

# A female NHL coach? This is a game changer

Jessica Campbell is crossing the blue line by becoming the NHL's first female coach.

For the first time in NHL history, a female full-time coach stands behind the bench. At the start of the 2024 season, the Seattle Kraken made history by adding Jessica Campbell as an assistant coach—a groundbreaking decision that has me, and many others, excited.

Hockey is more than just our national sport in Canada; it's practically a religion. So we have one more reason to cheer—Coach Campbell is also a proud Canadian. Originally from Saskatchewan, she's built an impressive résumé, having played in the NCAA, in the Canadian Women's Hockey League, and with Canada's national women's team before turning to coaching. There's even a BC connection—some of her earlier coaching years were in Kelowna, where she describes establishing her coaching voice.<sup>1</sup>

It's true that Coach Campbell is not the first woman to make her mark in the NHL. Many women have been impacting professional hockey behind the scenes, including the Vancouver Canucks' own assistant general manager, Cammi Granato. Yet there's something particularly powerful about seeing a woman directly behind the players, leading the action from the bench. It feels like a real "TSN turning point," and a historic moment for hockey fans everywhere.

Even my young daughter likes hockey a little bit more now. It reminds me a little of how football became her favorite sport because Taylor Swift's boyfriend was in the Super Bowl. Although they're vastly different, both Travis Kelce and Coach Campbell give fans, especially women, another reason to feel connected, bringing personal stories and a new dimension to games we thought we already knew.

In the NHL, it was due time that diversity got a power play.

As a lifelong hockey fan, I grew up rooting for the Toronto Maple Leafs, with a Felix Potvin poster proudly displayed on my wall. (Please know that I converted to Canuck-ism when I moved to BC in 2008 and have been loyal ever since.) My kids have also grown up around the game, and I have spent countless hours in arenas and at tournaments. But in 2022, when Hockey Canada's handling of the 2018

sexual assault allegations against junior hockey players came to light, I paused to consider the culture I was supporting.<sup>2</sup> After learning of the lack of leadership, transparency, and accountability, I questioned the environment I was encouraging my kids to embrace. That scandal served as a reckoning, costing Hockey Canada over \$23 million in lost sponsorships and prompting a total overhaul of its board of directors.

Campbell's presence behind the bench is a glimmer of hope that change is possible. It's a signal that professional hockey values talent, respect, and integrity. However, there are still plenty of misogynists who deserve a trip to the penalty box for their cowardly comments online. Trolls posting unimagined quips like "The first thing she's going to do is teach the players to keep the toilet seat down" only demonstrates the need for ongoing efforts to create a more inclusive and respectful sport.

Meaningful culture change will take time. Outdated stereotypes need to be challenged at all levels of the sport, from the locker room to the boardroom to the bleachers. But for young girls watching, Coach Campbell is a beacon, reinforcing the idea that they, too, can reach the top levels of any field if they work hard and stay passionate. As they say, girls need to "see it to be it," and Jessica Campbell is one example to young athletes that leadership, skill, and perseverance are not bound by gender.

It's also a powerful opportunity for the NHL to telegraph its commitment to fostering a more inclusive hockey community.

As Jessica Campbell and the Seattle Kraken continue to skate forward into new territory this season, perhaps take a moment to tune in and share her success with a hockey fan in your life. For a young athlete, her inspiring story might just be the ultimate assist. ■

—Caitlin Dunne, MD, FRCSC

**This is a powerful opportunity for the NHL to telegraph its commitment to fostering a more inclusive hockey community.**

## References

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# Finding balance and being intentional to create happiness

With December upon us, many of us have been experiencing what seems like a never-ending cold and flu season, both in clinic and at home. This comes alongside the increased mental and physical workload of holiday gatherings, keeping traditions, and spending time with family and friends. With the added stress, I hope you all take time to reflect on how much you have accomplished this year and any goals you may have set at the beginning. One goal that I set for myself is to be more intentional with how I spend my time and to find what fills my cup.

I recently read the book *The Courage to be Disliked* by Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga. It is an engaging and insightful read and especially pertinent at the end of the year when there is time to reflect. The book's core message is that happiness isn't found through acceptance from others but by living true to ourselves. One highlighted concept is to separate tasks and focus on what you can control. In clinical practice, I continue to work on recognizing the boundaries between my tasks and those belonging to others. As physicians, we can strive to provide the best care, but a patient's response and the outcome of treatment are not always predictable. Letting go of what we can't control helps prevent emotional exhaustion. Another idea discussed in the book is self-care, reminding us that we cannot pour from an empty cup. Our job is often about giving, and that can come at the cost of our own well-being. This book reminds us that embracing self-care is not

selfish but essential to providing ongoing compassionate care.

As my career progresses and evolves, I am still trying to find the right balance, one that brings together work, family, self-care, and everything in between. The right balance is different for everyone. Being in a group practice has allowed me to see the different ways others have set up their practices to achieve this balance and do what's right for them. It is

also encouraging to see the many initiatives in medical school, residency, and practice focusing on physician well-being. It is important to set up boundaries that help support a sustainable clinical practice for the long term.

As I navigate this winter and holiday season, I hope to be more intentional with how I spend my time with my family and friends and find things that bring me happiness. Maybe the path to true happiness starts with giving ourselves permission to live authentically, set out on our own terms.

—Yvonne Sin, MD

**Embracing self-care is not selfish but essential to providing ongoing compassionate care.**

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