



BASEBALL
New Brunswick/Nouveau-Brunswick

GIRLS BASEBALL DEVELOPMENT MANUAL

2023



A resource for associations and coaches

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Purpose and Overview

In 2022, there were approximately 600 girls playing baseball in New Brunswick. Of those 600 girls, almost 80% were 11U and below. After 11U, the number of girls participating in baseball in the province decreases significantly. It is clear that more needs to be done to recruit and retain girls in baseball, and Baseball New Brunswick is committed to ensuring women and girls have opportunities to participate at every level. A big piece of this is ensuring girls have opportunities to participate in female-centered environments. As such, we are committed to supporting associations in the creation and implementation of baseball programs for girls.

This manual is intended to support associations and coaches in establishing baseball programs for girls. It provides research and insight on the experiences of women and girls in sport, as well as best ways to support them during their participation. It also provides guidelines and best practices for creating and delivering programs for girls. The overall goal of this manual is to provide associations and coaches with the tools and knowledge to successfully create and implement a sustainable baseball program for girls.



Women and Girls in Sport

Girls and women continue to be underrepresented in sport. Despite the progress to tackle gender inequity in sport, intentional efforts are still needed to improve girls' experiences. Although women and girls have more opportunities to participate than they once did, many cannot access or benefit from them because of unaddressed barriers (Canadians Women & Sport, Winning Plays: The Gender Equity Playbook Report, 2022). In order to best support women and girls in sport, we must understand the barriers they face and intentionally and actively address them. This section outlines the barriers women and girls face in sport as well as ways to support female athletes. This information will allow coaches and other programmers to intentionally create environments that support girls' needs to ensure girls have positive experiences in baseball.

By age 16, 1 in 3 girls drop out of sport as compared to 1 in 10 boys (Canadian Women & Sport, Winning Plays: The Gender Equity Playbook Report, 2022; Rally Report, 2020). The steepest decline of sport participation for girls occurs during adolescence, which is why retention during this time is so critical. Typically, women and girls experience more barriers in sport than men and boys; these barriers affect girls' participation in sport as athletes, coaches, officials, and leaders. In the Rally Report released by Canadian Women and Sport (2020), girls reported a number of barriers that have lead them to dropping out of sport. The most reported barriers included: (1) lack of quality of programming, including coaching, having appropriate competition levels, and having programs that are intentionally designed for girls; (2) low confidence; (3) perceived lack of skill; (4) body image issues; (5) lack of opportunity to form meaningful social connections; and (6) injury. All of these barriers affect women and girls in sport and must be addressed in order to minimize drop out levels.

Girls and women can benefit immensely from positive participation in sport. The benefits of participating in a positive sport environment can be broken down into three categories: physical (skill development, physical health), psychological (mental well-being, cognitive skills, confidence, self-esteem, and empowerment), and social (fun/enjoyment, social connection, mentorship and leadership, and community). By ensuring girls experience these benefits, the likelihood of dropout decreases significantly. Moreover, the more benefits girls experience from sport, the more involved they become in community life and leadership positions. This means that the benefits of sport go well beyond sport itself and can benefit girls in a number of environments.

So, what can coaches and sport administrators do to support girls' needs and ensure they experience the benefits of sport? Here are some ways to best support your female athletes:

- **Educate yourself** – As a coach of a female or co-ed team, prioritize learning about the factors (barriers, pressure, etc.) that affect your female athletes. Reading this document is a great first step.
- **Build a foundation for a positive culture** – You, as a coach and leader, have the opportunity to define your team's culture from the get-go. Develop team values and expectations and introduce them to your players at the start of the season. Allow players to provide input on the values and expectations to ensure they are meaningful for them. Throughout the season, ensure you are role modelling positive behaviour.

