HER Game Plan

September 2026

The Hidden Opponent: When Girls Don't Feel Like They Belong

Most coaches can spot overt bullying immediately, but what about the athlete who is never intentionally included?

With girls' and women's sport participation at record highs and social pressures on the rise, creating an intentionally inclusive team culture is more critical than ever.

Discover practical strategies you can use today to foster true connection, build team confidence, and ensure every athlete feels like she belongs.

Read more about building stronger, more connected teams →

Learn more now. Take Caring Climate Module 2: Mutual Kindness and Respect is Fostered and Valued >>>

TRY THIS:

Pair girls with a teammate they don't usually connect with. Have each pair warm up together and challenge them to find three things they have in common or learn three new things about each other.

Review your organization's traditions and messaging to spot exclusive practices. Swap status-based norms, like peer-voted awards, for shared leadership opportunities that make every athlete feel valued from day one.

THE RIDE HOME

Coaches:

The Ride Home is a communication tool designed to help you share the culture and character skills taught at practice with parents, making it easy for them to reinforce those lessons during the car ride home.

Copy and share this message with guardians:

Dear [Sport/Team Name] Families,

We are excited to share a key character and team culture concept we are emphasizing at practice, along with a few quick discussion prompts you can use on the ride home. Research indicates that car ride discussions offer a relaxed, low-pressure environment where athletes feel more comfortable opening up.

This month, our focus is belonging, ensuring every athlete feels included and valued, regardless of her role on the team. Girls

remain in sports longer when they feel strongly connected to their teammates. You can support this at home by asking your athlete:

- *Who did you include today, or did you notice anyone who might have felt left out?*
- *What are some actions you could take to help a teammate feel included?*

Your engagement helps empower her to actively build a positive team culture, rather than just participate in one.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Champion of the Month

Better-equipped coaches create better environments. Learn how the IYCA and Coaching HER® are partnering to bring actionable strategies, workshops, and resources directly to coaches working with girls in sports—starting with what you do at practice tomorrow.

Learn More >>>

Amplifier of the Month

Before girls and women's sports became one of the fastest-growing industries in business, Dr. Nicole M. LaVoi, Director of the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport at the University of Minnesota and Founder of Coaching HER® was producing the research that challenged outdated assumptions and pushed the industry forward.

Listen to the GOALS podcast, The Business Case For Women's Sports, presented by Ally >>>

EVENTS

The **Women Coaches Symposium** (WCS), established in 2014, provides high-quality educational programming and professional development for women coaches. This full-day women-focused event serves as an avenue for networking and provides space to build community among women coaches. **Register now to secure your spot >>>**

September Speaking Engagements & Event Highlights

Sept 3 | Special Olympics North America Keynote
Delivered the keynote address for U.S. Business leadership in Milwaukee, focusing on state-level CEO engagement to advance support and programming for girls and women.

Sept 10 | British Triathlon HERVoice: LeadHERShip Tri
Spoke to a UK coaching cohort on driving systemic change through three core pillars: commitment, compassion, and choices.

Sept 17 | Special Olympics MN: Kickstart to Inclusion
Engaging local Minnesota educators and school leaders to plan, build, and expand inclusive Special Olympics and Unified Sports experiences for the upcoming academic year.

Sept 23 | Minnetonka Rotary Club Presentation
Presentation on the impactful research and initiatives from the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, highlighting the Coaching HER® program.

Sept 28 | MNSE Champions Council Event
The Minnesota Advantage: Can We Become the Capital of Women's Sports? Connecting with state legislators on expanding female sports initiatives.

Sept 28–29 | NRPA Conference & Youth Sports Summit (Philadelphia)
Dr. Nicole M. LaVoi joins the "Get Her in the Game" panel at the inaugural NRPA Youth Sports Summit and presents *"Coaching HER®: The*

Retention Revolution for Youth Sports" at the general conference.