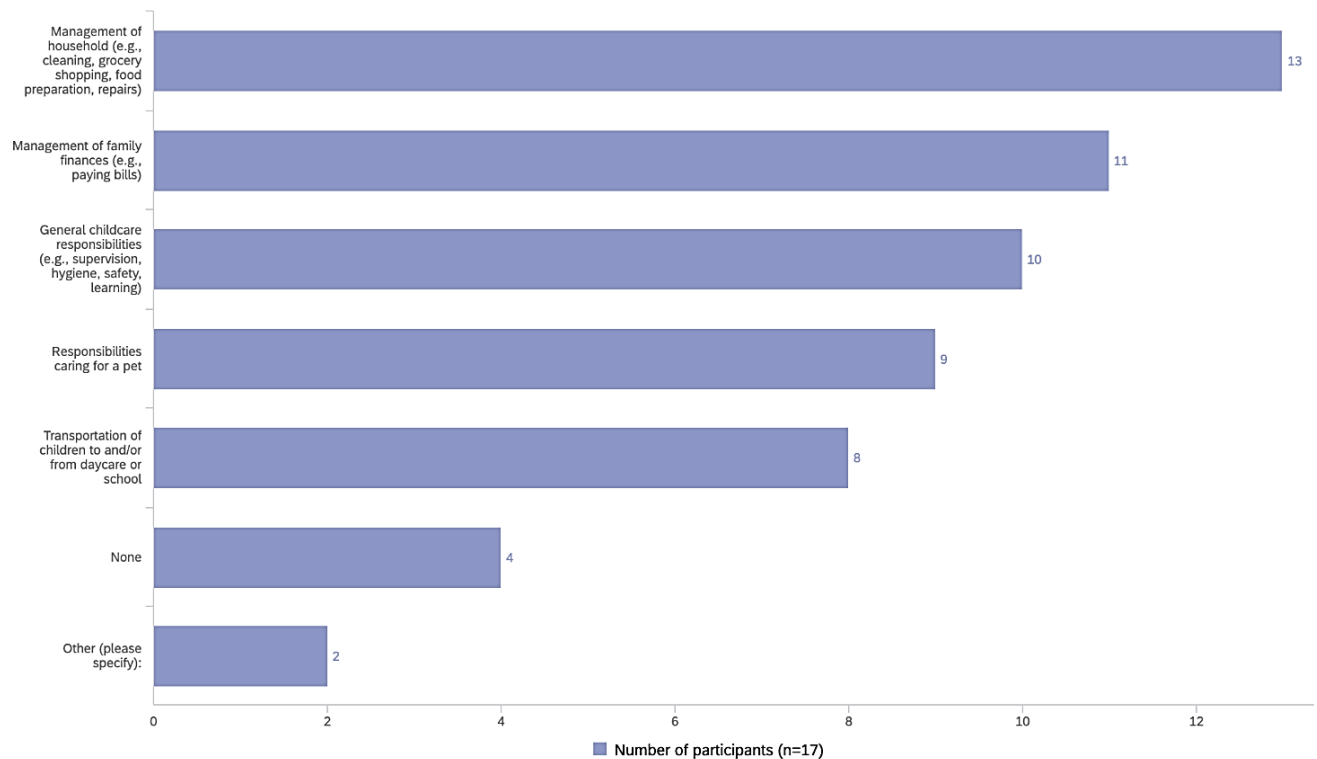


Figure 1: Participants’ Reported Caregiving Responsibilities

As noted in Figure 1, the most common caregiving responsibilities reported by participants were management of the household, family finances, and childcare. Two participants also reported

“other” responsibilities, which included running a business and having sole responsibility for all domestic duties.

Participants also shared their personal and professional barriers to coaching. The following chart depicts participants’ reported barriers to coaching, most notably competing caregiving responsibilities, lack of confidence, and competing employment responsibilities:

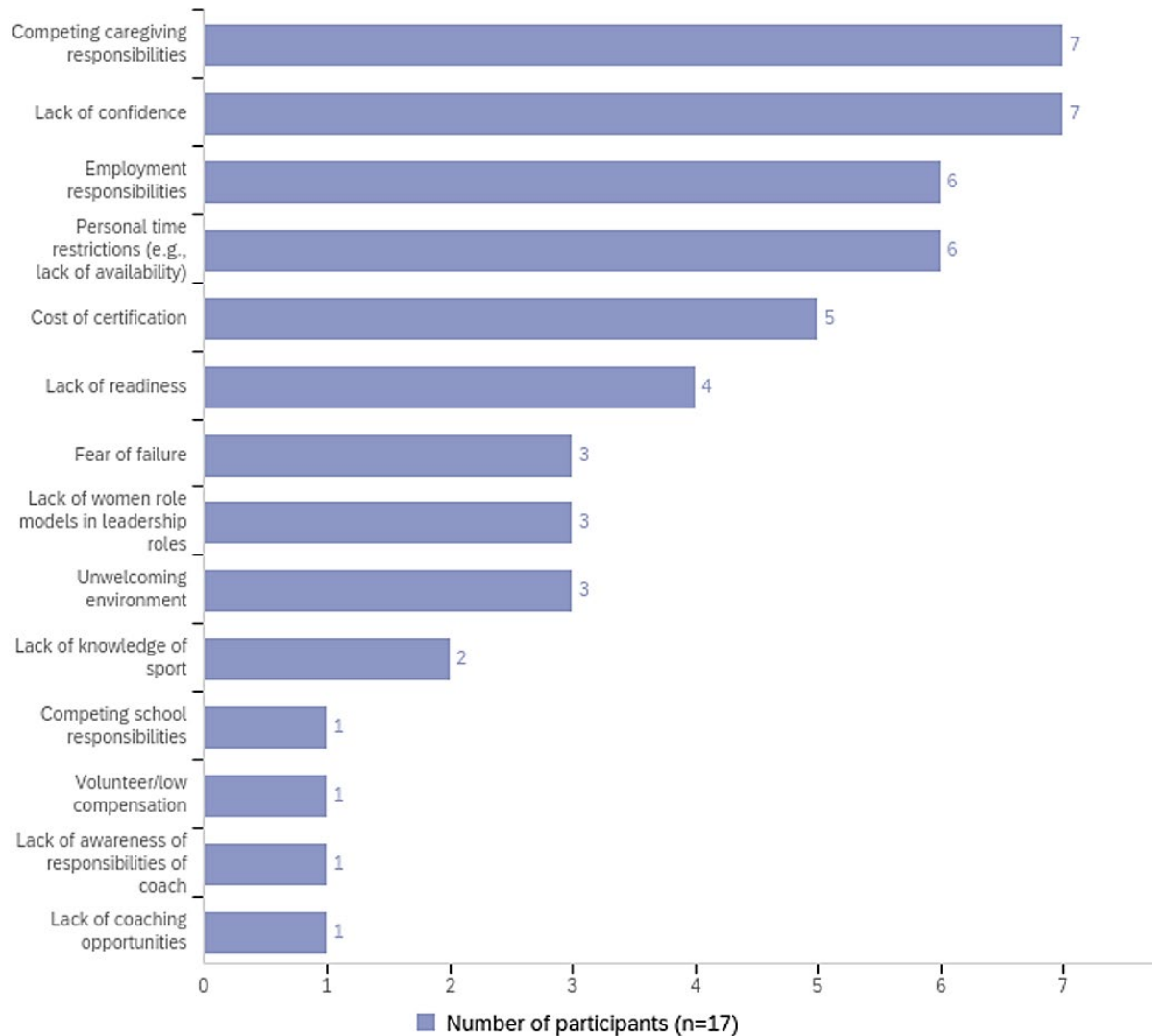


Figure 2. Participants’ Reported Top Three Ranked Barriers to Coaching

To elaborate on the barriers to coaching, Coach 8 stated *“In rep, mainly time and no pay. With all the practices and games, ensuring everything runs smoothly when team members aren’t showing up and letting down the rest of the team, can become exhausting.”* Likewise, Coach 13 shared that *“Time, distance, if the coaching is paid vs. unpaid”* are prominent barriers for her.

Perceived Facilitators of Coaching Prior to Participation

In contrast to the barriers, participants reported the top three facilitators that would help them become a coach or remain involved in coaching, including but not limited to, funding of coach certifications, financial compensation, free childcare, knowledge of the sport, flexibility with school or employment responsibilities, and support with caregiving responsibilities. Please see Figure 3 for a full breakdown of facilitators.

