



# Equal Play

## Title IX *and* Social Change

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and stumbling blocks have empowered society generally, and women specifically, in turning back and transforming stereotypes and biases. The successes of Title IX to date, although far from complete, suggest that other social movements can benefit from Title IX's history. It is a story—much like sport itself—that is a testament to our country's enduring and resilient ethic of competition on the field and its passion for fairness and justice.

|||○|||○|||○ PART I ○|||○|||○|||○

## Women's Sports before Title IX

### • INTRODUCTION •

The Industrial Revolution brought a more formal segregation between men and women, as work and home were increasingly separated into what has now become known as the "doctrine of separate spheres." Publicly, men were cast as the competitors in the amoral, economic, legal, and political realms, whereas women were positioned either as decorative acquisitions or as spiritual guardians of men's immortal souls. Women's moral superiority was in direct proportion to their physical inferiority to men. Whereas women at the lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder have always engaged in heavy physical labor, middle- and upper-class women's roles focused on their central duties in childbearing and homemaking. Physicians and educators noted that women's health was suffering as a result of this limiting definition of femininity, but the call was not for sports and competition; rather, it was for walking and calisthenics to improve women's physical and mental health for the purposes of childbearing and homemaking. As the piece by Susan Cahn makes clear, the medical profession warned against exercise that was too strenuous lest it harm women's reproductive functions, while the moralists warned that sports participation would lead to a masculinization of women, either turning them against their prescribed roles or into homosexuals. Homophobia, or the fear of homosexuality, was used (and, indeed, is still used) to keep young women from playing sports.

Yet it is a mistake to assume that girls and women did not participate in sports before Title IX. The article by Welch Suggs provides a brief history of the forces that shaped women's sports experience, and how the female sports leaders hoped to avoid the pitfalls that seemed to plague men's athletic experiences. These visionaries were committed to building a better, more cooperative sporting experience for women than was thought possible for men. The early values

of women's sporting competition, however, morphed over the years, especially after women's intercollegiate athletics came to be organized not by the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), but by the historically all-male National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the early 1980s. As women came to be involved in organized sports, society did not have an easy time knowing what to make of the new role of women as athletes.

In addition to the experiences of the average female athlete, the article on Babe Didrikson Zaharias makes clear that extraordinary women's accomplishments were widely recognized and respected. The fact that Wilma Rudolph, Billie Jean King, Donna de Varona, and Althea Gibson were household names bears witness to both their athletic feats and the recognition they were accorded for their accomplishments. These women were both elite athletes and the appointed advocates for women's athletics. Despite these isolated success stories, women who were serious about athletics were seen as a bit freakish, not something that parents commonly hoped for their daughters in the same way that they might for their sons. So whereas history books may include shining examples of women excelling in sports, women's accomplishments generally were marginalized, and it took an exceptional person—not just an athlete with outstanding physical skills—to be able to surmount this society-wide position. The *Sports Illustrated* article by Bil Gilbert and Nancy Williamson provides a glimpse of what the sports experience was like for a more typical female athlete.

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## Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Sports\*

Susan Cahn

In the fall of 1911, *Lippincott's Monthly* described the modern athletic woman: "She loves to walk, to row, to ride, to motor, to jump and run . . . as Man walks, jumps, rows, rides, motors, and runs." To many early-twentieth-century observers, the female athlete represented the bold and energetic modern woman, breaking free from Victorian constraints, and tossing aside old-fashioned ideas about separate spheres for men and women. Popular magazines celebrated this transformation, issuing favorable notice that the "hardy sun-tanned girl" who spent the summer in outdoor games was fast replacing her predecessors, the prototypical "Lydia Languish" and the "soggy matron" of old.

With the dawning of the new century, interest in sport had burgeoned. More and more Americans were participating as spectators or competitors in football, baseball, track and field, and a variety of other events. At the same time women were streaming into education, the paid labor force, and political reform movements in unprecedented numbers. Women's social and political activism sparked a reconsideration of their nature and place in society, voiced through vigorous debates on a wide range of issues, from the vote to skirt lengths. Popular interest in sport and concern over women's changing status converged in the growing attention paid to the "athletic girl," a striking symbol of modern womanhood.