- **Provide a safe and inclusive environment that allows opportunities for building social connections** – While boys need to perform at their best in order to be accepted by their peers, it is the opposite for girls; in order to perform at their best, girls must first feel like they belong. This is why providing a safe and inclusive environment that fosters positive social connections is so important when coaching girls. Ultimately, your female athletes will not perform at their best unless they feel like they belong. To create a sense of belonging on your team, provide opportunities for your athletes to get to know one another (e.g., team bonding activities). It is also important for you, as the coach, to get to know your athletes and understand their individual needs; this will allow athletes to feel supported and valued within their sporting environment.
- **See role models and be role models** – For girls to experience the benefits of sport, they must see that there are meaningful and attainable opportunities. This is where the importance of female role models come in. When female athletes are given the chance to interact with positive female role models (older players, coaches, etc.), they see that there are opportunities for them to continue in sport. Although having female coaches for girls is incredibly important, male coaches can also support their female athletes by providing them with opportunities to see female role models in their sport. A coach might introduce their athletes to a prominent female athlete in their sport or bring their team to watch a female team play. No matter how you decide to introduce your athletes to female role models, giving them the chance to see what they can become if they continue in their sport is incredibly important.

- **Redefine girls' relationships with risk-taking** – In order to try a new skill or activity, girls must feel competent. Therefore, it is your job as a coach to ensure your female athletes feel confident before progressing to a new skill. Meet with your athletes and support them through a goal-setting process. For example, you may ask your athletes what they would like to accomplish by the end of the season. By establishing achievement motivation, girls are able to take control of their own development as an athlete, which is incredibly important for developing confidence. Female athletes are more likely to continue in their sport if they are self-motivated to progress.
- **Recognize and respond to signs of disengagement** – Pay attention to your athletes' engagement levels. Are they showing signs of disengagement (change in mood, focus level, etc.)? If so, develop ways to re-engage them into the practice or game through social connection.

The Importance of Girl-centered Programming

Girls, especially of adolescent age, face unique challenges related to body image and self-esteem, which can be difficult to successfully address in co-ed spaces. Additionally, girls and boys tend to engage in sport in different ways; girls seek acceptance and a sense of belonging before putting in effort (acceptance = effort = performance) while boys tend to engage in sport first through effort, which then leads to acceptance (effort = performance = acceptance). Because of the unique challenges girls face and the fact that they engage in sport differently than boys, coaches are able to better support girls' needs in female-centered environments. In female-centered environments where coaches prioritize belonging, girls

worry less about their appearance, are more likely to feel comfortable being themselves, and are more likely to experience the numerous benefits of sport.

Additionally, when girls participate in female-centered environments, they are not faced with the added pressure of standing out. In co-ed and male-centered environments, female athletes tend to stand out because of their gender, which comes with added pressure, including the pressure to perform. This pressure to perform can bring about numerous challenges and can lead to high levels of stress. On the other hand, girls in female-centered spaces report feeling less pressure to perform and because of this, often feel more comfortable.



Developing a Girls Baseball Program

Now that you have a better idea of the theory behind coaching girls in sport, we can get into how to build a sustainable girls baseball program. Before we get started, it is important to understand that not every association or group will begin at the same place – and that’s okay! This manual is designed to be used by groups in a variety of situations and acts as a guideline; you may need to adapt it to fit the needs of your association. There is no one cookie cutter approach to building a new program and you will likely have to be flexible throughout the process. With this being said, we have established a number of areas that we suggest focusing on. Focusing on these aspects will give you a great start in creating a successful and sustainable program.

The six key areas we suggest focusing on are:

- 1. Have a dedicated person or group in charge of your programming for girls**
- 2. Establish short-term and long-term plans**
- 3. Recruitment and Retention**
- 4. Appropriate design**
- 5. Quality coaching**

Each of these aspects will now be described in detail.

Have a dedicated group or person in charge

We suggest that you dedicate one or more people within your association as Female Program Coordinator(s). This person or group will oversee all aspects of female baseball within your association. See Appendix A in the *Tools and Resources* section for a mock job description, which includes the responsibilities of the position.

Establish short-term and long-term plans

When developing a new program, it is important that you establish short-term and long-term plans. A short-term plan should outline the goals for the program over 1-2 years as well as the ways you plan to achieve these goals. A long-term plan will look at your goals for the program over 3-5 years. Although it may be more difficult to create a long-term plan, doing so will provide direction for your program moving forward.

Engage a number of stakeholders during the planning process: your Female Baseball Coordinator, coaches, parents, and athletes. This will allow you to create a plan that better supports the needs and wants of different stakeholders.

Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention are incredibly important aspects in building a sustainable program. First, we will look at recruitment, specifically, the recruitment of coaches and athletes.

Coach Recruitment

When recruiting coaches, there are four things we suggest looking for:

- Someone who is knowledgeable in baseball (or at least willing to learn)
- Someone who is confident in their teaching and demonstration of skills
- Someone who is passionate about and excited to coach girls
- Someone who understands the best practices concerning coaching girls (or is willing to learn)

Coaches with these attributes will contribute positively to your program. There are many strategies that you can use to recruit

coaches. You may choose to use passive recruitment techniques, which includes things like social media and advertisements, which are used to target large and broad audiences. You may also choose to use active recruitment techniques, which involves getting out into the community to recruit through face-to-face communication. Active recruitment is often more time-consuming and labour-intensive, however, tends to have a higher rate for finding the ideal candidate. Generally, we suggest you use a combination of passive and active recruitment techniques, as it will allow you to reach the biggest audience possible.

When recruiting coaches for your girls program, we suggest you focus specifically on recruiting female coaches. Look to recruit former or current players, women from local women's leagues, and female family members.

Athlete Recruitment

Recruiting female athletes can occur in a number of ways. It is beneficial to use a number of strategies, as this will allow you to reach as many girls as possible. Suggested techniques include:

- Social media
- Encouraging girls to bring their friends, for example, host a “Bring a friend to baseball” day
- Reaching out to other female teams/programs in the community (hockey, basketball, etc.)
- Connecting with local schools and community centres
- Using pictures of female baseball players in advertisements
- Getting to know the parents- they may spread the word to other families

Retention

After recruitment, you can then focus on retention, that is, ensuring that your coaches and athletes continue to participate. The most important factor in retaining athletes and coaches is to provide a positive experience.

Following the successful recruitment of coaches, you can shift your focus to training. Firstly, you must ensure your coaches have the necessary NCCP baseball training (see baseballnb.ca for an updated list of coaching requirements by age group). Providing them with additional education opportunities is also recommended. Throughout the season, ensure you continue to support your coaches and address any of their concerns as they come up. A coach that feels supported by their association is more likely to continue to be involved.

Following the successful recruitment of athletes, you can then focus on providing them with a positive experience. In order for your athletes to have a positive experience, you must provide a quality program with quality coaches, which includes providing a safe environment that fosters social connection. Program design and quality coaching are discussed further below.



Appropriate program design

Now that you have a better understanding of how to best support female athletes, it is important to design and deliver your program with girls' needs in mind. Remember the ways to best support female athletes that were explained earlier: educating yourself, building a foundation of positive culture, providing a safe and inclusive environment that allows for opportunities to build connections, seeing and being role models, redefining girls' relationships with risk-taking, and recognizing signs of disengagement. All of these factors must be taken into consideration when designing your girls program.

Remember that the baseball skills that you are teaching are no different; however, the approach to teaching them might be. Before you even consider teaching the foundational skills of baseball, you must prioritize creating a safe, positive, and inclusive environment that focuses on fun and belonging. A sense of belonging amongst your team must exist in order for your athletes to realize their potential. With this being said, the importance of skill development and competition for girls is no less. Just because girls prioritize creating relationships in sport does not mean they are less motivated to develop their skills. Female athletes want a chance to compete and and must be challenged to improve and as such, must be provided with opportunities to do so at all levels.

While supporting your female athletes' development, it is important you focus on the process, not the final outcome. Coaches that take a mastery approach, meaning one that focuses on effort and the process behind learning skills, are most successful in motivating female athletes. Be specific when providing feedback to

your female athletes; give them specific pointers and praise. For example, instead of just saying “good job”, say “great hustle out there, I noticed you were really giving it you’re all”. Athletes that are aware of what they are doing well and what they must do to improve will be more motivated to develop.

Quality coaching

When choosing who will coach your female program, it is important that you choose coaches that are motivated and passionate about being involved. Prioritize coaches that are committed to developing an understanding of the best ways to coach female athletes.