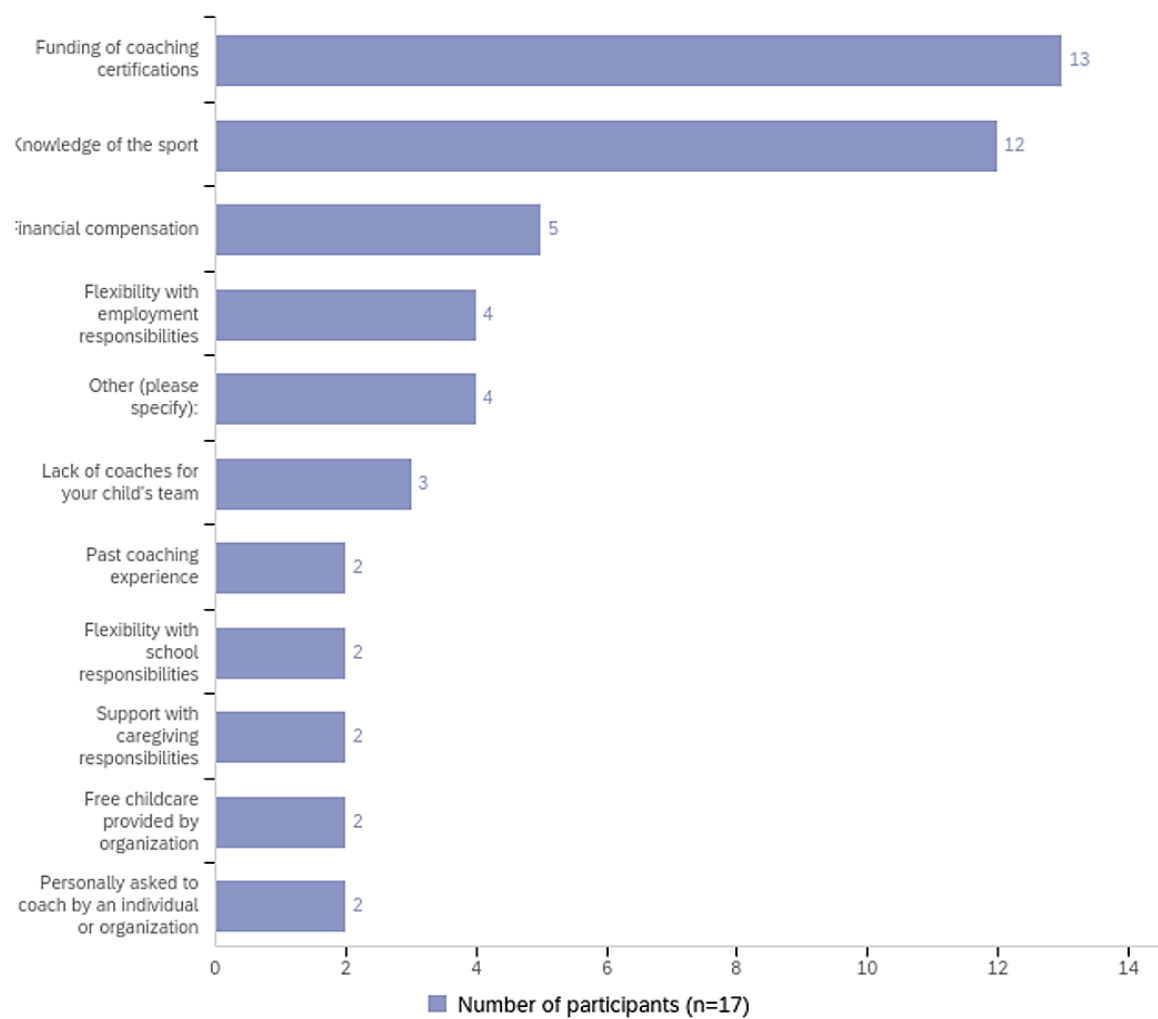


Figure 3: Participants' Reported Top Three Facilitators of Coaching

As demonstrated, the top three factors that would facilitate their coaching journeys are funding of coaching certifications, knowledge of the sport, and financial compensation. This is similar to Cohort 1 coaches who recognized funding support for training and certifications, knowledge acquisition, and experience as the three most important factors that would facilitate their coaching journeys. In addition, four coaches reported "other" facilitators that would help them begin or continue coaching, including a love of the game, having children in the sport, and the opportunity to have women mentors amongst the network.

Reported Motivations for Engagement in the Program

In the focus groups, participants shared general motivations behind their participation. Similar to some Cohort 1 participants, Cohort 2 participants were motivated to join *She's Got Game – She Can Coach* to learn more about soccer, to increase the number of women coaches in soccer, and to be able to spend more time with their children who play soccer. For instance, one participant shared that she joined to improve her skillset and continue her coaching journey: *“Just from coaching last year, I thought it'd be kind of a good thing to have to kind of have that extra support and learning and stuff [through the program].” - Coach 3.*

Another participant shared that she joined *She's Got Game – She Can Coach* to spend more time with her daughter who is registered for a Guelph Soccer program:

I guess my daughter has been for 5 years now in Guelph Soccer, and I think every single year she's been in it, I've gotten multiple emails saying we're low on coaches. And I didn't know where to start with soccer because I hadn't played it since high school, so I didn't really think I could do it. And then when I heard about She's Got Game, and how they would teach you how to coach soccer and stuff like that, I was interested because then I could maybe... spend some more time with my daughter, and actually know what I was doing. – Coach 7

Coach 6 shared that she joined *She's Got Game – She Can Coach* to increase women professionals in soccer and fulfill the gap she experienced as a player:

And what drew me to this program was... the aims really aligned with what I want to do. Getting rid of a lot of barriers for women is important, and it seems like this program was trying to address a lot of those and really create a supportive environment. Because there is a really obvious need for women coaches in Guelph, like everywhere else. I only had male coaches growing up until I played in university, and that, and that was even in my last year at university. It was all men up to then. And yeah, it's just, it's so male dominated. And even my experience coaching, I feel very like discredited a bit because I'm a woman. And so there's just an obvious need. So I thought the program sounded amazing. – Coach 6

An important finding from the Cohort 2 evaluation is that some participants were motivated to join *She's Got Game – She Can Coach* based on word of mouth from Cohort 1 participants, thus reiterating the positive impact and success of the program:

As my kids are a bit older now, I was looking for something kind of to do on my own, and so I joined the Women's Rec League in the Fall and a few other people on my team were talking about the She Can Coach program. They were in Cohort 1. And at first, I was like, ‘Oh, that's cool, like I would never do that, but cool good for them’ kind of thing. And then some other women on my team were interested in signing up, and my husband is really into like, he does rep hockey and, and things like that. So I figured, well, maybe I could coach my kids' soccer. – Coach 1

KEY TAKEAWAYS: BARRIERS, FACILITATORS, AND MOTIVATORS

- Most significant barriers reported by participants: breadth of household and childcare responsibilities, personal time restrictions, competing employment responsibilities, lack of confidence and fear of failure, cost of certifications, and lack of awareness of roles/responsibilities of coaching
- Most significant facilitators reported by participants: funding of coach certifications and increased knowledge of the sport
- Motivations for participation reported by participants: to learn more about soccer, to increase the number of women coaches in soccer, and to be able to spend more time with their children who play soccer

Design and Delivery of the Program

Based on the data gleaned from the focus groups and post-participant surveys, participants predominately appraised the program and their participation as very positive and identified several key components of the design and delivery as critical to the success of the program. This section will review these components in depth.

Provision of Supports

Similar to Cohort 1, in general, the post-participation survey indicated all participants perceived the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program provided critical supports to address some of the most significant barriers confronted by participants in becoming a coach or continuing their coaching journeys (e.g., lack of confidence, time restrictions, costs of certification). Specifically, the provision of informational and instrumental supports throughout participants’ engagement in the program was referred to as a very positive aspect of the program.

Informational support. Informational support refers to the provision of program updates, advice, feedback, and ongoing communication with participants. In general, participants identified the overarching organization and communications from Guelph Soccer as a significant benefit, with one participant stating, “*the support from the club with updates and check-ins was so helpful!*” (Coach 13). Another participant noted that “*the online access to the coach material I used for training [was helpful]*” (Coach 12). Coach 2 also shared that “*it’s really easy to email [the program administrators]. And getting an answer back has been really good.*” Additionally, one participant summarized the various ways in which informational supports from the program were beneficial for her:

[The program administrators] from Guelph Soccer were really quick to respond. I think all the trainings, the concussion stuff, just all of that was really useful. The practical trainings where we did learn drills, that was really helpful as well. She Can Coach covers our registration fee for the Women’s Soccer League. So, I’ve done it Fall, Winter, and now Summer, and that’s definitely like helped improve my skill too. - Coach 1

Another participant recognized the email communications from Guelph Soccer program administrators as particularly helpful, especially for figuring out the coach certification pathway:

I feel like for everything that we've done, and for the different online training versus on field training and just having someone kind of like walk you through, that has been so helpful. And I know they're always like 'it's so confusing and sorry for such a long email,' but it's actually so nice. Because if I was doing it independently, I think that would have been like a barrier to entry for me a bit. I might not have participated in all of [the offerings] if it wasn't as easy. So, they definitely like facilitated that process. I'm not sure that, like I actually like might not have even perceived, like coaching training at all from that perspective, just because I feel like I could have looked it up and been confused about like how to proceed. So that's been really helpful for me. – Coach 4

Participants also reported that the provision of informational support assisted in keeping them on track with the program:

So I feel like there's been lots of opportunity to kinda make it work with your schedule. And then there has been a lot, like to have the training provided and a lot of [program administrator's] emails to kind of lay out what you need to take stuff in, or what you kind of need to complete things have been really helpful and useful. - Coach 3

Instrumental support. Participants recognized instrumental support offered by Guelph Soccer as critical to their engagement and success in the program. Instrumental support refers to the provision of tangible or concrete assistance, including financial, childcare and coaching support. In general, the post-participation survey indicated the top two factors that have helped facilitate participants' coaching journeys are funding of coach certifications and knowledge of the sport. All participants recognized the financial support provided by Guelph Soccer as fundamental to their engagement in the program, especially as it relates to obtaining coach certifications. One participant explained how the financial support and childcare were significant to her:

Yeah, I think it was a really good program. Offsetting the cost of things was significant for me, for sure...I love that [the program is] trying to get the coaches out playing too and facilitating that, like having the registration be waived and providing childcare. That that is part of the program is really meaningful for me. - Coach 6

Likewise, Coach 7 shared how the financial support from “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” allowed her to advance her coach certifications to continue coaching her kids, something that would not have been possible if she had to pay for all four coaching courses:

I know if I had wanted to go for all 4, all 4 modules or hierarchies, or whatever you want to call it, and I had to pay for it... I probably would not have done all 4. But I took all 4 so that I could move up with my kids through soccer. But yeah, that's a huge plus that I didn't have to pay for every single one of them definitely, because that would have become a factor had I had to pay for all of them. - Coach 7

Another coach explained how “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” went above and beyond to support the skill advancement of herself and other members in Cohort 2:

Some of the friends that I met in the Fall and Winter League, we realized that we were going to be coaching in the Summer and we still didn't feel like we had many soccer skills. So, we talked to [a program administrator] and they were able to pay a couple of former University of Guelph women players to do a little multi-week training session for us. They paid for it for us... It was amazing. So, it was just like Monday nights and they just did skills drills with us. So, I've talked to some of my friends who did that with me, we're all in She Can Coach, and we've used some of the drills even from that in our own coaching, and it just made us feel more confident with our actual soccer abilities, too... I don't think it was an official part of the program, but She Can Coach definitely funded it for us. - Coach 1

