



Coaching Women and Girls

The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation

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Session outline

Aim – to provide an introduction to some of the main differences between coaching men and women and to explore what this means for your coaching in practical terms.

Covering.....

- **Potential barriers for women and girls in canoeing, overcoming these and the role the coach can play in this**
- **Practical differences to coaching women**
 - **Physical**
 - **Psychological**
- **What does this mean for you in your coaching?**

Understanding the barriers

- **Open discussion as to what the potential barriers for women are to progress and succeed in canoeing (Matching pairs task – match barrier to the solution)**
- **What can a coach do to assist in breaking down these barriers**

Differences - Physiological

Puberty

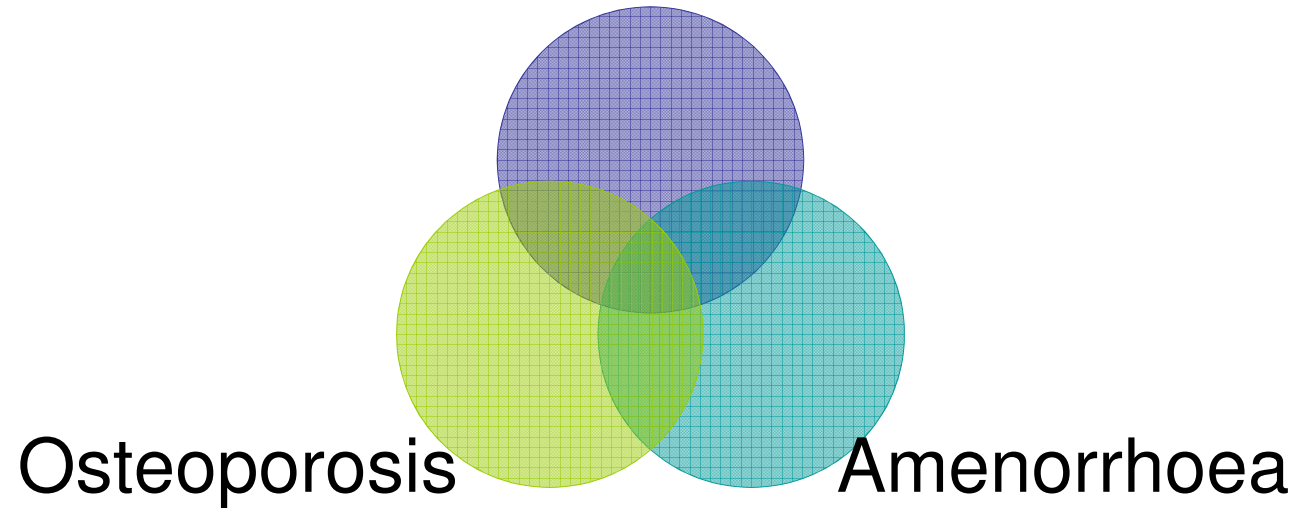
- **On average the process of puberty takes about 4 years in both sexes**
- **Until puberty girls and boys do not differ significantly in most measurements of body size, composition etc**
- **At puberty, body composition begins to change significantly. Oestrogen causes increased fat deposits in females – especially in the hip/ thigh area. Bones also grow at an increased rate at this time – although those of girls reach their final length sooner than those of boys.**
- **Menarche – start of periods, may be later in highly trained athletes.**
- **Although genetics are the major determinant of maturation rate – general health, nutrition, etc also have an influence.**

Periods

- **Women have won Olympic medals and set world records at all stages of the menstrual cycle**
- **Some women, however, will report changes to their performance**
- **Pre menstrual symptoms may cause a drop in performance, these include – mood changes, fluid retention, feeling bloated and abdominal pain**
- **Low dose oral contraceptives may help alleviate these symptoms but may also cause weight gain**
- **In (endurance) athletes – oligomenorrhea and amenorrhea are quite common. There are links between this and early onset osteoporosis and other serious long-term health problems. Stress fractures can also be more common in those who previously have had normal periods but whose intense training have contributed to these ceasing. (Secondary amenorrhea).**

The female athlete triad

Disordered eating





Female athlete triad

Being a highly competitive athlete and participating in a sport that requires performers to train incredibly hard is a risk factor. Participation in sports where a specific/low weight is required/advantageous can also put women at risk of the female athlete triad.

Risk factors of the female athlete triad include – weight loss, no/irregular periods, fatigue, decreased ability to concentrate, stress fractures and muscle injuries.



Female athlete triad

A coach should make sure that he/she maintains the health and well being of his/her performers and be careful to not push them to the detriment of their health.

Additional information

- **Women and men do not differ in lower body strength expressed relative to body weight or to fat free mass. But women show significantly less upper body strength than men. (Approx 30%)**
- **Differences between female and male respiratory responses are primarily due to body size differences**
- **Beyond puberty the average woman's VO₂ max is 70% - men's is 75%**
- **There is little or no difference in the lactate threshold between the sexes.**

Implications for your coaching

In small groups, discuss, and come up with a list of the key considerations/ adaptations you may have to make given the physiological differences between the sexes. You may wish to consider how you might approach these issues with your athletes as well.

(Jumper test)

Practical Differences

- **Coachability**
- **Confidence**
- **Criticism**
- **Chemistry**

Coachability

Women are more coachable than men

- **More willing to try new things – especially if it makes them perform better**
- **Have greater respect for the coach – and are more appreciative of good coaching and more likely to work hard to please the coach**
- **However, if coaches adopt an “in your face” style women are more likely to shut down than to challenge this behaviour.**



Confidence

Confidence is key to all athletes performance

- **There are still many world – class female athletes who struggle with their confidence**
- **Women do not give themselves enough credit for things that they are good at**
- **Women base confidence on what others think of them rather than relying on internal sources of confidence**
- **Women tend to be more open and forthcoming when feeling at their least confident. They are less inhibited to show a lack of confidence in their body language and words.**
- **In coaching women there is more of a need to “ego boost” for men the opposite can often be true**

Criticism

- **Women tend to take coach's criticism personally and are more sensitive to comments directed at them. Internalising and scrutinising them.**

Chemistry

- **Whilst men achieve a sense of worth through their position in the hierarchy – for women it is the position in “the web” that is important**
- **Females standing is determined by their ability to connect and maintain relationships – acceptance, for men it is determined by ability, and how well they do things**
- **Women will look for ways to enhance team bonding – so when there are team “issues” this can be both disruptive and distracting**



What does this mean for you in your coaching?

Group discussion as to how coaching practice/style might be amended to get the most out of the female athlete

(Discussion Mats -15 minutes and feedback)

(Kneeling test)



Conclusion

It is clear there are physiological and practical differences between the sexes. Above all though your athletes are individuals and should be treated as such.

Hopefully this has provided you with a few ideas and an opportunity for discussion. WSFF are doing more research into this area – the outputs of which will be published in June at SCUK's next Coaching Summit.



**Thank you and good luck to you all
with your coaching in the future.**