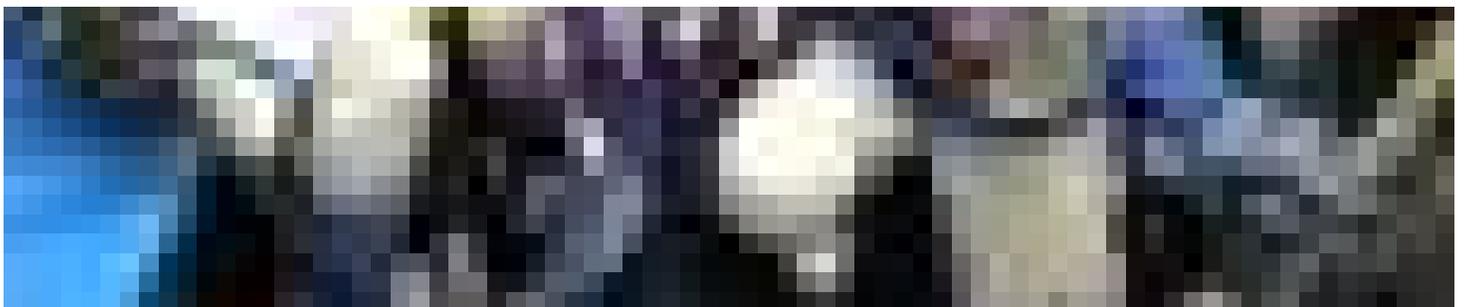




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## **MICHELE AMIDON WORKS ON INITIATIVES TO GROW GIRLS' AND WOMEN'S HOCKEY IN STATE**

By Heather Rule, SportsEngine, 04/01/21, 10:15AM MDT

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**Hub exclusive: Amidon, who is the NHL female ambassador for the Colorado Avalanche, aspires to showcase and support female players statewide.**



Michele Amidon (far right) with Team Colorado Tier 1 girls and local players the night she was announced female ambassador for the Colorado Avalanche. Photos courtesy of Michele Amidon

Michele Amidon played hockey for St. Lawrence University and also won a silver medal as a member of the U.S. women's national team at the 1992 IIHF World Women's Championship.

"Many times with the national team, we'd be up in Canada. Always sold out. Every game," Amidon said.

With those fond memories in mind, one of Amidon's goals is for Ball Arena to host a sold-out professional women's hockey game. As the NHL female ambassador for the Colorado Avalanche, she's in a prime position to help make that a reality, although the concept is still in the idea stage.

In Amidon's coaching career, she was a head coach at USA Hockey's National Player Development Camps and coached the Bowdoin College women's hockey team from 1998-2006, garnering four NCAA tournament appearances during that span.

She was named USA Hockey's first Director of Women's Hockey in August 2006, where she was the general manager of the women's national and Olympic teams from 2006-10. She also spent three years as the first executive director of the Boulder Hockey Club. Along with her female ambassador role, she's also the Brand and Quality Control Director for the Colorado Rampage Youth Hockey Association and the 8U Player and Coach Development Director for Arapahoe Hockey Association.

Amidon, who is based in Denver, has volunteered in hockey throughout her life, so when Jason Schofield, director of amateur hockey development for the Colorado Avalanche, asked her a couple of years ago if she'd like to step into the new female ambassador role, her response was "of course."

Working a fairly new position, Amidon's role as female ambassador is still evolving with the Avalanche. With the NHL celebrating Gender Equality Month in March, Amidon has been busy communicating with various members of the organization.

"My goal in the next couple years is to elevate some of the other women in the state," Amidon said. "So the Avalanche has a pool of players to call on and not just me. I want to highlight their successes and get them more involved as well."

The Avalanche are hosting a Girls Growing the Game Series March 21-24 with fans invited to participate in activities such as a girls-only Learn to Play session and a Try Mile High Mites for Free event at the Sport Stable in Boulder, giving families the opportunity to join the hockey community and learn about the sport in a friendly environment.

Amidon and former Team USA athlete Jordan Slavin led a virtual off-ice training session, allowing girls to learn skill drills that help them stay sharp away from the ice. Hockey fans also participated in a live question and answer session with women in the hockey community, including Amidon and Slavin.



Gretchen Ulion (left), with Michele Amidon and Meghan Duggan (right) during a female leadership summit and fantasy camp hosted by the Colorado Avalanche in 2019.

Amidon is also a member of the NHL and NHLPA female hockey advisory committee. It was actually the committee's idea for NHL teams to create the female ambassador positions. The committee works to create marketing ideas, find ways to get more fan and player engagement, and showcase women who've had successful playing careers.

For one of its initiatives, the committee packaged a female tool kit and sent it to all NHL clubs.

"That's been really helpful getting them ideas of how to get more female engagement in every aspect of the game," Amidon said.

She is hoping to host another fantasy camp this summer for young girls — pandemic permitting. It all falls under the same goals of creating visibility and exposure for female hockey players, Amidon said.

They're up to more than 2,000 registered female hockey players in Colorado, and a major focus of the Avalanche is to grow the 4-to-10-year-old age groups to have some more organic growth from the bottom up, Amidon said.

"That way we can feed into just producing more players and exposing more players to the game at all levels," Amidon said.

Amidon helped put together the Colorado Avalanche Women's Leadership Summit in summer of 2019, which was "an opportunity to have some face time with these Olympians," Amidon said. Grace Lee, from Boulder, participated in the summit, along with Meghan Duggan and Gretchen Ulion. Lee and Duggan skated with Team USA in the PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Winter Games, while Ulion played for the gold-medal-winning U.S. team in 1998.

"Events like that are hard to pull off without the backing of our NHL programs," Amidon said. "Especially the outreach that the Avalanche have in terms of social media — Twitter, Facebook, Instagram — the mailing lists, the contacts that they have."

Amidon noted the tagline "If you can see it, you can be it." In order to have the engagement, it's critical to have the visibility of women in these positions, Amidon said. It's all about making sure these female athletes at the professional levels are visible, "which in the past have been very difficult," Amidon said.

Having NHL clubs, like the Avalanche, on board with that line of thinking and that can help with exposure is critical, according to Amidon.

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**--Michele Amidon, female ambassador for the Colorado Avalanche**



Amidon with her sons, Mason and Ryder, for Arapahoe Youth Hockey.

Amidon is working on putting together a goalie camp for kids, too, enlisting the help of Nicole Hensley, a goaltender from Lakewood who was a member of the 2018 U.S. Olympic team and plays professionally.

"We hope to definitely involve Nicole Hensley in our movement for more growth and exposure," Amidon said. "She's a phenomenal role model, leader. And she's willing. So we're excited about that."

They're still deciding on the particulars of the camp, like the age range and whether the camp should be all-girls or co-ed. Though Amidon said she likes the idea of it being co-ed to have strong, female role models in front of the young male athletes, too.

"I have two boys," Amidon said. "So I just think that's empowering for them and future generations respecting women and leadership roles as well."

As far as that sold-out women's game, Amidon has noticed some of the progress with the last couple of Olympic tours, playing in front of capacity crowds across the country ahead of the Olympic Games.

Still, Amidon sees the potential and the benefits of women's hockey games being played at these bigger venues, such as Ball Arena.

"It supports our female athletes that deserve to be playing and showcasing their talents in front of a sold-out crowd," Amidon said. "And then it gives the young, female players and older women, an opportunity to see the game at the highest level and interact with these amazing role models."

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