Other coaches discussed how the information from Guelph Soccer, such as coaching manuals and orientation, served as helpful resources for them during their coaching this year. For instance, Coach 2 shared how she liked having this support throughout her coaching this season:

I would say, Guelph Soccer has been able to provide, like they give us the manual, which is good. I mean, I haven't really used it, but to know that it's there, and all the information is in there, I like to have that support. And then I'd say, there is a lot of knowledge that has been given from the She Can Coach program. Just all the trainings and online trainings. And then in the beginning of the season, Guelph Soccer held an orientation that kind of gave the low down on like age specific rules and everything which was really helpful. - Coach 2

Program Structure

Participants perceived the structure of the program to be strong, well-rounded, and well put together. Specifically, participants perceived the variety of offerings (coach huddles, women’s league, online and in-person trainings) to be a strong aspect of the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program. These various offerings contributed to a comprehensive and balanced program that facilitated opportunities for learning, skill development and social activity. One participant summarized: “*The program was very well-rounded and has given me the knowledge and the tools to coach. Experience is the only way to keep growing as a coach and I feel that this program has given me more confidence to keep moving forward in my coaching journey.*” (Coach 10). Another coach discussed how she benefitted from having many options to choose from: “*It's been really great in terms of options, and you can kind of customize it to like what you want to get out of the program, which I think is awesome.*” - Coach 4

Coach 10 elaborated on the breadth of offerings that made the program enjoyable for her by stating:

I believe every element has a strength. From the bonding group/cohort moments, to the online components that let you complete at our own pace – being a mom we don't always get much free time – it's inclusive, the in-person experience, giving moms the ability to play with daycare and the amazing women behind the program for making this a possibility. It's a very supportive, open, flexible, informative program! - Coach 10

Coach 5 also discussed how the different trainings and modules were beneficial for her, too:

A few things jump to mind here, the face to face [in-person training] has been great, and those different modules, the fundamentals for example, but those [trainings are] hugely helpful, well run, very engaging. Like I came home tired. They were really good. So kudos to all of that. - Coach 5

KEY TAKEAWAYS: YES, THE PROGRAM WORKS!

Similar to results from the Cohort 1 evaluation, results from the Cohort 2 evaluation indicate that the program continues to work well in the following ways:

- The program provides ongoing informational and instrumental support to participants
- Participants appreciated the opportunity to engage in a breadth of program offerings and design their own experiences based on their personal schedules (i.e., the flexibility to pick and choose certain activities)
- The facilitation of the program by Guelph Soccer administrators enhanced participants' commitment and engagement in the program

Perceived Personal and Professional Outcomes of Participation in the Program

Through the pre- and post-participation surveys and mid-point focus groups, participants identified their feelings toward coaching and anticipated benefits of the program prior to engagement, as well as actual benefits of the program following engagement, including professional (e.g., increased coaching skills, technical skill development) and personal development (e.g., self-efficacy, sense of community). Each of the perceived personal and professional benefits that participants reported will be discussed in turn.

Feelings Toward Coaching Prior to Engagement in the Program

Prior to engagement in the program, participants were prompted to identify their top five feelings about their upcoming engagement in the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program through the pre-participation survey. The following chart demonstrates the range of feelings identified by participants prior to engagement in the program:

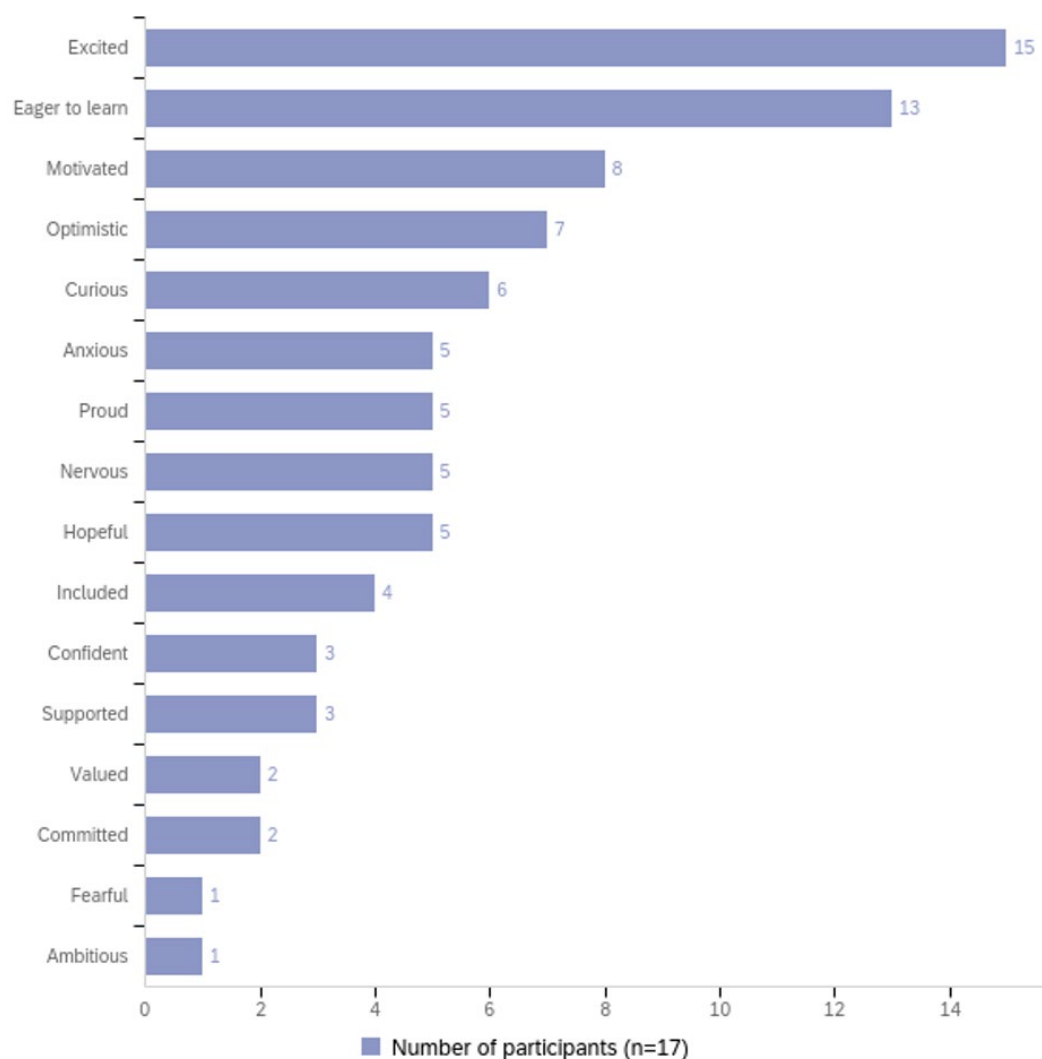


Figure 4: Participants' Reported Feelings Prior to Engagement in the Pilot Program

As demonstrated in the chart above, prior to engagement in the program, participants reported a range of feelings, including excitement, eagerness to learn, motivation, optimism, and curiosity. Notably, none of the participants reported feeling burned out, not supported, or not motivated (thus do not appear in the graph).

Anticipated Benefits of the Program Prior to Engagement

Participants were also asked to identify the top three anticipated benefits of engagement in the program. The findings indicated that the anticipated benefits of the program ranged from personal development to social or sport-specific benefits, including fun and enjoyment, contributing to players' skill development, developing new personal skills, and giving back to the community. The following chart outlines the participants' responses:

