

From player to coach

By LISA TIMPF

THE TRANSITION FROM player to coach is often a difficult one to make.

Former national volleyball team member Karen Fraser, a standout for Dalhousie's women's volleyball squad for five years, made that change in the '84-85 season, while coach Lois MacGregor took the year off.

Fraser successfully exploited her national team and collegiate playing experience to coach the Tigers to an undefeated league record and a berth in the CIAU championships.

Fraser was pleased with the league record, but disappointed in the Tiger's eighth-place finish at the national intercollegiate finals.

"Had we had more competition during the year, I feel we would have done better at the nationals," said Fraser. "We didn't have the experience in close games, except for the Dalhousie Classic and the York tournament."

"We're hoping that next year the Dal club team will be strong so we can practise against them," said Fraser.

Playing men's teams as a form of practise doesn't really simulate game conditions for women's matches, Fraser found.

"We tried playing a bantam men's team," said Fraser. "Their hitting was better, but their passing and defensive skills were poor by comparison."

"But if we played guys at a higher level, they hit the ball too hard, so again it didn't simulate women's game conditions."

Problems in making the transition from player to coach are sometimes compounded if the coach is involved with the same team he or she played for previously.

"I was really worried at the start of the season because I was

friends with quite a few of the players, and I wondered if they would take advantage of that," said Fraser of coaching her former teammates. "But, although there were a few rocky times, there were no real problems. It was a very cohesive group this year, and I was able to retain the friendships without losing their respect."

"I was really happy with the way it worked out."

Another area of difficulty in the transition process lies in the coach finding him/herself still wanting to play.

"When the team was playing poorly in a game, I found myself wishing I was able to go out on the court to help — I felt so helpless on the bench," said Fraser. "And when they were playing really well, I wished I could be out there because it looked like so much fun."

Fraser did not play this year at the club level, but hopes to be able to get back into it. However, having played at the national level, this will require a change in approach.

"I'll have to go into it with the attitude that it's just for fun — I have to be really patient and try not to get frustrated," said Fraser.

Although she entered the coaching experience this year thinking of it as a short-term project, Fraser enjoyed the experience and now hopes to make it a long-term concern.

"I would like to remain involved in coaching," she said, "and I'm hoping to take more (NCCP technical) courses."

"I'd like to stay involved at the intercollegiate level, with an eye to perhaps someday being able to help out with coaching at the national level."

Fraser hopes to retain her involvement with the Dal team next year, as an assistant to returning head coach Lois MacGregor.

Overtime Power plays

By LISA TIMPF

SPORT HAS BEEN SAID BY many sport sociologists to be among the most conservative institutions in society.

Certainly the social importance of power relationships is reflected in sport.

Hierarchical power structures within organizations, boss-worker relationships, and power in person-to-person interactions are all seen in the sport context.

Sport organizations, whether at the club, provincial, or national level, have both historically and at present taken on a hierarchical form, reflecting the type of power structures seen within the business community.

While this has provided an efficient method of implementing organizational objectives and executing items of business, the danger lies in the fact that often the result has been arbitrary imposition of decisions without the athlete (the participant) providing input.

Then there's the parallel of the boss-worker relationship — the player-coach relationship. Some coaches believe that athletes need to be manipulated in order to get the most out of them. This is what I call the "head games" approach, and I've seen it have negative consequences on too many of my friends to believe it as a valid approach.

The problem, again, is that often coaches are reluctant to relinquish any of the power



Dalhousie volleyball coach Karen Fraser shares some words of wisdom with her players at the Dal Volleyball Classic. Fraser coached the team to an undefeated AUAA season and an eighth-place finish at the CIAU championships. Photo: Marcus Snowden, Dal Photo.

vested by their position. If you let the athletes know what you're up to, you have less power than if you keep them guessing, asking "What does he/she really want?" "What kind of mood is he/she going to be in today/ in half an hour?" "What does he/she really think of me as a player/athlete?" Keep them off balance, keep them wondering, and you'll keep your power. Or so goes the theory.

Often the athletes play along. Believing they need someone to tell them what to do, they question neither the system nor the process. And so if they aren't treated as mature adults with a right to participate in decision-making, and without a right to know what the coach really wants, it is sometimes only themselves that they have to blame.

Then too, athletes themselves often participate in the power play process in interpersonal relationships with teammates.

Seniority and skill level are two sources of power within the team, but there are others. There's nothing wrong with holding power in these contexts if it is used positively. However, some players use it to attempt to influence coaching decisions to their advantage, while others use it to "keep the rookies in their place." All of which is beneficial for the people in power but a little

dehumanizing for those without it.

Too often, power plays are performed, consciously or subconsciously, because of the fear of the vulnerability that openness and sharing bring. Maybe it's because people believe that sharing their power will give others power over them. Maybe it's because they feel that's the way it's always been done, so that's the way it *should* be done. Or maybe they just never question the process because one way or the other the product — the playing — still happens.

A coach openly communicating expectations, hopes, and dreams for the team and for the individual player is one alternative to manipulation and "head games."

Communicating of individual goals and objectives among teammates is one way of helping to break down veteran/rookie power blocks.

Athletes have to take some responsibility for the degree to which their experiences are frustrating due to power-play situations.

A more humanistic, sharing model of sport participation would bring increased vulnerability for all concerned, but perhaps also increased potential for fulfillment for all concerned. Something to think about.

Hats off to the men (and women) in the striped shirts

By JONATHAN PLYMOUTH

"WHAT, ARE YOU BLIND?"

"Put your glasses on!"

"Come on, ya bum!"

You can hear these comments, and others, in arenas, in gyms and near baseball diamonds.

The people doing the hollering can be parents of minor-league players, coaches of professional or collegiate teams, or fans or athletes from six to 60, and beyond at either end of the spectrum.

But the target is the same — the referee/umpire/linesman/official.

With the level of abuse they get, you sometimes wonder why they do it — especially those increasingly rare instances where they don't get paid.

What players, coaches and fans often forget is that the call is in the eye of the beholder. And what two different people behold seeing the same thing from two different angles is often just that — different.

What the athlete physically experiences ("he pushed me, I didn't push him") may not be evident to someone else who can't feel it but tries to see.

I'm not saying referees are never wrong. We all make mistakes. Coaches make mistakes. Players make mistakes. Even sportswriters (although rarely) make mistakes. Why can't officials?

This is not to say either that poorly-prepared, inadequately trained or inattentive officials shouldn't be in some way reprimanded. But alternative channels (a concern for professional attitudes among the officiating ranks or close supervision of the situation by the official assigner) are more appropriate routes to pursue in dealing with the problem.

And a well-prepared official who is trying his/her best to stay on top of the game but isn't seeing the same thing as players, coaches or fans, 100 per cent of the time, is not necessarily derelict in his/her duty.

A tip of the hat from the sports department to members of the officiating fraternity. You deserve it.

