

Aurora Tigers Make CJHL History, hire first female GM

By **Robert Belardi**

There's always something that comes with setting a new standard.

It's replete with joy and with the sense of purpose. To know you're making a concrete difference in your field and paving the way for others is what anyone in any profession sets out to do.

When Team Governor of the Ontario Junior Hockey League club Aurora Tigers Jim Thomson was looking out for a new General Manager of his team, he was interested in finding a woman.

“It was a conversation about a year ago between Jim and myself and we were talking about looking at other options for the position. He said we're going to look at females, and I said absolutely,” said OJHL commissioner Marty Savoy.

In his search, he came across a young woman working with Paramount Sports Management.

A 24-year-old named Sierra Costa was completing her co-op while studying Sports Management at Humber College. What caught Thomson's eye was her attention to detail and her affinity for taking over the set-up and operations of her events.

That's when it clicked. It was her. She was going to make history. And when she found out she had been named the next General Manager of the Aurora Tigers, Costa couldn't believe it.

“When I found out Jim had offered me the position, I was floored. I couldn't believe that this was the opportunity that I was getting. I hadn't even finished school yet when this opportunity was given to me. So, it was great being able to work towards that and having my dreams become a reality,” Costa said.

“The goal has always been to work in hockey” but there was just an abundance of emotions. At first, I didn't think it was real.”

Costa, who was a late bloomer to the sport, gained an interest in the game after watching hockey with her uncle. Motivated by fun times with her family watching the sport, she joined the team at St. Joseph's College in Toronto to play competitively in high school.

Unfortunately, due to too many concussions she had to step away from playing. But that didn't stop her from getting involved. She knew she couldn't live without the game, so she got involved in the managerial side of things.

Last Friday, at Aurora Town Hall, Costa was unveiled to the public as the first female general manager in CJHL history, and the hope is, this will show girls out there that this is something they can do one day.

“I hope it will show little girls out there that this isn't just a men's game. It doesn't matter if it is the male side of the sport or the female side of the sport, it's hockey,” said Savoy, who has coached female hockey for over 12 years.

In recent shifts in the spectrum of women in sport, there have been ground-breaking moments in the professional game to have women involved, not just in hockey, but everywhere.

But between the grassroots level and the professional game, there is a large area to bridge between the two gaps. How can women get to the professional game if there is no opportunity past grassroots levels? That's where this opportunity poses as a more than suitable outlet into achieving that. And, for Costa, she hopes this will be the start of something incredible.

“Everyone wants to take the elevator up and get to the penthouse, the penthouse being into the NHL. But you have to start somewhere. I think this is the greatest opportunity to start somewhere. You still have that level of competitiveness. You're dealing with trades, you have deadlines, you're dealing with financials,” Costa explained.

“It would be great to see, maybe next season or even seasons down the line to see another female ? not necessarily GM ? but coaching staff. I think women bring just as much knowledge to the sport as men do.”

Costa will be predominantly dealing with majority of the business side of the team. She hopes she will be able to involve the Aurora Minor Tigers and even the Central York Panthers as part of her plans moving forward with the team. She has many aspirations and she can't wait to get started with helping out with plans.

“We're all equal. If a female can do the job, she deserves the job,” Thomson said. “That's what my wife and I looked at. We got a person that is going to help in so many areas, make our life easier and make our organization better. This is a great day for women in sports and I couldn't be prouder to have Marty here and the Mayor here to be part of this and announce this.”

Simultaneously as Costa was announced to all of Canada, the Aurora Tigers also announced Serpa Automotive Boutique as the team's new sponsor for this upcoming season and Connor Van Weelie as the team's new captain heading into the 2022-2023 campaign.