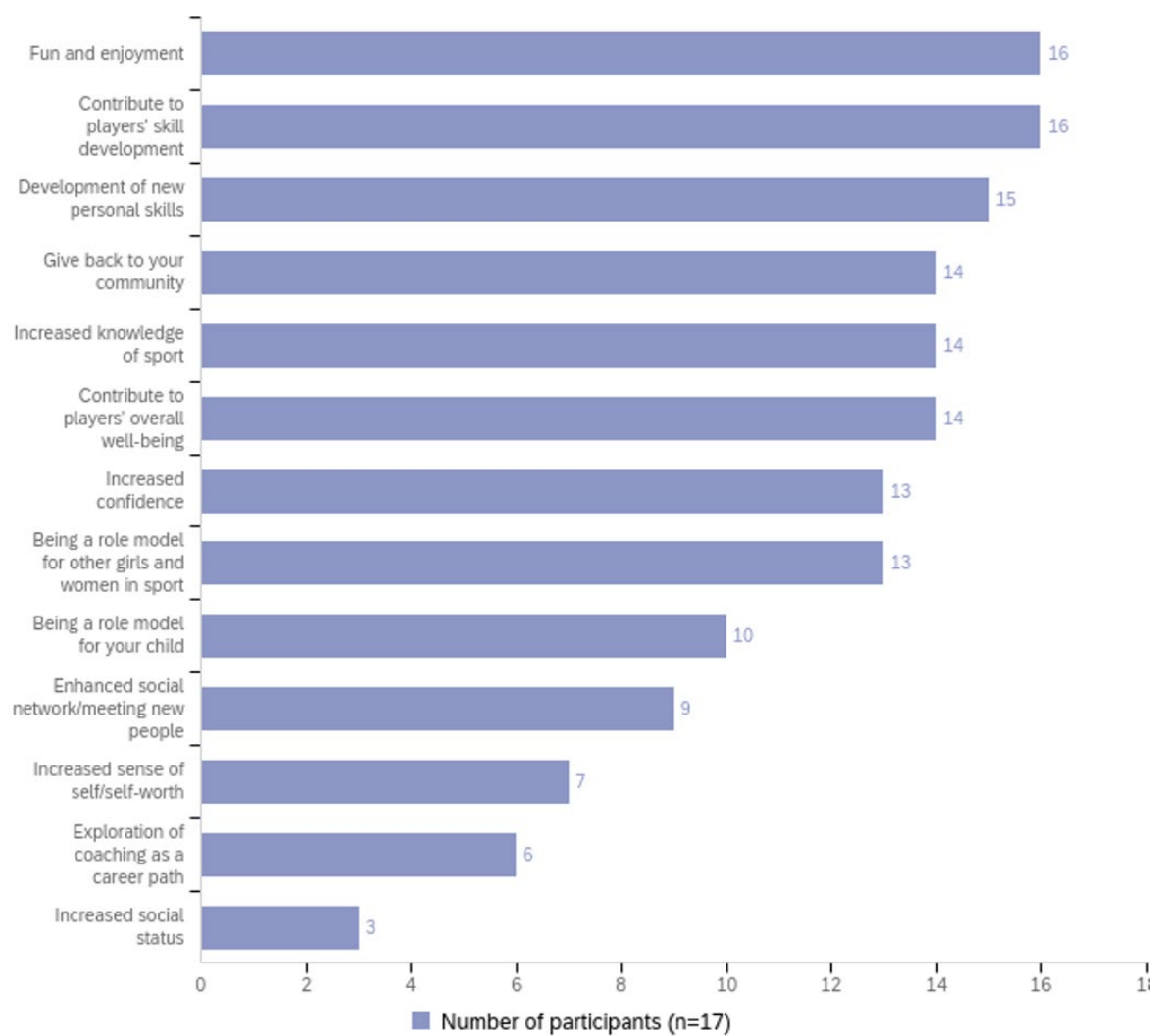


Figure 5: Anticipated Benefits of Program Reported by Participants Prior to Participation

Following participation in the program, coaches were asked to report the top three benefits they experienced through engagement in the program. In response, they identified the development of new skills, giving back to their community, and being a role model for their child as their top three actual benefits of the program. Of note, two of the top three anticipated benefits (e.g., fun and enjoyment, contribute to players' skill development) indicated in the pre-participation survey are different from the top three actual benefits identified in the post-participation survey. Please see Figure 6 for a breakdown of the benefits experienced through participation in the program.

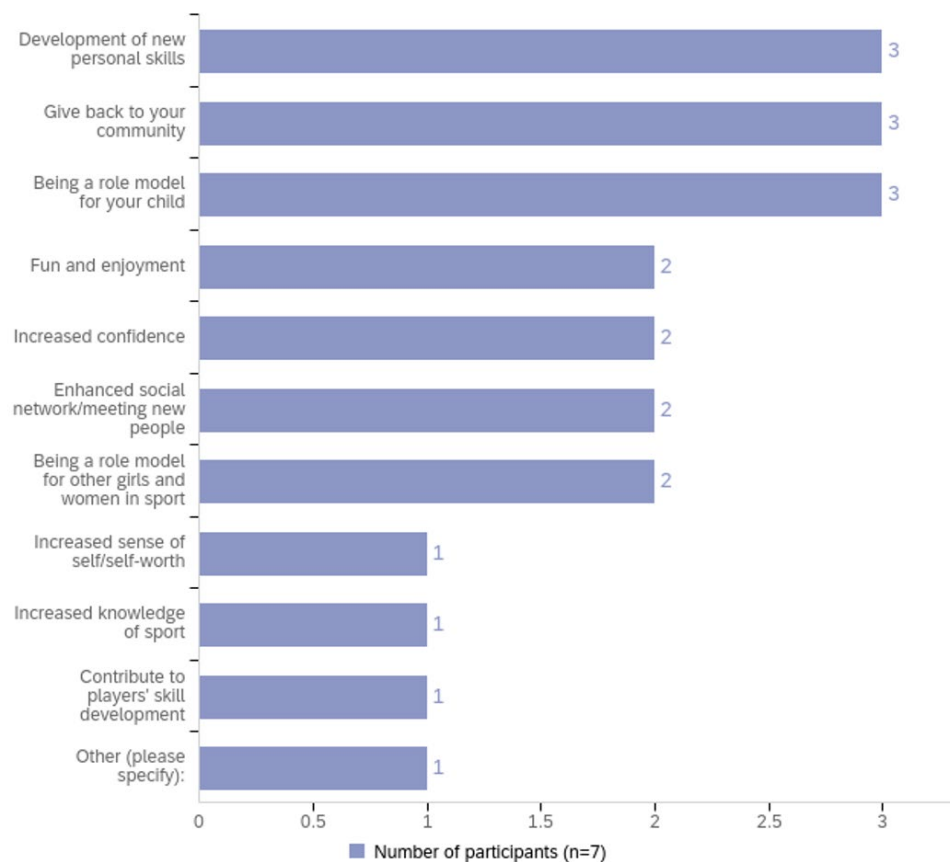


Figure 6: Top Three Benefits of Program Reported by Participants Following Engagement

Perceived Professional Benefits

Increased perception of general coaching skills. In the post-participation survey, we assessed participants' general perceptions of their coaching skills and related program supports by asking them to rank statements on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Participants also had the option to select values for "somewhat disagree" (2), "I don't know" (3), and "somewhat agree" (4). The following chart outlines the average ranking score (i.e., mean scores) amongst the participants for each statement related to coaching skill development following participation in the "She's Got Game – She Can Coach" program:

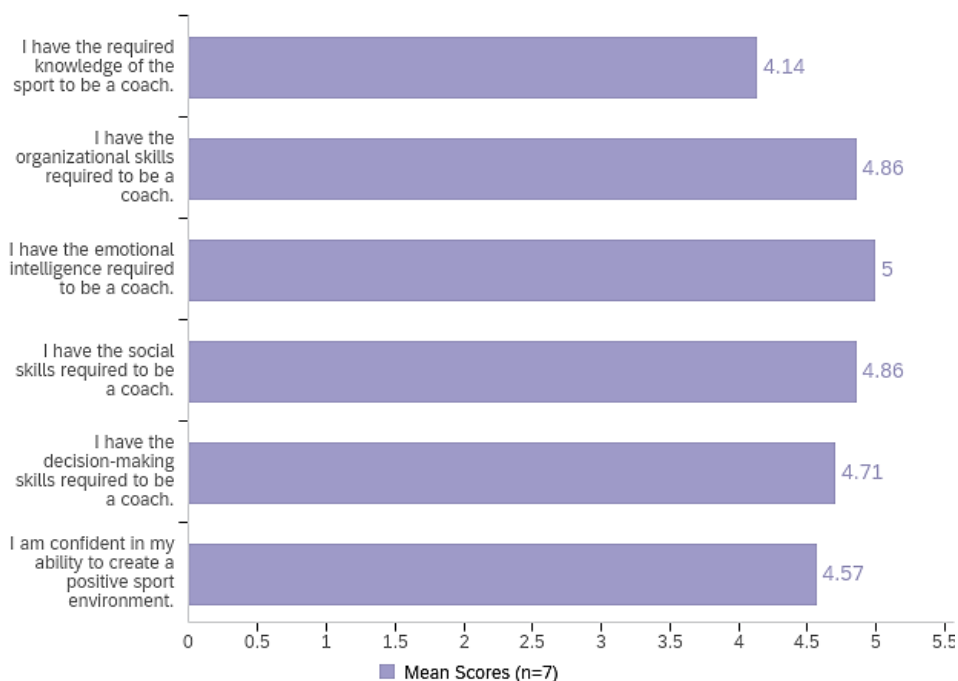


Figure 7: Participants' Feelings About Coaching Skills Following Engagement in the Program

As illustrated in the chart above, participants averaged between “somewhat agree” and “strongly agree” for all statements about perceived coaching skills. To contextualize these results, please see the following chart extracted from the pre-participation survey that posed the same statements to participants for ranking on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree):

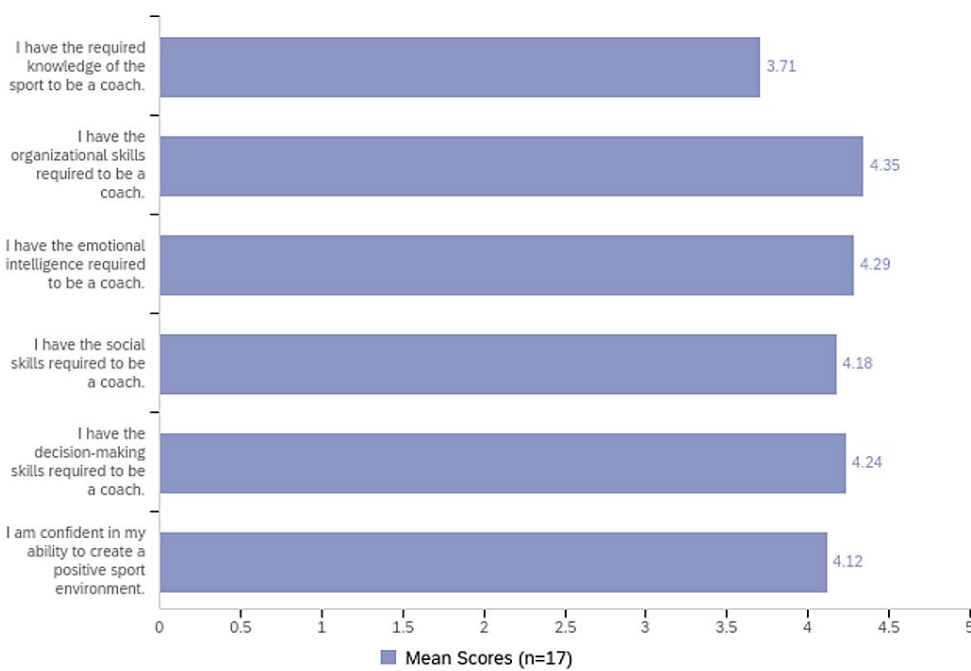


Figure 8. Participants' Feelings About Coaching Skills Prior to Engagement in the Program

When comparing the average ranking scores across the pre- and post-participation surveys, it is evident that engagement in the program enhanced participants' perceptions of their coaching skills in all areas identified. These increased scores were particularly pronounced in participants' perceptions of the emotional intelligence, social skills, and organizational skills required to be a coach, which increased by 0.71, 0.68, and 0.51 of a point from the pre- to post-participation surveys, respectively. This increase suggests participants feel more confident in their knowledge base as coaches and their abilities to apply this knowledge in practice following the formal (e.g., coach certifications) and informal (e.g., women's league, coach huddles, template plans) learning provided by Guelph Soccer.

