



CHAPTER 1

**Brought to You
by CAAWS**

CAAWS: The Driving Force Towards Equity in Canada's Sport System

by Sheila Robertson



The roots of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) reach deep. They go back to the late 19th century when Canadian women first began to invade the male preserve that was sport. They grew through 1925 when Alexandrine Gibb founded the Women's Amateur Athletic Federation and for the first time gave women in sport an official voice. They have reached up through every decade of the 20th century, each distinguished by magnificent performances by dozens of Canadian women.

What has that athletic success to do with CAAWS? Don't the many Olympic medals and world championship titles indicate that all is well in the world of Canadian sport?

"... designing a sport system that fully involves women."

No. The successes have been misleading.

For much of Canada's sporting history, athletic success notwithstanding, women have been consistently under-represented in all facets of sport, more often frustrated and mute than flourishing and articulate.

To change this one-sided face of Canadian sport, CAAWS was created in 1981 by leaders of national, provincial and local sport and physical activity groups. At a meeting in Hamilton, Ontario, they agreed to work together to secure gender equity for girls and women in Canada's sport and active living communities.

Today, CAAWS and its partners are designing a new sport system, one that

- ◆ *fully involves women as leaders, coaches, officials, athletes and participants*
- ◆ *weaves equity into the governing structures*
- ◆ *offers girls a complete range of opportunities and choices*
- ◆ *assures full and fair access to resources*

The CAAWS approach to change is grounded in partnerships. CAAWS leaders

- ◆ *chair the 36-member Harassment and Abuse in Sport Collective*
- ◆ *offer leadership workshops to women in sport at the national and provincial levels*
- ◆ *play a key role in On the Move, a cross-country program for inactive teenage girls*

CAAWS works to increase awareness of the importance of gender equity within Canada's sporting community, the media and the public at large.

CAAWS participates in decision-making at all levels of the sport community. Nationally, it contributes to the development of Sport Canada's Funding and Accountability Framework. Working through regional networks, CAAWS helps develop and implement policies that support and complement the national approach. At every level, CAAWS celebrates outstanding achievement through the bi-annual Breakthrough Awards, and the annual announcement of its list of the Most Influential Women in Sport and Physical Activity.



Synchronized swimmers Penny and Vicky Vilagos face the media

As well as developing this book, CAAWS has commissioned ground-breaking reports on harassment and abuse in sport, eating disorders, legal rights and responsibilities, and girls playing on boys' teams and has developed a gender equity handbook that is widely used by sport associations across Canada.

A leader on the international scene, CAAWS participates in major world conferences, including the World Conference on Women and Sport sponsored by the International Olympic Committee, the historic Women, Sport and the Challenge of Change conference, where the Brighton Declaration was drafted, and the subsequent World Conferences on Women and Sport. CAAWS was also instrumental in founding WomenSport International.

The CAAWS of the future will wear a different face. Yet while it matures, grows and keeps pace with evolving demands, CAAWS remains true to its founding principle of securing gender equity in sport and physical activity in Canada. CAAWS has a record of accomplishment and dedication. Fulfilling our mission is only a matter of time.



