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INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP ON WOMEN AND SPORT

www.iwg-gti.org

The IIHF Women's Hockey Program

When, in February 2010, after the completion of the Olympic Women's Hockey tournament, IOC President **Jacques Rogge** issued a stern warning to the IIHF and the international ice hockey community that the women's program could be in danger of elimination from the Olympic Winter Games, many saw it at first as a doomsday prophecy, foreshadowing the imminent death of the women's game. However, the last 18 months have proven that Dr. Rogge's comments may have been just the wake-up call the international ice hockey community needed, to help put the women's side of the sport on the radar all over the world. Since February 2010, a few important markers have been set, to help launch the mightiest offense, politically and economically speaking, in international women's ice hockey to date. The first milestone was the Leadership Summit in Vierumaki, Finland, in July 2010. It involved key administrators of women's hockey from the top 14 nations, gathered around the same table for the first time in history. This was followed one month later, in August 2010, by the World Hockey Summit in Toronto, which featured an entire session just dedicated to women's hockey. It saw numerous prominent speakers take the stage, including **Hayley Wickenheiser**, one of the most accomplished women's ice hockey players in history.

These two important landmark meetings were followed by a two million Swiss Franc commitment by the IIHF to improve the state of women's hockey internationally. Hand in hand with this measure came the creation of a full-time position inside the IIHF and the subsequent hiring of **Tanya Foley** as Women's Program Manager, in the IIHF's Head Office in Zurich, Switzerland.

With the scene now set for a major revolution in Women's Hockey, Tanya Foley sat down with the IIHF Women's Committee as well as an ad hoc working group including the foremost experts and administrators of the women's game worldwide and set out to come up with a strategic plan. By February 2011, less than a year after Dr. Rogge had issued his challenge, a plan was in place to improve women's hockey the world over.

To Sochi and Beyond

Subsequently to the strategic planning sessions, the initial phase of the plan has since been implemented step by step by the IIHF. The following initiatives have already been put in place: **Women's Coaching Symposium**. The first Women's Coaching Symposium was held in

coordination with the IIHF World Women's Championship in Zürich. Coaches from over twenty-eight nations attended, for a total of over 100 participants. While these events are common around the world, it is rare that the coaches of the women's teams make it on the invitation list, so the IIHF has hereby ensured that this group is provided with every opportunity to meet and learn from the best coaches in the game.

AMP (Ambassador and Mentor program): Coaches and Athletes who have succeeded in Women's Hockey at the highest level (Olympic or World Championship medal-winners) form a dedicated support system for nations ranked 5-14 in the world ranking. Two Athlete Ambassadors and two Coach Mentors were assigned per nation, to mentor these teams as they attempt to qualify and then prepare for the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi 2014. The Athlete Ambassadors are led by Hayley Wickenheiser, while the coach mentors are checking in with 3 time Olympic gold medal winning coach **Melody Davidson** in their day-to-day interaction with their assigned teams.

July High-Performance Camps: In July 2011, high-performance camps were held for the U18 and the seniorage categories. These saw 204 athletes from 13 nations gathered in Bratislava, Slovakia, at the facility which had hosted the men's world championship just two months before. The camp staff was comprised of top strength and conditioning coaches, goalie coaches and other leaders in the women's game.

Twelve Nations Invitational Tournament Series: In response to the need for nations to play more international games, especially against nations they traditionally do not have regular contact with, a tournament series with three segments was created. The twelve nations were separated into three pools based on world ranking. You can check out the results of the first two tournament segments (in Finland and France) on www.iihf.com, and follow the final segment from Germany from November 9 – 13, 2011.

WGHD (World Girls' Hockey Day): Many countries around the world have very few young players registered. These are the future of the sport and a deeper pool of athletes needs to be developed from an early age for nations to reach success on the international stage. On October 2nd, 2011, the IIHF promoted the first World Girls' Hockey Day where nations around the world were invited to conduct a Girls Hockey Day and submit pictures and a short story about their event, which can be shown on the IIHF.com website. The entire Website celebrated the occasion by turning pink for the day. The Day was a tremendous success as over 165 events took place in 20 countries and on four continents. The extensive coverage can still be viewed at <http://www.iihf.com/iihf-home/sport/women/world-girls-hockey-day/2011.html>.

What are the goals of all these programs?

In the short term, the IIHF's main goal is set firmly on providing educational opportunities for the coaches and athletes around the world, on what they each need to do to be the best in their role. The IIHF cannot operate hockey across the globe, but it can develop opportunities that will give access for everyone to some of the best and most experienced actors in the game through seminars, camps, and mentorship programs. The IIHF is also focusing on finding ways to increase the number of games played against the top teams by some nations who traditionally have not had that ability.

The long term focus will still include providing educational opportunities, but working with the women's committee and external partners, the IIHF will work on identifying ways to create more visibility for the sport around the world. As well, the IIHF will look specifically at creating more opportunities for the under-18 age category so it can help nations raise the next generation of elite female ice hockey athletes with more access to resources than any other group previously. This will include working with nations to recruit young girls to the sport.

In the end, change does not come over night, so we look for consistently positive results to come by 2018 and 2022. However, as is shown in the upset of Canada by Sweden in August, small changes may start to crop up here and there sooner than that. However, these won't realistically topple any kind of "world order". At least not just yet.

Veronika Muehlhofer

External Women's Program Manager, International Ice Hockey Federation www.iihf.com

Founder &CEO, Millionsports www.millionsports.com