In addition to general perceptions of coaching skills appraised in the surveys, participants discussed the technical skill development gained through the various program aspects in the mid-point focus groups.

Technical skill development. From a broad perspective, participants of Cohort 2 developed a variety of technical skills throughout the program. For some participants, the nature of technical skill development emphasized building and enhancing their soccer knowledge and global understanding of the game. This is similar to Cohort 1 participants who also reported advancing their soccer skills and knowledge through the *"She's Got Game – She Can Coach"* program. For example, Coach 9 stated that the completion of program components *"gave me the push and knowledge base to be able to take a coaching position."*

In addition, Coach 3 discussed how she uses what she learned in the *"She's Got Game – She Can Coach"* courses in her own coaching:

This year I definitely feel more confident and I feel like it's not because it's my second year, like I'm doing a different age group and stuff. I feel like it's just because I've had more experience coaching through the program and meeting other people. So, I feel like I'm doing better... it's kind of nice I can think of games from when I went to the courses that I can use, or exercises and stuff like that I just learned from taking this course and kind of implement that into my actual coaching. - Coach 3

Coach 5 shared how the skills session that she was a part of helped her better understand some of the drills in the coaching manual and be able to explain them to her team:

Even now, in the U9s, when you read the activities like, it's talking about a chop turn, which I would have had my kids demonstrating for me at home before I left, if I hadn't done the skills training. – Coach 5

In addition to technical soccer skills, participants also referenced their 'soft skills' development throughout the program and how this affected their coaching:

The actual game of soccer is a part of me. However, understanding the psychology/growth development of each age has reminded me to be more appropriate with my expectations of what a player's ability should be and a reminder of their feelings/maturity level. - Coach 10

Perceived Personal Benefits of Participation in the Program

Developing and advancing self-efficacy. Following participation, participants reported the building and advancing of their self-efficacy as a positive personal outcome of engagement in the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program. Participants perceived self-efficacy was developed and enhanced through engagement with other women in the program's community and through increased coaching knowledge and practice.

Building self-efficacy through community and engagement with other women. In general, participants recognized the importance of learning to coach in an environment with fellow women and girls. Similar to Cohort 1, Cohort 2 made references to the “community” of women developed through this program. Participants suggested that the “*She’s Got Game - She Can Coach*” program provided them a space to connect with like-minded women in the Guelph area, play soccer with new people, build co-coaching teams, and learn from and with other women. Participants reported that building this supportive community was one of the most valuable aspects of the program. For instance, Coach 4 shared her feelings about the women in the program: “...*just like being able to meet so many like great women like strong women, great role models like awesome moms.*” Another participant had a similar experience and shared how supported she felt throughout the program:

Broadly speaking, I feel very supported by, you know, all the women in the program and also the women running the program, and yeah communication has been really good. There's opportunities to connect regularly. It's obviously important to the club, which feels good. And yeah, everything I've participated in has been really great for making connections. I've really liked the in-person stuff, probably a little bit more so. Yeah, but they, it's just been, it's been a great opportunity and a great experience. - Coach 6

One participant shared how she was able to connect with other “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” coaches after a game, and how this created a helpful environment to connect with other coaches and ask coaching questions:

So the 3 of us walk back to our cars, and we talked about the season, and you know what was working and that sort of thing, and how we were faring with our teams and you know, I'd ask a question ‘I can't get my kids to do this.’ And they were like, ‘Oh, we've tried this with our kids.’ And so it was really nice to have somebody to bounce things off when you're the only coach because you can't really talk to anybody else, but to have that support system with somebody who is training or coaching the same age group, or even if it wasn't the same age group. I haven't really talked to anybody else. But yeah, it was really nice, after the last game to talk to somebody else that I knew. - Coach 7

Another participant shared the importance of the program being all women and how this helped her be more vulnerable and connect with other participants:

Having it all women has been really cool, because I think it was a value add for me to be to be a little bit more vulnerable to say, 'Hey, I don't know how to play soccer. We don't know at all how to play soccer.' And now I joined a team, and it's, you know, people, the group is very forgiving because they, they, you know, if we come to a session we're like, 'Oh, I gotta leave. I gotta leave half an hour early because my kid has this,' or you know [my kid is] in school so things come up, or your kids are sick. It's been easy to be a little bit more vulnerable... A couple of the coaches in particular, I have them on Whatsapp, you know, we can talk back and forth about experiences that we're having in the coaching as well. And I think that that's been really cool. - Coach 5

Building self-efficacy through knowledge acquisition and practice. Similar to Cohort 1, the participants in Cohort 2 reportedly gained self-efficacy in their coaching abilities through knowledge acquisition, including the completion of online and in-person training certifications and education components. For example, Coach 7 shared how the coach education helped give her develop the confidence to go from feeling like she was not ready to coach, to stepping up to become the head coach of her son's team:

I got to my first game, and I was like 'Hi.' But in May, there was a lot more confidence because I'd finally gotten through the fundamentals and stuff like that, and the online stuff and everything. So I felt a lot more confident, and even from my first game in May to now, it's a huge difference. I mean, I'm so excited to go to soccer. I have a great group of girls who are hilarious. And it's fun, I mean, it's great. Even to go to rep with my son, honestly when they asked for help I said, 'I am nowhere near a rep coach like none whatsoever, don't expect great things.' And now, like last week I came out, and I was a head coach for a game, whereas usually I'm the back person, so I usually just leave the head coach to coach, and I'm on the bench kind of thing figuring out who's sitting and who's playing where and kind of doing just like a little back coaching. But yeah, when I got there in April, there's no way I would have said, 'Yeah, I'm totally up for head coaching this rep team,' whereas last week I was like, 'yeah, okay sure I got this.' So yeah, definitely, a huge help. – Coach 7

Similarly, Coach 5 discussed how completing the coach education helped her feel that she brings more to the table and has more to offer the team that she coaches:

So, this allows me the ability to at least go out there and say, yes, I feel confident that I can teach you something. I can facilitate this, and you will have a good time. And even my daughter, her team, they're at a level now where kids go their different ways, right? So, she's already got anxiety about whether or not they'll have their coach and their assistant coach back next year. So at least, again, that's kind of why I set myself up to go for a C-License should I find that something I want to do. Because I have the confidence now to say if I had to, I would do this because I would take all the responsibility if the alternative were my daughter's team folding, right? So certainly, that's been a huge asset for me as someone who didn't play soccer growing up. - Coach 5

Coach 5 continued on to say:

I don't think I would have coached in the winter at all until I was done the trainings, because I don't think that I would have been confident to coach at an age group that my kids play in. So I think that it's definitely improved my confidence. Even like to go tonight, from the first week of House League to now, I'm more confident in how the drills will run, and before I was worried like, 'Oh, my gosh! What if they have a question about something and I don't know the answer.' I don't have those concerns anymore and I think that part of it is because I know the kids better, I know the parents better, and I'm more comfortable. But for sure, a much larger part is that the She Can Coach program gave me the skills that I needed to have that confidence on the field. - Coach 5

Transfer of skills to personal life. A new emerging theme from the Cohort 2 evaluation was the perceived transfer of skills learned in “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” to participants’ personal and professional lives outside of coaching soccer, such as coaching employees in the workplace or strengthening the connection with their children. For instance, for Coach 3, skills she learned in the program have helped her communicate with employees in her professional role: “*It's funny how coaching 11-year-old girls in soccer helps me coach my employees at work who are not 11-year-old girls. I feel like there's skills [we've learned] about how to talk to different people*” (Coach 3).

In another example, Coach 6 shared coaching encouraged her daughter to become involved in soccer this year, thus getting more girls involved in sport through representation:

I'm not entirely sure my middle kid would have even tried soccer if it wouldn't have been for me coaching her this year. [It is] kind of what gave her the courage to get out there and give it a chance, and she loves it, which I also didn't see coming. So personally, it's really helped [me] support my kids that way. - Coach 6

Likewise, another participant shared how the soccer skills she learned from “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” have helped her to strengthen the bond she has with her children at home:

So yeah, there's a few things that I've taken away from the coaching aspect of it and put it into my day-to-day stuff. I mean, even with my own kids, just like kicking the soccer ball around, there's a little bit more bonding there with my kids because I do coach them and I do step back out of that coaching role when we're just kicking the ball around at home. But yeah, it definitely helps. - Coach 7

The positive impact of involvement in the program on the bond between women coaches and their children was also shared by Coach 5, who stated that:

On the personal side, I definitely find that there's things that I've brought home and, the kids are excited, actually, that I got engaged [in the program]. It's not that we don't share other interests, but because soccer is such an interest in our house, they like that now, when we go to the park, I don't kind of toss the ball like, okay guys go run around.

