

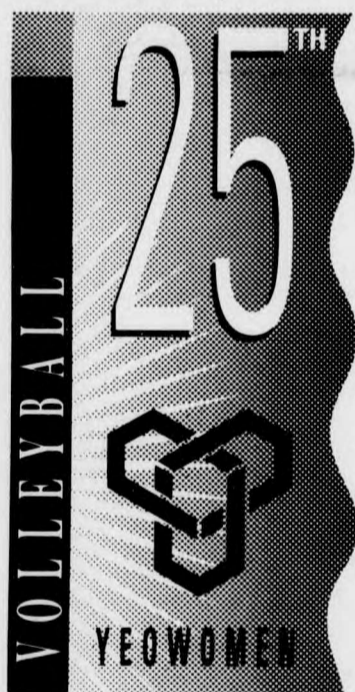
# Mary Lyons: A legacy to York

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## LOOKING BACK LOOKING AHEAD

UNDER Mary Lyons' guidance as women's athletic coordinator the York Yeowomen have become one of the strongest athletic programs in Canada. Lyons is retiring at the end of this year, leaving behind a rich legacy, not only to York, but to university athletics in Canada. Clockwise from TOP LEFT—the 1991-92 volleyball Yeowomen, Ontario champions and hosts this weekend of the National volleyball championships; the original 1967-68 volleyball Yeowomen, with Lyons as coach; Lyons in 1973; with Yeowoman Lily Durzo in 1976, unveiling the Yeowomen's new logo; celebrating 25 years of women's volleyball at York; Lyons

by Josh Rubin

It will be the end of an era in York athletics.

On July 1, women's athletic coordinator Mary Lyons will be leaving York after 25 years at the university.

When Lyons arrived here in the summer of 1967, it was a different world, both outside the universities as well as the world of women's athletics.

At York, the physical education program was still in its infancy and the Tait McKenzie facility was less than a year old.

After responding to an ad in the *Globe and Mail*, Lyons says she was offered a job by the department to develop a women's athletics program. Though the opportunity to start from ground up was admittedly appealing, Lyons says she was still a little hesitant about accepting.

"I kept on asking myself if I really wanted to be in a big city," said Lyons, who was teaching high-school phys.ed. and math in Niagara at the time.

Still, the attraction of developing a program in a department which included the likes of department head Bryce Taylor proved to be too strong to resist. According to Lyons, it was Taylor's progressive thinking which helped to pave the way for the subsequent success of women's athletics at York.

"One of the reasons we've been allowed to grow as much as we have is that Bryce put in two athletic coordinators, one for women's athletics, and one for men's. They each had equal power in developing their own programs," said Lyons, adding that simply wasn't the case at a lot of universities.

"In many universities, there's a male coordinator, and the person in charge of women's athletics is only his assistant," Lyons said.

Norm Gledhill, who is a York professor and also one of Canada's top anti-doping experts has known Lyons for 22 years, says he will be sorry to see her go.

"What she has done is bring the women's athletics program as close as possible to the men's, both in terms of budget, facilities and number of teams," Gledhill said, adding "she's worked extremely hard."

Gledhill's sentiments were echoed by OWIAA executive director Sheila Forshaw, who graduated from York's physical education program in 1982.

"Mary is somebody who's been really supportive of people going through the program, and she's been a real force in women's athletics, not just at York," said Forshaw in reference to Lyons' work in getting the Ontario Women's Interuniversity Athletic Association off the ground.

During the 1969-70 season, Lyons served on a committee which sought (and eventually attained) the merger of two competing conferences in Ontario at the time, the OQWCIA (where York played) and the WIAU.

The union seemed a logical thing to do, as the two conferences often played interlocking schedules any-

way. When they eventually did join up, Lyons was fairly active in the new OWIAA, and in 1971 served as president.

In the mid-70s, Lyons was also president of the Canadian Women's Interuniversity Athletic Union (CWIAU) when the group merged with the CIAU, a national body for men's athletics.

Lyons says the main thrust for the national merger came from programs outside Ontario. Programs which for the most part, says Lyons, were run by men.

"They assured us that we wouldn't have to follow the same eligibility rules, but here we are now, and women have got identical regulations," Lyons said.

One of the CIAU regulations that had bothered Lyons at the time was that any athlete had to sit out of competition for an entire season after transferring schools.

Said Lyons "there's some legitimate reasons for transferring. Besides, at the time, women's athletics didn't have the same kind of unethical recruiting as did, say, football."

In addition to all her administrative work, Lyons also found time for two stints as head coach of the Yeowomen volleyball team, and organized what has become one of North America's most prestigious annual volleyball coaching and playing seminars.

As for her decision to leave York, Lyons says she felt it was just "time to do other things, like go on vacation a little more and relax." She also says she'll take some fond memories of York with her.

"I've really loved my job, and I've been lucky to work with some really good people," Lyons said.

