

## EVOLUTION OF THE DIVISION I FEMALE STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH AND A CALL FOR CONTINUED GROWTH IN THE PROFESSION

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***Increasing Presence Of Females In The Weight Room.*** In 1984, Meg Ritchie (now Meg Stone) was the first ever female head strength and conditioning (S&C) coach at a Division I (D-I) school. In 2004, Andrea Hudy was named the first female S&C coach for a D-I Men's Basketball team (Profiles of Women in S&C, NSCA). Up until the early 1990's, the strength and conditioning profession remained relatively homogenous with 99% of all head S&C coaching positions held by males and only 1 female S&C coach in D-I (Todd, Lovett, & Todd 1991, Pullo, 1992). Moving through the 1990's, the presence of female S&C coaches began to increase. In 1997, the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) reported that female S&C coaches grew to occupy 5% of D-I S&C coaching positions. In 2005, The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport began publishing an annual Racial and Gender Report Card that included data on D-I S&C coaches. In their most recent 2015-2016 report, 14.2% of D-I S&C coaches were females, only a 2.1% increase from 2005 (Lapchick, 2017). As of 2014, 41.4% of D-I schools had at least one female S&C coach, a 6.8% increase from 2012 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Though impossible to determine the number of females occupying head positions with any certainty from this information, it may be reasonably inferred that this is also trending upwards. Future reports should present the number of females who currently hold head or director D-I S&C coaching positions. This increasing presence of females within the S&C profession is certainly worth celebrating; however, it is important to acknowledge that female S&C coaches may not be advancing at the same rate or magnitude as their male counterparts. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to highlight unique barriers faced by aspiring female S&C coaches and to present strategies for enhancing their development.

***Barriers For Females Breaking Into The Field.*** Some of the most distinctive barriers for aspiring female S&C coaches are unequal assumptions of competency compared to males and differences in development experiences and opportunities. Female coaches often feel excessive pressure to prove their competencies and experience coaching as an intimidating culture because of their position as an outsider in a historically male dominated profession (Norman, 2010, Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Additionally, female coaches may have to work harder to earn respect from male athletes compared to their male colleagues. Magnusen & Rhea (2009) showed D-I male football players declared considerable preference for a male S&C coach and shared several negative attitudes towards the idea of having a female strength coach. A few of the negative attitudes expressed were that "she would not make them train with greater intensity and efficiency, that she would not be as likely to be a head strength coach in 20 years, that they would not be able to take it when she corrected their form, that they would not have as much confidence that she was a good strength coach, and that she would be less likely to motivate them." On the other hand, female soccer and volleyball players had no gender preference and felt that their training would be productive with any qualified S&C coach, regardless of gender. The prospective male and female S&C coaches that were presented to the athletes at the beginning of the survey were shown to be equally qualified. (Magnusen & Rhea, 2009). Future research should survey D-I athletes from a variety of sports across conferences to determine their perceptions of and attitudes towards prospective male and female S&C coaches with differing

qualifications. Due to the longstanding prevalent role that men have had in S&C and athletics, men are often the recipients of favorable presumptions of legitimacy when compared to women who have historically been outliers in the S&C profession.

Additionally, it is well supported that coaching opportunities and experiences differ between male and female S&C coaches. Female S&C coaches spend considerably less time coaching male athletes that are involved in the ‘revenue sports’ (i.e. football, basketball, baseball) when compared to male S&C coaches (Brooks, Ziatz, Johnson, and Hollander, 2000). Sartore-Baldwin (2013) identified that within D-I S&C, “women are still very much the minority and that advancement opportunities are scarce for women.” Without the same opportunities to work with revenue sports, it makes it difficult for a female S&C coach to practice a wide variety of skills and acquire necessary knowledge for advancement in the profession. Andrea Hudy and Meg Stone are wonderful examples of women who were entrusted by a revenue sport coach to develop the desired characteristics of their athletes. Hudy has received multiple awards from the NCSA, including the NSCA Impact Award (2017) and the College S&C Coach of the Year Award (2013). Since Hudy’s 2004 debut at the University of Kansas, 19 men have been drafted into the NBA from KU (Kansas Athletics, 2017). Stone holds numerous accolades including the College Strength Coaches Association’s “Legends in the Field” award, first female inductee to the USA Strength Coaches Hall of Fame (2003), and the first female recipient of the Boyd Epley Award for Lifetime Achievement (2009) (Profiles of Women in S&C, NSCA). Stone has also contributed to the development of numerous Olympians and professional athletes. Their high levels of success illustrate what highly qualified female S&C coaches can produce when given the opportunity to put their knowledge and tactics to work within revenue sports. Hudy and Stone continue to be dominant leaders and contributors within the S&C profession, regardless of their identity as female.