Now, like we'll bring the cones, we'll set up the net so. And you know, we'll get out there together. So it's been good. - Coach 5

Establishing and advancing gender equity. Another positive program outcome is related to the ability for participants to establish and advance gender equity through their participation in the program. Participants shared how the program empowers them to be leaders in sport, and what their experiences being women coaches have been like. For example, Coach 2 shared her reaction to her and her co-coach being the only women coaches on the soccer field: *“And we like we looked up at the field, and we are like, Oh, wow! We're the only women coaches here, like the rest, were all male coaches. So that was just something we observed there.”*

Coach 6 explained how the coach training specifically focusing on coaching girls made a big difference in her coaching, and caused her to reflect on how many advancements have been made since her time as a youth athlete:

The training, the one about girls, I can't quite remember what it's called, but I really liked that there was specific research done for girls and how to keep them in sports, and how to address, like come at them a little bit differently. Because that was never something that I ever experienced as a kid playing soccer, and I played at a pretty high level, like I had good coaches, but it was not tailored to women athletes whatsoever. So it was just really cool to see that all this stuff matters now, you know, 30, 25 years later. So that was really cool. And then, just in terms of, just like confidence and that this matters, that you know women representation really matters, and keeping women in sports, and supporting women in leadership positions. And all this stuff is really important to me in my personal life as well. - Coach 6

Some coaches also shared their experiences with parents, specifically some players' dads, while being a woman coach:

For sure that, in the first week there's a couple of dads who brought their kids, who were very, very knowledgeable about soccer. Like they were the ones who told us there's no corner kicks in this league like we didn't, [my co-coach] and I didn't know that. They had a lot to say, and I remember feeling a little like 'okay well, you could have also volunteered to be a coach, or like, you could stand up and help us.' But I think I was probably just sort of feeling defensive because I was nervous. They've been fine since then, like we've been trying to kind of tell them like 'hey, if you guys have any ideas for drills like, could you?' And we both happened to be away last week, myself and my co-coach, and one of those dads stepped in as the parent volunteer while we were away. So we've kind of tried to bring them in, so that was good. - Coach 1

Similar to Coach 1, Coach 2 shared how she and her co-coach also tried to involve any parents who had insight into their coaching:

I've had like 3 dads on the side of the field trying to tell us kind of what to do in some instances. But and so we've been like, 'Hey, you know what? Why don't you come next week if you want and run some drills with them.' - Coach 2

Finally, some coaches explained how “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” helps empower women and girls in sport, thus advancing gender equity in sport: “[*The program*] empowers women and girls to hold positions of leadership especially in a sport. To be an example to youth, especially girls. The friendships and experiences...” - Coach 11

Do Cohort 2 Participants Plan to Keep Coaching Following Participation in the Program?

One of the core overarching objectives of the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program is to develop women and girls as coaches to increase gender parity in the Guelph Soccer system with the hope it will encourage more women participants to join and continue participation in Guelph Soccer programs. As a result, it was critical to understand whether the women and girl coaches in the program planned to continue coaching beyond Cohort 2. The following chart outlines participants’ plans to engage in coaching and “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program components (e.g., women’s soccer league) as indicated on the post-participation survey:

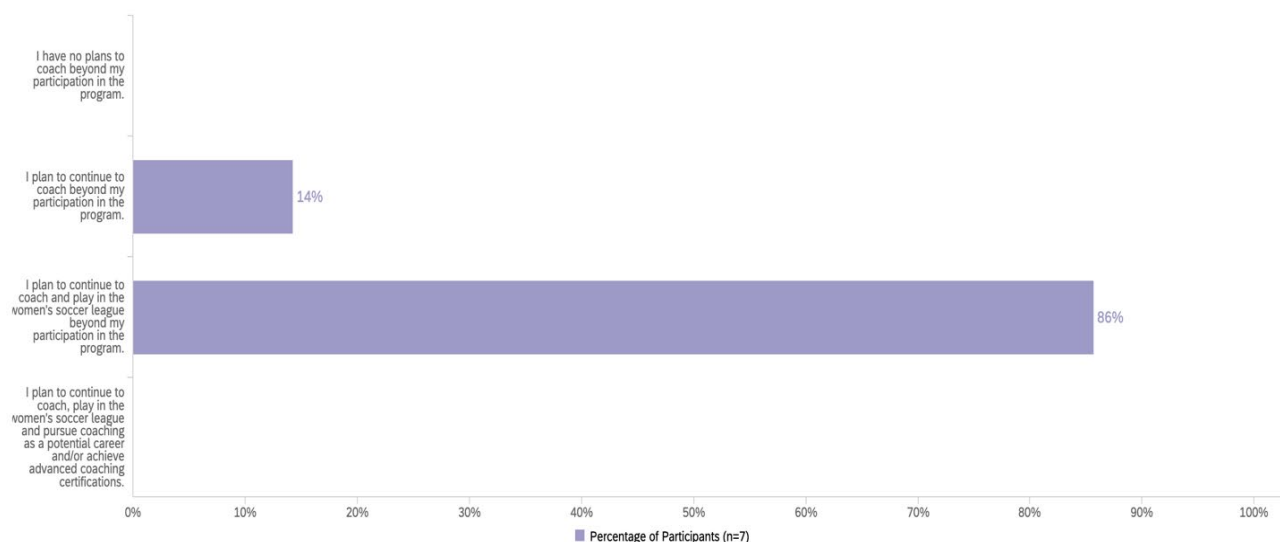


Figure 9. Participants’ Plans for Coaching Beyond Cohort 2

As indicated in Figure 9 and confirmed through focus group data, the program designed and delivered by Guelph Soccer has encouraged the women and girls participating in the Cohort 2 of the program to continue their coaching journeys. 100% of Cohort 2 participants who engaged in the post-participation survey indicated their interest in continuing to coach beyond their participation in the program, and 86% expressed their intentions to also continue to engage in the women’s soccer league.

In the post-participation survey, we also asked participants to indicate whether they would recommend participation in the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program to other women and girls in the Guelph area and beyond. In agreement with Cohort 1 results, participants from Cohort 2 unequivocally confirmed their support for the program with 100% of them indicating they would recommend participation to others.

KEY TAKEAWAYS: POSITIVE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL OUTCOMES

- Participants’ perceptions of their general coaching skills and competencies improved following engagement in the program
- Similar to results from Cohort 1, Cohort 2 participants reported an increase in self-efficacy through engagement with other women in the program's community and through increased coaching knowledge and practice
- Participants perceived they were able to establish and advance gender equity through their participation in the program
- A new emerging theme from the Cohort 2 evaluation was the perceived transfer of skills learned in “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” to participants’ personal and professional lives
- Cohort 2 participants plan to continue their coaching journey beyond the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program

What Challenges Were Experienced by Coach Participants Throughout the Program?

There were three key challenges identified by coach participants from Cohort 2: balancing the diverse interests and skillsets of participants on the same team, understanding the application of rules and soccer terminology, and confronting persisting inequities experienced in the attitudes of adults and players in the soccer environment.

In terms of balancing diverse interests and skillsets of participants, Coach 1 discussed the challenges with designing programming that keeps *all* the young participants on her team engaged throughout the session:

There’s some [children on my team] who are good [at soccer], and they’re almost 6 or so [years old]. So they don’t want my red light/green light [game], or just more like fun things; they want soccer skills. But then there’s the ones who are like, really little still and they like those fun games. [In the future], some education around balancing different skill levels or interest levels or something like that [could be helpful]. - Coach 1

Coach 1 suggested that this balancing of diverse interests of participants on her team was not a challenge she expected when joining the program and is particularly pronounced in the game setting. She elaborated:

Especially with the little ones... [coaching them] is different than I thought, different struggles than I thought. I thought the drills would be the hardest part, but it's actually the games, because that's where some of [the children] are just like sitting in the net. And you're not supposed to have a goalie at that age. So, you're trying to get them to stand up and move. And versus other kids who are like pushing and kicking and shoving other kids over. And I'm like, "Oh, man...", so it's still challenging, but just challenging in a different way than I anticipated. - Coach 1

Balancing the various needs of team members and keeping them interested during practices was also a challenge for Coach 2, who coached an adolescent girls' house league team. Balancing these needs was particularly pronounced when attempting to effectively implement strategies and drills acquired through coach trainings. As Coach 2 notes, she was excited to use the drills demonstrated in coach trainings but learned that some of them were more engaging than others in practice with her team. She said:

When we did like the in-person training with the trainers, they were great and very knowledgeable and skillful, and they had some really good drills I was able to use with the team that I'm coaching. Some of them worked well and then some of them not so well... I coach 13-year-old house league girls, and most of them, they just want to show up on a Monday and socialize, and that's their fun for the week. And, then some of them really do want to play soccer. So I am finding it challenging [to balance these needs]. When going to the [in-person] coach trainings, I was like, "Oh, yeah, these are great drills and if everyone's actually listening and really eager to do it, these are great." But I find it a bit more challenging with the 13-year-old girls that are at the house league level [to implement the learnings]. - Coach 2

Another challenge reported by Cohort 2 participants related to discrepancies between the soccer rules and regulations taught in the coach training modules and those used in the Guelph Soccer context. As stated by Coach 5:

The [Guelph Soccer] handbook doesn't necessarily align with what we learned in the [Ontario Soccer] modules, which I find odd. Guelph Soccer does not follow all the Ontario Soccer stuff, and it kind of shows when you have a group of people who learned it all, and now we're supposed to go and convey something else... I don't feel like we learned enough about the rules... I feel like a little bit more on the actual rules of play [would be helpful]. So at the beginning [of the season] you're not saying to the other coach 'hey these are the rules', 'oh we haven't been using those rules', 'No these are the rules, so these are the things we'll do.' - Coach 5

For Coach 5, displaying the rules in the Guelph Soccer Handbook and being given advanced notice about the potential discrepancies between Ontario Soccer rules and regulations and the rules used in the Guelph Soccer context would have assisted in feeling better prepared:

A more robust handbook would be helpful. It's got guides in it, but put the rules in there, and then, if there are discrepancies between what Guelph Soccer runs, versus what Ontario soccer teaches, there should be someone from Guelph Soccer there to overlay the sessions, to actually give you the more accurate version, I think, would have been helpful as well. - Coach 5

Similarly, Coach 7 identified a lack of knowledge around the specific rule changes that occur between winter and summer seasons at Guelph Soccer as a challenge:

Because I went from winter to summer, the rules changed, and it took me almost a week to figure out that I was doing 7 v. 7... We had always done 5 v. 5 up until that point. And I'm like, I'm sure we go up, and it took me forever to find where that was, so I was like, 'uh oh this is not good. I don't know what we're playing, and my game is in like 3 days.' I mean the, the coach huddle I guess at the beginning went over a bunch of stuff. But yeah, I think it missed a few key points for someone who'd never come up through like U9, U10... something like that would have been nice to know before I'm like scrambling trying to figure out how I'm going to set my team up. - Coach 7

