

# Women into High Performance

## Case Studies



### Rachel Laybourne

Volleyball England

Women into High Performance is a bespoke programme aimed at female coaches who have been identified by their governing body of sport as having the potential to work within the performance environment within 1–5 years.

Through a facilitated approach, the coaches develop the skills, behaviours and knowledge required to transition into, and remain within, the high performance environment. Activities include workshops, communities of practice and a peer coaching programme.

Level 3 volleyball coach and Volleyball Relationship Manager at Volleyball England Rachel Laybourne told us about her experience.

Rachel was always looking for continuing personal development (CPD) opportunities but was not quite sure what she needed. When a member of the Volleyball England team suggested the Women into High Performance programme, in her own words, she knew that it was 'a no-brainer'.

'From the first day, it was so engaging.

There were like-minded people around the table, discussions were really relevant, and there were topics and issues that I could discuss openly without judgement, also things that you could take away and implement the next day. I found it really, really helpful.'

Rachel found the structure of the programme very refreshing from a personal development perspective as it was something that she had never done before, and the themes covered were all relevant and engaging.

Midway through the programme, she was offered the opportunity to take on the role of interim head coach of the England Junior National team, which eventually developed into her taking on the role permanently. Rachel admits she 'wasn't going there [to the programme] to get myself a national team job. I was going there to find out more about my strengths and more about my work.'

'I got the most help with my transition from playing to coaching. When I went to interview, I felt like I was in a much better place.'

Although Rachel found the seminars prepared her for the practicalities of coaching, she said the homework and reflection had a much greater impact. 'I was able to implement things immediately in my next session, it was really good for practical tips. What you put into the programme is what you get from it, and if you go there with an honesty and an open mind to say, "I hadn't realised this was an actual issue, or I hadn't realised I had this opinion or viewpoint," then you are challenged and stretched while you are there.'

Rachel felt she gained confidence and reassurance from completing the programme.

'I was quite self-doubting of my ability and thought that I was just getting things through my stature as a player rather than my merits as a coach. The transition part was where I was able to work out that I do have great strengths and more ability than I give myself credit for, and my self-confidence grew as a result of it.'

'I developed more of a presence and a confidence that I was doing things the right way and that I can take little risks because I am right in my thinking and ability to execute.'

Rachel is now excited to turn her focus towards preparation for the international season ahead and is motivated to put English junior volleyball on the map.

'We've got a limited talent pool, and the challenge is to grow that talent pool, but if we are going to do anything on an international scene, we need to grow the programme, educate and steer the girls in the right direction. I would like to say that during my time as a coach, we made great inroads in improving our European ranking and improving the reputation that we have as a volleyball nation.'

'In that one-year cycle, I was made to feel special and part of a programme that was unique – Women into High Performance. It wasn't just anyone who was invited, and as a result of it, I felt like I was part of something fresh and exciting. To be included was a fantastic opportunity.'