The female athlete's entrance into a male-defined sphere made her not only a popular figure but an ambiguous, potentially disruptive character as well. Sport had developed as a male preserve, a domain in which men expressed and cultivated masculinity through athletic competition. Yet, along with other "New

\*New York: Free Press (1994), 7-9, 164-165, 181-184, excerpt.

Women" who demanded access to such traditional male realms as business and politics, women athletes of the early twentieth century claimed the right to share in sport. They stood on the borderline between new feminine ideals and customary notions of manly sport, symbolizing both the possibilities and the dangers of the New Woman's daring disregard for traditional gender arrangements.

The female athlete's ambiguity created a dilemma for her advocates. Given women's evident enjoyment of such "masculine" pursuits, could the "athletic girl" (and thus, the modern woman) reap the benefits of sport (and modernity) without becoming less womanly? The *Lippincott's Monthly* article was titled "The Masculinization of Girls." And while it concluded positively that "with muscles tense and blood aflame, she plays the manly role," women's assumption of "the manly role" generated deep hostility and anxiety among those who feared that women's athletic activity would damage female reproductive capacity, promote sexual licentiousness, and blur "natural" gender differences.

The perceived "mannishness" of the female athlete complicated her reception, making the "athletic girl" a cause for concern as well as celebration. Controversy did not dampen women's enthusiasm, but it did lead some advocates of women's sport to take a cautious approach, one designed specifically to avert charges of masculinization. Women physical educators took an especially prudent stance, articulating a unique philosophy of women's athletics that differed substantially from popular ideas of "manly sport."

The tension between sport and femininity led, paradoxically, to educators' insistence on women's equal right to sport and on inherent differences between female and male athletes. Balancing claims of equality and difference, physical educators articulated a woman-centered philosophy of sport that proposed "moderation" as the watchword of women's physical activity. Moderation provided the critical point of difference between women's and men's sport, a preventive against the masculine effects of sport. It was this philosophy, with its calculated effort to resolve the issue of "mannishness," which guided the early years of twentieth-century women's athletics.

By midcentury the persistent attempts of women athletes and their advocates to project an image of attractive femininity had failed to sunder the perceived connection between female athleticism and a rough, ill-bred "mannishness." In fact, the task had become doubly difficult in the conservative post-World War II era. During these years women athletes encountered a growing suspicion that they were not only gender anomalies but might be sexual aberrants as well.

Given the long association between athleticism and male virility, it was not surprising that there should be speculation about lesbianism among athletes.

For decades critics of women's sport had linked "mannishness" to sexual deviance, claiming that masculinized female athletes would inevitably acquire masculine sexual characteristics and interests as well. The fear of female sexuality unleashed from feminine modesty and male control runs like a constant thread through the history of women's sport. However, the nature of such fears and the understanding of "mannish" female sexuality had changed significantly between early and midcentury.

Between 1900 and 1930, the sexual debate in sport centered on the problem of unbridled heterosexual desire, the prospect that "masculine" sport might loosen women's inhibitions toward men. But by the 1930s, female athletic mannishness began to connote failed (rather than excessive) heterosexuality. Citing expert opinion that intense competition would disfigure the athletic woman and make her unappealing to men, author Fred Wittner asserted in 1934 that as an "inevitable consequence" of athletic training, "girls trained in physical education today may find it more difficult to attract the most worthy fathers for their children."

The impression of heterosexual "failure" contained a further possibility as well: The Amazonian athlete might be not only unattractive but unattracted to men—she might prefer women. What began as a vague suggestion of lesbianism emerged as a full-blown stereotype of the "mannish lesbian athlete" in the years after World War II. As a stigmatized figure the mannish lesbian functioned as a powerful but unarticulated "bogywoman" of sport, silently foiling the ongoing efforts of sport advocates to rehabilitate the reputation of women athletes and resolve the cultural contradiction between athletic prowess and femininity.