The final challenge reported by Cohort 2 participants related to the broader persisting inequities experienced by women in sport. In the Cohort 1 report, we shared coach participants' reflections on their own experiences in sport and their feelings of pride as they contributed to breaking the gender barrier in coaching through the "She's Got Game – She Can Coach" program. Despite these feelings, some women in Cohort 1 recognized that while the program is an important step forward, barriers persisted in the attitudes of others (e.g., not taking women coaches as seriously as men coaches) and in participants' own self-doubt. The perceived attitudes of others in the environment was a challenge also shared by Cohort 2 participants. For Coach 6, it was the attitudes of other adults in the environment that upheld this barrier:

Last year, I coached my son's soccer team under 9 or 10, and I just, I felt like I wasn't taken very seriously. The assumption was that I didn't know the game. And even this year, with my son's rep team, they've been short coaches a bit because there's 3 separate teams and they only have like 3 coaches. So, if any of [the coaches] are missing... I have offered to help out and never heard anything. And I've noticed that there's a bunch of dads who have been recruited to help out with the team, and some of them seem to know the game, but some of them absolutely do not, and I just feel like... the assumption is because I'm a woman I probably don't know the game... I can confidently say that I do know the game really, really well. I just feel like I'm not given the opportunity. And I [feel like I] need to kind of prove myself or work harder to get the opportunity. The default is, she's a woman, she probably doesn't know what she's doing. And it's icky, doesn't feel good. Yeah, that's kind of the experience I've had so far. - Coach 6

Cohort 2 coaches also found these perceived attitudes apparent in some of the children that they coached. For example, Coach 5 reported these attitudes were exemplified by their

behaviours towards the women coaches, including, a lack of listening or treating them as an authority figure in the soccer environment:

There are kids that will kind of tell [me and my co-coach] what's what on the other team and I actually came home one week, and I was like, 'I don't know that I want to coach, I think I want to ref, because then I'll have a different shirt, and the kids will have to listen to me.' And [me and my co-coach] had a conversation about...is it because I'm a woman, or is it just because of these [particular] kids? I don't really know the answer, but I think that there is potential that because I'm a woman and I'm not an overly dominant human being that they feel like they could come and try to bend things around a little bit more than they would otherwise. - Coach 2

Coach 6 agreed with this sentiment and shared the effects of these behaviours on her experience as a coach:

It was also very apparent with the kids, like that when I coached the boys... they did not listen to much that I had to say. I found it really, really frustrating, and I did often wonder if they would be ignoring a male coach as much as they seem to be ignoring me. It wasn't just the grown-ups. It was, you know, by the time they were 10 years old they had already figured out that men know more about soccer than women do. - Coach 6

Although participants across both cohorts agree that the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program is making a substantial impact on reducing the barriers to women in coaching, some perceived inequities persist. As a next step, it is suggested that Guelph Soccer conduct more outreach to educate the Guelph Soccer community on the program, its mission and the components engaged in by participants. For instance, Guelph Soccer may consider spotlighting women coaches from the program as part of their community-wide communications, such as a monthly or quarterly newsletter.

KEY TAKEAWAYS: CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY COACHES IN COHORT 2

- Coaches found it challenging to manage the diverse interests and skillsets of participants on their teams and ensure engagement of all players throughout practices and games
- Coaches also suggested increased clarity and more soccer terminology in the handbook and/or additional sessions might strengthen knowledge and application of the rules and key terms
- Despite substantial training and engagement in “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*,” some coaches still felt that others in the environment (e.g., parents, children) made assumptions about their knowledge or abilities as women coaches

Were the Program Refinements Made Following Cohort 1 Effective?

In the *“She’s Got Game – She Can Coach”* Year 1/Cohort 1 report, we highlighted the coach participants’ reported challenges with navigating program requirements, including difficulties keeping track of program tasks and navigating the online pathways for educational components of the program accessed through external websites such as Ontario Soccer and the Coaching Association of Canada. In response to these reported challenges, Guelph Soccer developed a timeline image and coach checklist (e.g., important dates, coach education opportunities, total hours for training) to help coaches preview the year ahead. This refinement was successful as Cohort 2 coach participants did not experience difficulties in navigating the program components or associated websites and felt that adequate support was provided throughout the program related to the program pathway.

Coaches from Year 1/Cohort 1 also suggested Guelph Soccer hold an introductory administrative and basic soccer skills session at the outset of the program for first time coaches. In response, Guelph Soccer introduced an 8-week skills program for coaches to learn basic soccer knowledge. This aspect was recognized as helpful by most coaches who participated, however, one coach who participated in Cohort 2 requested that the introductory skills program increase emphasis on the rules and regulations (and how these rules may change depending on season), as well as soccer terminology.

Finally, in Cohort 1/Year 1, coaches suggested that Guelph Soccer continue to promote the program to the wider Guelph Soccer community. In response, Guelph Soccer captured more content of coaches participating in the program for social media and marketing purposes. This is a positive step to increasing awareness but given the evolving nature of marketing and promotion, Cohort 2 participants suggested this priority continue to be expanded throughout the life of the program.

Cohort 1 Check-in: 1-Year Beyond Participation in *“She’s Got Game – She Can Coach”*

At the end of Cohort 1/Year 1, participants indicated an interest in remaining involved in the *“She’s Got Game – She Can Coach”* program through continued access to coaching clinics, socials, and events, as well as the option to be paired with Cohort 2 coaches to continue networking and co-coaching, where possible. To determine whether participants did, indeed, continue their engagement with the program 1 year after their initial involvement, we reached out to former participants with a “Cohort check-in” survey – we received ten responses to this survey. The results showed that six of the ten participants (60%) have coached since their involvement in Cohort 1, and the other four have not coached since their involvement in Cohort 1, but plan to in the foreseeable future. Of the six participants currently coaching, five are in a volunteer coaching role, and one is in a paid coaching role.

The four participants who have not coached since Cohort 1, but plan to in the foreseeable future identified the current barriers preventing them from coaching, which included work and

family commitments, injuries, lack of time, lack of financial support, pregnancy/had a baby, and an interest in coaching only during seasons their children are enrolled.

In terms of other components of the program, four participants reported having some level of engagement with Cohort 2 through social events, coach huddles, coaching practices/games, or coaching courses (e.g., Making Ethical Decisions course), and three participants still participate in the women's soccer league. This continued engagement is a result of Guelph Soccer's intentional planning, as they invited Cohort 1 participants to participate in Cohort 2 coach clinics, socials, and events and paired Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 coaches together for the purpose of co-coaching, when requested. Continued engagement was a request from coaches in the Year 1 evaluation, and Guelph Soccer delivered on this point.

When asked if they still use the skills they learned in the *"She's Got Game – She Can Coach"* program, participants reported the numerous ways they still use the skills they learned in both their coaching and everyday life. For example, Coach 20 reported how being a part of Cohort 1 helped her develop into the coach she is now *"I embraced more 'me' vs. what I thought a 'good coach' should be - providing a fun and welcoming environment, putting kids needs first and re-wiring any negative thoughts/lack of confidence I had in my ability to coach."* In addition, coaches also reported how being a part of Cohort 1 helped them better understand the needs of the age groups they coach, the coaching language they use, how to plan practices, and how to coach during games. For example, Coach 21 shared the skills developed through engagement in the program have been helpful in providing her with *"a better understanding of what each age group needs/is looking has been useful in tailoring any practice time, and how to interact with the players."* Further, Cohort 1 coaches also shared how they use the skills they learned in Cohort 1 in their lives outside of soccer, including *"using the skills for leadership and other management roles at work and personal life"*, as well as *"using session planning ideas in teaching roles."* Finally, the community built from Cohort 1 of the *"She's Got Game – She Can Coach"* program, along with the passion for growing women's sports, is still felt by Cohort 1 coaches. For example, Coach 19, shared *"being part of Cohort 1 was a great experience and a great opportunity to meet like-minded people. It provided some drive to support and represent women in sport."*

While Cohort 1 coaches presently use numerous skills they learned in the *"She's Got Game – She Can Coach"* program, they reported the most helpful skills are: leadership, confidence in coaching abilities, how to structure practices, concussion training, teaching strategies for kids, modifying activities for different learning objectives, and teaching skill progression. However, Cohort 1 coaches also wish they knew more about certain aspects of coaching and identified areas in which they need to advance their skills. These include how to deal with interpersonal relationships on a team, how to handle certain age groups, conflict resolution, team motivation, soccer politics, and team management. They also offered that it would be helpful to have more practical training with the players, observe other coaches, and co-coach to help learn new ideas and ways to manage common coaching difficulties.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE PROGRAM

Participants from Cohort 2 suggested two core areas where improvements to the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program could be made by Guelph Soccer: refinements to the administration and operations of the program, and increased promotion in the Guelph Soccer community.

Administration and Operations

For Cohort 2, a few minor administrative and operational refinements could be made by Guelph Soccer to improve the program. First, a few Cohort 2 coaches shared that they encountered scheduling difficulties that could be mitigated by providing coaches with more clarity and advanced notice around anticipated soccer schedules for the season. For instance, Coach 7 shared her experience of trying to obtain the schedules for both house league and competitive leagues so that she could organize her participation in the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program:

I guess [Guelph Soccer] does their schedules differently for house league and rep. There's someone who does the house league schedule, and then there's someone who does the rep schedule, and they're 2 different people. So, the house league schedule came out in March, and I asked when their practices were going to be for the rep team, and I got a 'I have no idea' until about the beginning of April. So that's why I didn't sign up to play [in the women's league] this year, because I didn't know if there was going to be practice the same night as my daughter, or when I wanted to coach. So... that was a barrier, for me anyways, to play. - Coach 7

A perceived lack of coordination of the schedules meant that Coach 7’s participation in program components was affected, as she opted not to sign up for the women’s league in case of an unanticipated scheduling conflict. Coach 5 encountered similar scheduling difficulties when trying to register her children for different levels of soccer, while also hoping for the opportunity to coach a team:

If you have multiple kids that play soccer, but at different levels. It would be really awesome if we knew all the [scheduling] information before we had to sign them up, right? Like now I never see my daughter play because Wednesday nights I'm coaching house league... I feel like everybody probably has that scheduling problem... The biggest barrier is if you have multiple kids in soccer, there's gotta be a more convenient way to get this all organized so that everybody can get the information before they have to decide where their kids are going to land. Because I think time, to me, always seems like the barrier. - Coach 5

In the future, Guelph Soccer may consider coordinating the release of the house league and competitive schedules with more advanced notice to ease the potential challenges for women coaches with complex scheduling needs.