Ultimately, a coach that understands the unique aspects of coaching girls will provide a more positive experience for your athletes.

Ensure your coaches have the necessary NCCP training for the age group and competition level. We also recommend that all coaches involved in a girl’s program take the Keeping Girls in Sport online training from the Respect Group Inc. For more information on the training, click here: [Keeping Girls in Sport Training](#).



Best Practices:

How your association can champion girls baseball

Now that we have a better idea of how to build a sustainable baseball program for girls, we will look at a number of best practices that have been used by other associations. There are a number of associations across the province and the country that have implemented successful baseball programs for girls. Here are a number of best practices that have been used:

- **Group girls together** – Even if you don't have enough girls to make a full team, group girls together as much as possible.
- **Combine with other associations** – This year, Baseball NB will be running its first-ever girls' leagues (see next section for more details). If you don't have enough girls to make a team within your association, you may choose to combine with another local association.
- **Discounted registration** – A number of associations have offered either free or discounted registration for girls in their first year. This allows them to try the sport at little to no cost and often attracts more girls to play.
- **Host open sessions for girls** – Before the season begins, you may choose to host an open session for girls to try baseball. During these sessions, focus on introducing the basic skills in a fun and welcoming environment. Following the session, provide parents with the details on how to register for the summer.

- **Provide opportunities year-round** – Baseball programming doesn't have to stop in September! Providing girls with opportunities to stay involved in baseball throughout the off-season is recommended. Many associations already offer winter and spring training opportunities for their athletes – we suggest offering a specific timeslot for girls, or grouping girls together within your co-ed off-season program.
- **Take advantage of coach training opportunities and resources** – As highlighted previously, it is important that coaches receive the proper training. In addition to the NCCP baseball coach courses, there are multiple training opportunities and resources available for coaches that work with girls. We suggest taking a look at: [Keeping Girls in Sport Training](#), [Gender Equity LENS training](#), and other resources outlined below in the *Tools and Resources* section.
- **Take advantage of funding opportunities** – There are many grants and other funding opportunities available for local associations. Specifically, the Sport and Recreation Branch provides funding for organizations that are focused on providing opportunities for under-represented groups, including women and girls. See more details [here](#).



Baseball NB Program Opportunities for Girls

This section outlines the opportunities for girls that are supported and provided by Baseball NB.

Baseball NB Spring Program for Girls

New in 2023 is the Baseball NB girls spring program. This is an 8-week grassroots/development program for associations to run from April-May. The program is intended to introduce girls ages 6-16 to baseball prior to the summer season. Participating associations will receive a program manual, coach training, and t-shirts for participants. If your association is interested in running this program, please reach out to meghan@baseballnb.ca.

Baseball NB Girls Provincial League

Also new in 2023, Baseball NB will be running provincial girls' leagues this season. We plan to have a 12U league and a 14U league, depending on interest levels. The leagues will culminate with provincial tournaments at the end of the summer. As this is the first year of our girls' leagues, we plan to be flexible to allow as many teams as possible to join (e.g., allowing associations to combine, limiting travel if requested, etc.). If you are interested in putting a team into this league or would like to learn more, please reach to meghan@baseballnb.ca.

Baseball NB High Performance Girls Program

We continue to offer our high performance girls program at 14U and 16U. Winter training has already begun and tryouts will occur mid-May. These teams practice and compete together throughout the summer and then travel to 16U Nationals and 14U Atlantics in August/September. Looking forward, we plan to expand our HP girls program to include more age groups in the near future.

Tools and Resources

Appendix A- Female Coordinator Position Description, adapted from Baseball AB

FEMALE PROGRAM COORDINATOR DESCRIPTION

[Name of Association] Female Program Coordinator Roles and Responsibilities

Date: (Date)_____

Review Frequency: Yearly

Review Date: "One year from approval"

Key Goals

- To ensure the development of female athletes
- To provide opportunities and support to female athletes and their families
- To support the establishment of female teams across all age divisions
- To ensure the development of coaches for female athletes

Reports To

The [Name of Association] Female Program Coordinator reports to the President of the [Name of Association], in consultation with the Baseball New Brunswick Program Coordinator and Female Baseball Committee.

