

Jacqueline Lavallee: One Sport is not Enough

As a Phys. Ed. teacher, basketball coach and former All-Canadian in both soccer and basketball, Jacqueline Lavallee knows a little about sport.

From 1996 to 2002, Lavallee was a star athlete for the University of Saskatchewan Huskies, playing both soccer and basketball. She can recall arriving at evening basketball practices directly from soccer practice, still wearing her soccer gear. "My coaches were very accommodating," she said. "They worked very hard to make it possible for me to play both sports, and I am extremely grateful." The University basketball season begins league play in November as the soccer season is winding down, and though the seasons did not technically overlap, Lavallee said at times there were conflicts that had to be negotiated.

Playing soccer, Lavallee was a Canada West all-star midfielder three different years, and in 1999 she was an All-Canadian. In basketball she was a three-time Canada West all-star point guard, and was an All-Canadian in the 2001-2002 season.

Following her graduation from the U of S, Lavallee joined the U of S basketball team as assistant coach and began a partnership with head coach Lisa Thomaidis that has continued into the present.

With Thomaidis' encouragement, Lavallee left the team during the 2003-2004 season to play basketball professionally in Germany. "You couldn't ask for a better lifestyle," she said of her time there, "it's a great thing to be able to play at that level, be paid for it, and experience a whole new culture." While playing in Germany, Lavallee had the chance to play in the Euro-Cup which had her play in countries all over Eastern Europe.

The following year saw Lavallee back in Saskatoon, once again the assistant coach for the U of S women's basketball team. "As a point guard, you're always forced to be thinking. It's all about knowing where the ball needs to go and how to get it there," she said. "I have always been a cerebral player, I love the strategy involved in the game, so moving into coaching was a natural progression."

Lavallee has taken her coaching expertise beyond the U of S. In the summer of 2010, she travelled to France with the Canadian national under-17 "Cadet" women's basketball team as their head coach. This was the first time such a tournament had been held, and Lavallee said acting as head coach on an international level boosted her confidence.

Looking back at her career as a player and coach, Lavallee credits sport as a confidence booster and much more. "If it weren't for sport I could easily have

gone down a different path. My coaches have all been strong mentors and role models, and the teams I have played on have been like family. They provide a lot of support and always challenged me to not only strive for excellence as an athlete but to grow as a person throughout the process.”

Lavallee is a teacher at Oskayak High School, a school founded on Aboriginal culture. When asked how she encourages young people to become involved in sport, she responds that is not necessarily her goal; “I want my students to be more active, adopt a healthy lifestyle and have the confidence to use the community facilities that are available to them. I want them to take their health seriously, which doesn’t mean they must play competitive sport. However, I will always encourage those individuals who want to pursue sport and lead them in the right direction.”