Another administrative aspect requiring minor refinements related to the timing of coach trainings. A few coaches from Cohort 2 shared that the close timeframe in which the in-person trainings were scheduled, compounded by the need to complete online modules in preparation, made it challenging to balance all of their responsibilities. As illustrated by Coach 7:

When we did all of our 4 trainings, like the fundamentals, they were really close together and you had to have the online portion done before you went to your in-person session. And for me being March and April, that is my busiest time of year at work. So, there were a few nights I was up until midnight just trying to do the online portion before I had like the 5 hours on Sunday of soccer. So I don't know, maybe just maybe not every 2 weeks or something... it was hard to juggle getting the day off work during my busy season, and finding child care, and then getting to this for our in-person soccer session. I mean, I loved it, but it was definitely a slog through March a little bit. - Coach 7

Challenges prompted by the timeframe were further exacerbated when coaches' attendance at the trainings were contingent upon finding childcare. As explained by Coach 5:

It's sometimes tricky to ask a mom to take a giant chunk of time to go do the training pieces. It was great that there was daycare provided for the She's Got Game portion of it (women's league), but for the She Can Coach program (coach training), that's a long chunk of time, and if you are amping up to do your C-license and you need to go like 4 weekends in a row or however it is originally scheduled, like that was pretty daunting for me. My kids aren't young; the youngest is 8 and the oldest is 12...but it was still like a lot of kind of juggling to get [childcare] sorted out... I think having daycare available would have been a great answer. - Coach 5

In the future, Guelph Soccer could consider scheduling the in-person trainings further apart, arranging childcare on site for coach participants attending the trainings, and/or providing participants with soft deadlines well in advance of the in-person trainings to encourage coaches to complete the online components and balance the program workload over a longer period of time.

An additional administrative aspect wherein participants felt there could be more clarity related to the ways in which the program requirements for “She’s Got Game – She Can Coach” extended to other coaches in the Guelph Soccer system. Cohort 2 coaches suggested that all coaches who interact with participants in the Guelph Soccer programs should be encouraged to take the trainings offered in the “She’s Got Game – She Can Coach” program, especially when coaching girls. As Coach 6 said:

I don't know what's mandatory [in terms of training] across Guelph Soccer... I coached before I joined the She's Got Game – She Can Coach program, and I'm pretty sure I only had to do the coaching girls module when I joined She Can Coach. I didn't have to prior, which doesn't make sense to me... If you can keep girls in sports, they're going to be

coaches, maybe down the line... but you have to recognize that a lot of girls are going to be coached by men, and what can you do for that [in terms of training]? - Coach 6

As Coach 5 reflected on her own child's experience as a girl in the soccer environment, she expressed a belief that more coaches should have education on coaching girls specifically:

This is an awesome program, but we also need to think about the other coaches that coach women. I think about my daughter's experience, and how she left a soccer team and went to a whole different club now because of experiences with her team and with her coach. And when I go through those training modules [focused on keeping girls in sport] and think about what an ideal coach is, the things that I would like to emulate, the things that I see from coaches that I appreciate, and then think about the reasons that she left. I think they need to hammer – they means broadly Ontario Soccer, Guelph Soccer, everyone – some of these specific girl things harder than they do, and to make sure that the girls are getting an experience, that whether their coach is male or women, they are engaged to stay because they feel comfortable and safe, and like they are getting the same experience as their brother or their male friend, etc. - Coach 5

If Guelph Soccer does not currently encourage the wider Guelph Soccer coach community to take specific training focused on how to coach girls and keep them in sport, it may consider doing so in the future. It may also be helpful to include an informational overview of mandatory requirements for coaches outside of the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program in a Coach Huddle or the handbook.

Finally, several Cohort 2 coaches suggested that future iterations of the program have more opportunities to connect socially – in-person – with the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” network. Coaches recognize that the program originated in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated challenges, but felt more in-person opportunities to connect would be beneficial for getting to know other members of the program:

The program was really good and I really enjoyed it. But I think more in-person [opportunities to connect]. I know we're just coming out of COVID, so everybody's online. And it's hard to get together and drive places and stuff like that, because that adds time... I find [making connections] really hard to do when I'm talking to you on a screen whereas if we are in-person for a meeting, you know, you could stay around after the meeting, and get to know the other coaches and talk and stuff like that. So I think that's maybe an aspect we want to go to now that we're getting back to more in-person activities. – Coach 7

Coach 6 echoed this sentiment and felt that more opportunities to connect in-person would also facilitate learning between members of the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” network:

My preference would be for in-person events more so than online, if at all possible... Maybe it's [Guelph Soccer] facilitating [social engagement] a little bit... More communication between the participants of the program would be really helpful.

Because I'm sure there are a lot of women in the group with that coaching knowledge, and if there was just like some facilitated time together... there's a lot of teaching, just like lateral teaching that could also happen as well. - Coach 6

Importantly, coaches suggested that in-person social opportunities facilitated by Guelph Soccer do not need to be in addition to all of the other program components, but instead could be attached to events already occurring, such as the women's league, coach huddles, or coach trainings. For example, coaches suggested that a social event could be held before or after women's league games as many of the program participants will already be in-person to play a soccer game. In the future, Guelph Soccer could consider increasing the number of opportunities to connect socially, in-person with fellow participants and assess whether there is increased attendance or if it presents a barrier to those who prefer to join online.

Marketing of the Program

In the Cohort 1/Year 1 report, we highlighted participants' desire to see increased marketing and promotional strategies to further showcase the program in the Guelph Soccer community and beyond. In the evaluation for Cohort 2, coaches participants reflected the same sentiment; Guelph Soccer could engage in increased promotion throughout the club to showcase "She's Got Game – She Can Coach," emphasize its importance to the club, promote the values of the program in the community, and the importance of having women coaches. As stated by Coach 6:

In general, there needs to be more recognition of the program beyond us to know that this is a priority for the club. I think it's kind of like not very well known, so I think there could be more [promotion]. I mean, Guelph Soccer sends out a ton of communication and I don't remember that I've ever seen it being mentioned that this is a priority at the club. - Coach 6

As a result, it is suggested that Guelph Soccer continue to integrate "She's Got Game – She Can Coach" marketing and promotion across all levels of programming, online platforms (e.g., social media, website, newsletter/communications), and in-person events to enhance the value, meaning, awareness, and impact of the program.

KEY TAKEAWAYS: PROGRAM REFINEMENTS SUGGESTED BY COACHES IN COHORT 2

- Coordinating the release of competitive and recreational schedules in advance of registration may help mitigate scheduling complexities
- Scheduling the in-person trainings further apart, offering childcare during the trainings, and/or creating soft deadlines for online components of the program further in advance of the in-person trainings may help balance the workload and logistics over a longer period of time
- Offering more in-person opportunities for the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” network may help strengthen connections and deepen the learning experience
- Increase efforts to market and promote the program more widely

CONCLUSION

It is well-documented in the existing literature that there is a lack of women coaches across all levels of sport in Canada and abroad (Banwell, 2020). Research suggests that women are confronted by unique barriers in coaching, including, a male-dominated environment, overemphasis on winning at all costs, perceived lack of opportunities or job insecurity, low financial compensation, competing domestic responsibilities, perceived lack of value of women in sport, employers’ reluctance to employ women coaches, issues of harassment, and a lack of programs designed to mentor and develop women coaches (Kerr & Ali, 2012; Kerr & Banwell, 2016; Kerr & Marshall, 2007; LaVoi, 2016; Norman, 2013). Although significant progress to advance women has been made in other professional fields (e.g., higher education, business), a lack of women in coaching remains. Women athletes, especially, benefit from the skills and competencies women coaches bring to sport (Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Norman, 2013). Moreover, the presence and influence of women coaches may empower other women athletes and coaches (Norman, 2013), and influence girls and women to play and remain in sport (Meier, 2015).

For Guelph Soccer, specifically, a paucity of women in coaching roles was identified as an area for improvement within the organization. In 2019, the ratio of coaches at the club were 5:1 men to women. To address this existing gap, Guelph Soccer developed the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*,” a three-year pilot program that began in the Fall of 2021. The purpose of this report is to evaluate the effectiveness of Year 2 of the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program.

The results of the evaluation of Year 2 demonstrate that “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” continues to be effective in recruiting, training, and developing women coaches. Cohort 2 participants suggested that the program alleviated key barriers to coaching through ongoing informational and instrumental support, most significantly through the funding of coach certifications and skills trainings. As a result of engagement in the program, participants reported positive personal and professional development, including increased coaching skills,

technical skill development, increased self-efficacy, and a sense of community. A majority of participants also confirmed their intentions to remain involved in the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” women’s soccer league and continue their coaching journeys beyond the program.

Based on feedback from Year 1 of the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program, program administrators implemented improvements for Year 2. These improvements included creating a timeline image and coach checklist, offering an 8-week soccer skills program, increasing content for social media and marketing and were found to be effective by Cohort 2 participants. Looking ahead to year 3 of the program, Cohort 2 participants suggest a few recommendations for the administration, operations, and marketing of the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program. These include releasing competitive and recreational schedules ahead of registration, offering childcare during trainings, scheduling in-person trainings further apart, offering more networking opportunities for program participants, and promoting the program more widely.

Overall, based on the pre- and post-participant surveys, as well as the mid-point focus groups, Cohort 2 participants appraised Year 2 of the “*She’s Got Game – She Can Coach*” program as a continued success in recruiting, retaining and developing girls and women into coaches in the Guelph Soccer community.

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