By the 1950s, all female athletes and physical educators operated under a cloud of sexual suspicion. The destructive stereotype of the mannish lesbian athlete pressured women in sport to demonstrate their femininity and heterosexuality, viewed as one and the same. Many women adopted an apologetic stance about their athletic skill. Even as they competed to win, they made sure to display outward signs of femininity in dress and demeanor. They took special care in dealing with the media to reveal "feminine" hobbies like cooking and sewing, mention current boyfriends, and discuss future marriage plans.

Leaders of women's sport took the same approach at the institutional level. Physical educators redoubled their efforts to discredit the portrayal of P.E. majors and teachers as social misfits and prudes. In a paper on postwar objectives, Mildred Schaeffer explained that P.E. classes should help women "develop an interest in school dances and mixers and a *desire to voluntarily attend them*." To this end administrators continued to emphasize lifelong sport and daily-life

skills (including occasional lessons on how to lift luggage and dodge oncoming automobiles). The idea of "co-recreation" spread from intramural activities to the regular curriculum, where physical educators began designing coeducational classes to foster "broader, keener, more sympathetic understanding of the opposite sex." Lest there be any confusion about the message, in 1956 the University of Texas brought in Dr. Henry Bowman, author of *Marriage for Moderns*, to lecture first-year women's P.E. classes on how "to be gotten."

In conjunction with curricular reform, physical educators launched internal crackdowns on students and faculty who might feed the public image of mannishness. Departments warned against "casual styles" that might "lead us back into some dangerous channels." They implemented dress codes forbidding slacks and men's shirts or socks, adding as well a ban on "boyish haircuts" and unshaven legs. The Ohio P.E. Association left no doubt about the impression it sought to project. Its 1946 brochure for prospective majors flatly stated, "The mannish concept of a physical educator is no longer acceptable." The pamphlet's cover showed a man in a suit and a woman in high heels and a skirt walking hand in hand *away* from a background of athletic fields.

Popular sports promoters adopted similar tactics. Roxy Andersen responded to the implied connection between mannishness and lesbianism by designing AAU<sup>1</sup> promotional campaigns around the assertion of heterosexuality. In her 1945 article "Fashions in Feminine Sport," Andersen created a historical scenario of growing heterosexual appeal and pursuit. She contrasted "prehistoric femmes who developed their speed running AWAY from the men" with "the glamorous girls of this age," who dated six nights a week. The modern athlete's "luscious . . . decorative . . . long-stem" beauty and frequent dating discredited the "erroneous opinion that men disapprove of women in sport."

Marshaling sexual data as if they were athletic statistics, a 1954 AAU poll sought to sway a skeptical public with numerical proof of heterosexuality—the fact that 91 percent of former female athletes surveyed had married. Publicity for the Midwestern AAGBL<sup>2</sup> supplemented the usual statistics on total hits, runs, and stolen bases with figures on the total number of married players in the league. In the same vein, the professional women's golf tour announced that one-third of its members were married and the rest were on the lookout for attractive marital prospects.

The fear of lesbianism was greatest where a sport had a particularly masculine image and where promoters needed to attract a paying audience. Professional

and semipro basketball and softball fit the bill on both counts. Sponsors tried to resolve the problem through beauty contests and other promotional ploys to "prove" the attractive femininity of athletes. While in earlier times such events celebrated the "sexiness" of the emancipated modern woman, in later decades they seemed to serve a more defensive function. Editors of the *Amateur Athlete* made sure that at least one photograph of the national basketball tournament's beauty "queen and her court" accompanied the photo of each year's championship team, as—behind the scenes—teams passed dress and conduct codes designed to allay fears that ball teams attracted "freaks" and "Amazons."

In their efforts to counter pernicious lesbian stereotypes, sports promoters and the media transformed the "unseemly" heterosexual element present in earlier working-class athletics into the basic standard of legitimacy for all women's sport. For decades the overt eroticism of popular sport had sparked internal controversy and external criticism. But by midcentury, promoters of a wide variety of women's sports highlighted the female athlete's sexual allure. The most acceptable athletes were the women whose beauty and sex appeal "compensated" for their athletic ability. Those athletes deemed unattractive by virtue of their size, musculature, facial features, or "unfeminine" bearing met with public censure and suspicion of their sexuality.

