

Case Study 11

Networking and Connection Events Building belonging with Alumni

High performance coaches, crucial for athletes' development and performance, need support, especially women coaches. The AIS Women in High Performance Coaching Project (WiHPC) found that a network of peers, mentors, and allies, male and female, helps women coaches overcome challenges, particularly in high performance settings where numbers are scarce, and loneliness abounds. Women coaches have consistently emphasized the vital role of communities and networks in their learning and career growth.

Together the WiHPC Project and AIS Alumni Network aim to enhance women coaches' experiences. This event marks the start of a long-term effort to create a supportive alumni network, empowering current and future coaches and fostering a sense of belonging in Australian sports.

Why a network?

Connection was integral, independent of gender or learning environment.
Connection was the most dominant theme, with the context for why varying at the level of the individual.

SenseMaker Report, 2023

Overview

Establish a sustainable network for past AIS program alumni, addressing their common query, "What's next?" This objective focuses on reconnecting colleagues from the last decade of AIS coach and leadership programs with the upcoming generation of coaches. The initiative includes a two-day workshop for 50 coaches, performance managers, and coach educators. The event encompasses an evening networking session and group discussions aimed at gathering insights for the future development of alumni networking events.

"Power of connection, sharing, being genuinely interested in another person/their perspective. Everyone has two parts to play - be open to connecting and assisting others to connect."

Alumni Event Attendees, June 2023



Objectives

The two day event had clear objectives:

- **Facilitate connections:** Recognise and connect the future Generation 2032 Program coaches with the knowledge and achievements of past generations of AIS Alumni Programs through a targeted networking event.
- **Share and progress learnings:** Share insights, progress and gather feedback for the WiHPC project with alumni and future generations. The WiHPC project aims to impact upon the experiences and representation of women in high performance coaching.
- **Foster collaboration and community:** Leverage the knowledge and diversity of the group to co-create an alumni program emphasizing allyship, enabling effective networks and support systems.
- **Strengthen the network** and promote the Win Well Pledge to enhance diversity and inclusion for all.
- **Seek recommendations:** engage with key stakeholders from previous and current coach generations to build effective coach development programs and networks.

Event design:

The event connected a Summit for the WiHPC project with the two day Alumni event. Activities over the two day event included:

- Rebuilding connections and laying Foundations for Belonging
- Building Alumni Foundations
- Stories from Alumni
 - Custodians of knowledge
 - Women in HP Coaching update
- Allyship, Sponsorship, Networking
- Network event & Keynote speech
- Dinner with old and new friends
- Breakfast with champions
- 2 year journeys of the Generation 2032 coaches
- Curating and enhancing Future Networks
- Recommendations for next steps



Insights from the 2 day workshop

What are the things we need to do in the spirit of network and curation to bring these young generation of coaches and athletes into the existing network in a way that empower all of us?

Below is an outline of the themes and insights shared at the end of the day.

Connection & Networking	Opportunity	Initiatives	Mentorship, Allyship, Sponsorship
<p>Create Connection - it takes time and investment.</p> <p>Forming communities/groups can massively help coaches develop.</p> <p>Importance of connection and mentors.</p> <p>Networking shouldn't be so scary.</p> <p>There is a strong desire for networks/ support across the system.</p> <p>Connection needs to be at the top of every coach's toolbox.</p> <p>Let's all commit to find one coach to assist in the next 3 months, either through a conversation or tap on shoulder to encourage, apply for job etc.</p> <p>There is need to bring all of this together. Lots of great things happening, but how to tie it all together?</p>	<p>So much is happening. Opportunity to 'streamline' across the system and break down silos.</p> <p>Power of the people in room to make a difference.</p> <p>There's a great deal of personal value in 'paying forward'.</p> <p>The alumni concept is so powerful as we see in many sports, how can we bring local groups together semi regularly.</p> <p>The impact of one conversation can be life changing- ensure you have one!</p> <p>Be curious.</p> <p>Need to ensure the WiHPC is seen as a 'spearhead' for increasing diversity - not an end in itself.</p>	<p>There has been a huge amount of activity/ programs/ initiatives over the past 8-9 years - are we clear which (and why) have been impactful?</p> <p>How many great initiatives the AIS have going.</p> <p>We need to be clear on the overall impact we want to have and how all of the various projects collectively achieve this.</p> <p>How much more there is to be done!</p> <p>Huge amount of work done in this space over the last decade - huge appetite for more.</p> <p>The momentum is enormous..but how do we protect and nurture the time required to keep it going!</p> <p>What is next? More alumni events. Systemise post course support and networking - state based?</p>	<p>Mentorship is something that comes up often, but is hard to get right.</p> <p>Allyship - how important it is and how can we build this.</p> <p>Allyship is critical.</p> <p>Male allies - how to bring them on the journey (so they realise a higher purpose).</p> <p>More mentoring programs (e.g., sport specific like athletics) or mixed sports.</p> <p>What is next - how we pay forward Diversity Mentorship.</p> <p>Diversity is bigger than just gender (Multicultural, LGBTQI+).</p>



Participant Thoughts

“It feels as though we have the opportunity and platform to evolve many aspects of the sporting system to ensure it is fit-for-purpose and ready to address the requirements both now and in the future.”

“There’s a lot of goodwill and people want to share. But unless that’s in a structured supported way i.e., through days like this or other structured programs - it’s not on people's priority agenda.”

“We need to ensure all parts of the organisations are on the journey, including leadership and decision makers.”

Alumni Event Attendees, June 2023

Final Comments

“Support the champions who are driving organic networks and encourage more people to do so.”

Improve networking skills of individuals | Formalised or supported networking events | Create explicit opportunities by conscious design

Alumni Event Attendees, June 2023



Links

Video: [Women in High Performance Coaching Project Alumni Event](#)