***Mentorship And Networking.*** Within the S&C profession, it is commonly understood that mentorship has significant implications for the aspiring S&C coach. Although the female-specific literature is limited, Sartore-Baldwin (2013) explored differences between the experiences of male and female D-I S&C coaches and found “the most prominent theme that emerged from the data was how the role of mentorship was integral to the successes of female S&C coaches” while the male S&C coaches did not emphasize the value of the mentor-protégé relationship as consistently or to the same degree. Examining the impact of same-gender mentoring on the career outcomes of female S&C coaches would be a useful inquiry. Through mentorship, professional networks are likely to be enhanced, which is recognized as one of the most influential factors in the ability for women to develop coaching careers (Greenhill, Auld, Cuskelly, & Hooper, 2009). Because credentials alone are not sufficient to gain a head S&C position, it would be in the best interest of the developing female coach to invest considerable energy into building interpersonal networks. Current or past female S&C coaches that can provide insight to aspiring female S&C coaches on how to overcome distinctive barriers based on experience may provide a unique and highly empathetic perspective. Increasing and diversifying ways to connect aspiring female S&C coaches with current or past female S&C coaches may be impactful for recruiting more females into the profession, which may ultimately lead to higher volumes of advancement to head positions.

***Previously Made Recommendations.*** Brooks et al. (2000) suggested the following solutions for increasing the number of female D-I S&C coaches: promoting mentoring programs, establishing personal support networks among female coaching staff members, and increasing internship

programs for female students and athletes that aspire to be a S&C coach. Magnusen & Rhea (2009) suggested that male athletes be exposed to female S&C coaches earlier in their sporting career to reduce gender bias.

**Updated Recommendations.** Outlined below are current resources that female S&C coaches might use to build their career, along with suggested improvements that would allow these developing coaches to be better prepared to overcome barriers unique to their gender.

Resource	Current Limitations	Suggested Improvements
Mentorships & Internships	<p>Commonly perceived that a mentorship must occur in person.</p> <p>Organizations often assign a formal mentor.</p> <p>Not as many potential female mentors as there are potential male mentors in the S&amp;C profession.</p> <p>Typically require traveling or relocating to region where internship site is or where mentor works.</p> <p>Require working many unpaid hours.</p>	<p>Creation of online mentorship opportunities.</p> <p>Organizations/Athletic Departments adopt informal mentorship model.</p> <p>Improve ways to connect aspiring female S&amp;C coaches with current or past female S&amp;C coaches.</p>
Online Resources (ex: NSCA Women's Committee, CSCCa Women's Facebook group)	<p>Very limited online resources specifically for females.</p> <p>Of the female S&amp;C specific online resources that exist, there is a lack of activity and valuable content for the current or aspiring female S&amp;C coach.</p>	<p>Creation of an online platform that shares experiences and stories of female S&amp;C coaches and enhances ways to connect aspiring female S&amp;C coaches with current or past female S&amp;C coaches.</p>
Conferences (ex: NSCA National Conference, CSCCa National Conference)	<p>Predominantly attended by males.</p> <p>Large # of attendants and short duration makes it challenging to form meaningful connections.</p>	<p>Conferences should include more sessions that aim to bring together current females in the profession (ex: CSCCa Female S&amp;C Coaches Breakfast Meeting)</p>

**Implications.** Perceptions of female S&C coaches are certainly changing. A group of both male and female D-I S&C coaches agreed that “women are having an increasingly important presence in the field of strength and conditioning” (Sartore-Baldwin, 2013). Efforts to diversify the profession by both male and female S&C coaches must continue. Current and past female S&C coaches should be surveyed to determine the greatest challenges they face, and the relative contributions that various resources, opportunities, and experiences had in shaping their career. Additionally, it should be determined if having or working alongside an experienced female S&C coach changes the way male athletes or male S&C coaches perceive females in the S&C

profession. By answering these questions, it may improve educational and developmental opportunities for aspiring female S&C coaches and increase the number of females who rise to the top of the profession and bring about impactful change to the general perceptions of female S&C coaches by male athletes and colleagues.

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