Although women's sport advocates did their best to "prove" heterosexuality and to suppress "mannishness," in the end this strategy did little to diminish the lesbian stigma of women's sport. Hostile observers perpetuated lesbian athletic stereotypes through their unrelenting ridicule of skilled athletes as "grotesque," "ugly," "masculine," or "unnatural." Leaders of women's sport unwittingly contributed to the homophobic climate when they began to orient their programs toward a new feminine heterosexual ideal. As organizational policies and media campaigns worked to suppress lesbianism and marginalize athletes who didn't conform to dominant standards of femininity, sport officials incorporated society's fear and loathing of lesbians into the practice and imagery of sport.

The stigmatized "mannish" lesbian athlete did not disappear but rather assumed the stature of a negative symbol of female social and sexual independence. As a powerful representation of deviance her significance reached far beyond the world of sport. She announced to all women that competitiveness, strength, independence, aggression, and same-sex physical intimacy were privileged features of manhood or, conversely, the mark of unacceptable womanhood. She represented the border that must not be crossed, reminding all women to toe the line of heterosexual femininity or risk falling into a despised and liminal category of mannish (not-women) women.

<sup>1</sup>AAU is an acronym for the Amateur Athletic Union, an organization sponsoring many athletic leagues and events. Until Congress passed the newly named Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act in 1978 (section 220510 U.S.C.A.), the AAU was the recognized governing body for many Olympic sports.

<sup>2</sup>AAGBL is an acronym for the All-American Girls Baseball League, founded in the 1940s.

As women broke down barriers in all facets of society, their interest in sports also grew after watching Wilma Rudolph, Margaret Court, Billie Jean King, and other athletes.

At the same time, the women in charge of the physical-education associations were worried about losing control over women's athletics. Dissatisfied with what they were getting in college settings, some women were playing tennis and competing in semipro sports at private clubs, on corporate teams, and in opportunities provided by the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) programs.<sup>1</sup> Some women were also competing on men's teams when they could.

"I was playing almost-semipro softball in the 1960s with the Raybestos Brakettes, playing against outside amateur teams," says Donna A. Lopiano, who became women's athletics director at the University of Texas at Austin and later director of the Women's Sports Foundation. "I played in four national championships, and we drew crowds in the thousands in small towns in Connecticut."<sup>2</sup>

Administrators with the Division of Girls' and Women's Sports (DGWS) realized that women were going to find opportunities to compete in elite, Olympic-style sports and decided that it would be better for those women to compete within the American educational system, under the supervision of qualified women, rather than to allow the AAU or National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to take command. In 1963, Sara Staff Jernigan of the DGWS addressed the NCAA's annual convention, asking the association to stop allowing women to compete on men's teams. She said she and other educators feared that women would be in danger of getting roughed up in games against men, and that women's sports would not develop if the best athletes were skimmed off by men's programs. Women leaders were also deeply suspicious of the regular scandals in men's sports—stories of players being allowed to skate through classes, boosters handing out bribes to recruit talented players, and point-shaving to help gamblers.

"The women in the sixties were historians, students of what had happened in intercollegiate athletics, and one thing they all recognized was that men's sport had gotten to where it was because physical educators, male physical educators, had taken a hands-off approach, saying, 'I don't want to have anything to do with that,'" Lopiano says. Women educators "were faced with repeating history. They took responsibility. They knew highly competitive sport for women was going to come in an educational construct, and that they needed to control it and keep it educational."

<sup>1</sup>Patricia Ann Rosenbrock, "Persistence and Accommodation in a Decade of Struggle and Change: The Case of Women Administrators in Division I-A Intercollegiate Athletics Programs" (PhD thesis, University of Iowa, 1987), 33 and 164.

<sup>2</sup>All quotations from Jernstedt, Lopiano, and Neinas in this article are taken from interviews conducted in 2003 and 2004, unless otherwise noted.

