

Playing

Interviewed By Sheridan Sechter
Photographed by Christy Lonergan

to WIN!

A powerhouse of energy, passion and commitment, Patti Phillips knows what it's like to play on a team, to coach a team and to win. The Director of the Women's Intersport Network for Kansas City (WIN for KC), Patti is in an unique position to promote the wellbeing and leadership potential of women and girls in Kansas City.

Before joining the Kansas City Sports Commission, Patti worked for the NCAA as the CHAMPS/Life Skills Program Coordinator in Education Outreach. Prior to that, she was the head women's basketball coach at Ottawa University in Ottawa, Kan. for eight years. Patti inherited a losing program at Ottawa and turned it into a regional power. Under her direction, the Ottawa Lady Braves received their first national ranking in school history.

If you need an inoculation of energy, an attitude check or just a savvy professional to talk to, start with Patti. Her enthusiasm is rare, and wonderfully contagious.



What drew you to your position at WIN?

I got involved with WIN as a volunteer in the 1998 Women's Final Four. What drew me to get more involved was that it is an organization that both surrounds sports and offers opportunities to improve girls lives. I just recalled all the opportunities that I didn't have as a girl, not just in sports but in a lot of areas. Civil rights and equity on all levels takes generations to really change. Sports have come along way but we are not there yet. Mia Hamm and the other players on the women's soccer team that won the World Cup were referred to as the Title IX Babies. Just look at what can be accomplished when you start young, go with something you enjoy and are passionate about it. Look at what can be achieved — whether you are a boy or a girl. But girls haven't

so much bigger than sports. I believe WIN is a movement — a vision. It is about empowering girls and women, and we do that through sports and fitness. So I am passionate about my job in a lot of ways and sports may be a piece of that, but it's more about the feeling that we're making a difference.

What is your biggest challenge?

There are a lot challenges associated with our status as a non-profit. One is funding. You always feel like you're only one step ahead of the game when dealing with funding issues. I think the other challenging piece is getting the platform to talk about your mission and what you're doing. It's not always easy to get the message out there. Staffing is a challenge as well. We have a very small staff of

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always had that opportunity, and we are still not on a level playing field. It is about equity, and equity is a human right. So the idea of being a part of an organization with a mission to help effect a societal change in this area seemed very exciting at the time and it still is.

What do you see in WIN's future?

In the next five years, we will definitely be focusing on increasing capacity in all of our programming. We really want to be the clearing house — the network — the community for people interested in women's sports and fitness. We hope to continue our growth, expand our scope and reach with a focus on tiered programming to young girls age 3-7, girls aged 8-16, and women aged 17 up. In general, we want our message to reach every girl and woman in Kansas City. We think the sports message is important, but the fitness message is the most important. We have got to be moving our bodies. There are so many gifts you get from doing your first 5K or taking a yoga class or whatever it is — it's so good for us emotionally and mentally. We want to continue to send that message. It translates in everything that a person does — personally, professionally, spiritually — all levels.

What is your passion?

I'm truly passionate about the change that we're creating at WIN. Sport is a vehicle, but I always tell people that WIN is

two. We always want to do more while continuing to focus on quality. It's a balancing act and a challenge that we deal with every day.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

I get to see the difference we make in girls' lives through the camps, the youth advisory board and our other WIN programs.

The other rewarding thing is working with all of the women including our advisory board and our coaches. WIN is an organization of women helping women. I think that's one thing you do learn from sports — how to be a team and how to help each other. I think we need more of that. There needs to be more women either pulling or pushing other women up to where they need or want to be. I think there is some of that, but there's always room for more. And I think we have that within our organization — absolutely. I think all the people involved with WIN feel that way. There's an energy and support that permeates our events. At one level, that is what we're about too. It's about empowerment — the message that “women can do it!”

What has been your greatest accomplishment?

My greatest accomplishment so far is learning to commit to myself first and have balance in my life. Coming from a sport background, I am very competitive and I consider that

a gift, but a few years ago I made a commitment to step out of the race and take some time for myself too. Life is short, so I try to be in each moment. I am thoughtful about what I eat, I'm active and I now take the time to be silent or slow down – which I never used to do. Every morning I do energy work and a kind of meditation – not traditional meditation – but I just sit in silence. I also unplug at night and try not to bring work home. Because of this commitment to myself, I think I'm more energized and plugged in during the day.

Do you have a mentor?

I have lots of mentors. My mother, Ann Phillips, is a mentor to me. She went back to school to earn her degree and then back to work when I was in junior high. She was a lifelong learner — always reading, always asking questions and she is by far the strongest woman I know. Both my parents always said that I could be whatever I want – without mentioning any limits on the male/female thing.

My first professional mentor was Janet Justus whom I worked for at the NCAA. She was a national leading expert on Title IX and the director of Education Outreach. She was a breath of fresh air because I had been working with all male coaches for eight years prior to that. Janet was and still is such a huge advocate for women and for equity in all areas. I see her as a person who always stands for truth and what is right. She really taught me about language and other subtleties that have an impact on our lives and professional growth.

I also consider my entire board and honorary coaches to be great mentors to me. It has been fascinating that as WIN has grown and changed and gone in different directions, the right person always steps up or is brought into the fold. Jan Kreamer, Julie Quirin and Anne St. Peter are examples and have all had a huge influence on me. I truly believe, though, that my entire board has influenced me as people would say a mentor would. They are all women who are engaged in caring and contributing to our mission. I tap into every one of them in different ways. I'm blessed to have their support. I really am.

What would you say are three of the reasons for your success?

The first is that I have been fortunate enough to be in positions that I am passionate about. I think passion is a huge driving force. I believe in WIN for KC. I believe in the WIN mission.

Another reason is that I've been fortunate enough to surround myself with supportive, intelligent and inspiring people. I don't think anyone can achieve success alone, and I wouldn't want success alone. To be able to find those people who you know can help you get to where you want to go

and to bring them into the fold is so important, and I have been blessed with wonderful people in my life.

The other thing is that I believe in the goodness in people, and I believe in people's potential. I believe that when you believe in people that they come through.

We've all lived through low points. How do you get through yours?

I realize that it's in the challenging times that we really see ourselves. Those times in our lives can be a catalyst to help us make needed changes or improvements. There are gifts in every moment – even in the trying times.

Do you have a personal philosophy?

My personal philosophy at this point in my life is that your thoughts create your reality. What you think about you bring about. I believe that we can do or be anything that we want to be. I believe that we are in much more control of our life and circumstances than what we want to admit at times. In short, life is good. Put positive energy out there. Good things come.

Do you have advice for other professional women?

My advice to other professional women is to consider that we are all in this together. There is enough good to go around for all of us. We have got to do a better job of sharing and helping each other. As women I think we have a responsibility to not only pave the road ahead but to also bring women up behind us. I think we have to continue supporting each other. Women bring so much to the table as leaders. We bring a whole different skill set than men. There needs to be more of us in leadership positions. And we need to help each other get there.

Also, take time out for yourself. We sometimes have to work twice as hard. We have to give each other latitude in taking care of ourselves. We're taking care of everybody else too, so we have to do a better job of putting ourselves first at least sometimes.

The mission of the Women's Intersport Network for Kansas City (WIN for KC) is to empower women and girls through advocating and promoting the lifetime value of sports and fitness while providing opportunities for participation and leadership development.

More Information:

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