Responsibilities and Duties

- Serve a two-year term or a term consistent with local Association's bylaws.
- Oversee the development, operation, and enhancement of the [Name of Association's] female programming
- Ensure all female athletes are made aware of all female baseball programs, including winter development camps, female provincial programs, etc. and encourage Association to support all female teams within the Association.
- Provide direction and support to the Association in the marketing and promotion of female baseball.
 - Ensure all Association promotion and marketing (website, social media, advertisements, etc.) support the inclusion of female athletes.
- In general, supervise and control the affairs of Association all-female teams.
 - Monitor the [Name of Association's] female player registrations.
 - Ensure coaches are identified and certified in a timely manner.
 - Liaise with other Associations to support in-coming transfers to all-female teams.
- In general, support the development of female players within the mainstream baseball community.
- Continuously advocate for women in sport
- Any other duties as assigned by the President or by the Board

Appendix B: Girl-Centered Environments Checklist,

taken from the Nike Coaching Girls Guide ([link](#))



GIRL-CENTERED ENVIRONMENTS CHECKLIST

HOW TO USE THE CHECKLIST (PROGRAM LEADERS)

Set up a regular schedule to run through the checklist – e.g., before the season, mid-way through the year and at the end of the year. Share the tool with coaches and create a two-way dialogue about successes and challenges. Coaches should share how they think they are doing and what support they need from the program leaders. Program leaders should share feedback about where they see coaches being successful and ask how they can be more supportive.

HOW TO USE THE CHECKLIST (COACHES)

Use the tool to check in regularly about how successful you are at providing the right environments for girls. Be sure to ask them to weigh in on what they see working and what could be improved. If something needs to change that is outside of your control, advocate to your supervisor or the league administrators about making a change.

SAFE, WELCOMING SPACE & TEAM CULTURE

- ☐ Girls are safe when arriving at practice or games. Entrance and activity space are hazard-free, well-lit and appropriately supervised.
- ☐ Girls' bathrooms are accessible and appropriately stocked. Garbage cans and hygiene products are accessible.
- ☐ Girls are actively and intentionally welcomed to the space and included in activities.
- ☐ Girls see pictures of female role models or other girls being active in their sport spaces.
- ☐ Girls see grown women who look like them when they participate in sports.
- ☐ Girls have the opportunity to be active in space that is reserved just for them.

APPROPRIATE EQUIPMENT

- ☐ Girls have access to sports equipment that works for them: the right size, appropriate to the rules of their sport, etc.
- ☐ Girls have access to personal items, like sports bras, hair ties and sneakers or cleats, which enable them to participate in sports. If they don't have these items, the coach or program leader attempts to secure these items on their behalf.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

- ☐ Girls (and boys) are referred to in gender-neutral terms. Coaches don't refer to all players as "guys."
- ☐ Girls hear coaches refer to positive female athlete role models – when naming teams or giving examples of great performances.
- ☐ Girls hear coaches acknowledge important female sports events, like WNBA playoffs, the U.S. Open, or the Women's World Cup.

TIME TO REFLECT

- ☐ Girls have the chance to reflect on their experiences in formal and informal ways.
- ☐ Girls have the chance to provide feedback to the coaches about their experiences.
- ☐ Girls see their coaches reflect on their bias about girls in sport and actively work to change it.
- ☐ Girls see their coaches intervene when they hear comments or see actions that minimize girls' ability to participate in sports.

Appendix C- Other Resources

This manual is based in current research has relied on a number of sources, including:

- Canadian Women & Sport: Winning Plays- The Gender Equity Playbook Report, 2022 ([link](#))
- Canadian Women & Sport: She Belongs- Building Social Connection for Lasting Participation in Sport, 2020 ([link](#))
- Canadian Women & Sport: Actively Engaging Women and Girls: Addressing the Psychosocial Factors, 2012 ([link](#))
- Canadian Women & Sport: The Rally Report, 2020 ([link](#))
- Canadian Women & Sport: The Rally Report, 2022 ([link](#))
- Baseball Alberta: Female Baseball Development Manual, 2021 ([link](#))
- Baseball BC: Female Baseball Development, 2018 ([link](#))