## Heroines as Well as Heroes\*

Welch Suggs

The public mind-set about women in sports had begun to change in the mid-1960s in part as a result of the Cold War. The public watched women compete on television, mostly in individual sports like tennis and gymnastics. Any competition in which Americans could beat Soviets was met with general approval. Although colleges had cut back on most sports offerings for women in the years following World War II, by the middle to late 1960s more colleges were experimenting with intercollegiate athletics for women.

The first college championship for female athletes was the 1941 golf tournament at Ohio State sanctioned by the National Section on Women's Athletics of the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, or AAHPER. The tournament became a yearly event in 1946, and a decade later the various organizations governing women's sports formed the Tripartite Golf Committee. By 1958, that group had expanded to form the Joint Committee on Extra-Mural Sports, which was designed to unite and streamline the efforts of the dizzying array of organizations that had some jurisdiction over sports for women at the time: the AAHPER women's section, which soon became the Division of Girls' and Women's Sports; the National Association of Directors of Physical Education; and the Athletic and Recreation Federation of College Women.

The task of the joint committee was to satisfy the fast-growing interest among college women in competitive sports in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

\* *A Place on the Team: The Triumph and Tragedy of Title IX* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), chapter 3, excerpt.

At the time, the NCAA did not object. In 1964, the association satisfied Jernigan by passing a rule to limit championship participation to men. It also created a "special liaison committee on women's athletics" the same year.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, DGWS officials began to explore the idea of creating an organization to sponsor women's championships, which would involve creating a new structure to govern women's sports across the country. Again, the NCAA approved. In a 1966 memorandum, Charles S. Neinas, the top assistant to NCAA director Walter F. Byers, wrote that the "NCAA limits its jurisdiction and authority to male student-athletes . . . consequently, a national organization assuming responsibility for women's athletics would not be in conflict with this Association."<sup>4</sup>

In 1967, AAHPER announced the formation of the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (CIAW) "to give college women more opportunities for high level competition in athletics." A news release announced that a national college championship in gymnastics would be held in March or April 1969, with a track meet scheduled for April or May. The schedule called for swimming, badminton, and volleyball championships in 1970, and the golf tournament was subsumed under the new slate.<sup>5</sup>

Katherine Ley of the AAHPER was to be in charge of the new organization, which would replace all of the competing committees and associations. Her platform for the new organization was as follows: "Children growing up need heroines as well as heroes. We suspect that the naming of national champions each year in the different sports will make sports activity seem more desirable and will motivate less talented girls all over the country to learn sports skills and to enjoy sports on their own."<sup>6</sup>

Within three years, AAHPER officials decided they needed a separate and more formal structure for the championships slate, and they spun off the CIAW into the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) in January 1972.

Developing their own association free from the influence of men, the women of the AIAW had a great feeling of ownership and protectiveness over their organization. They were able to reinvent the "girl for every sport, and a sport for every girl" philosophy from the history of their organizations, and the teams and championships they sponsored were structured to promote broad partici-

<sup>3</sup>Jack Falla, NCAA: *The Voice of College Sports: A Diamond Anniversary History, 1906-1981* (Overland Park, KS: NCAA, 1981), 161.

<sup>4</sup>Affidavit of Donna A. Lopiano, president of the AIAW, in *Assoc. for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women v. Nat'l. Collegiate Athletic Assoc.*, 588 F. Supp. 487 (D. D.C. 1983), affirmed, 735 F.2d 577 (D.C. Cir. 1984).

<sup>5</sup>AAHPER, "News Release," December 7, 1967.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

pation more than competition. They banned athletic scholarships and placed significant restrictions on recruiting.

These sentiments were reflected in the AIAW Policy Statement, adopted in May 1974:

We believe sport is an important aspect of our culture and a fertile field for learning. The sense of enjoyment, self-confidence, and physical well-being derived from demanding one's best performance in a sport situation is a meaningful experience for the athlete. These inner satisfactions are the fundamental motivation for participation in sports. Therefore, programs in an educational setting should have these benefits as primary goals.

In keeping with this belief, the following program elements are vitally important:

1. The enrichment of the life of the participant is the focus and reason for the existence of any athletic program. All decisions should be made with this fact in mind.
2. The participants in athletic programs, including players, coaches, and support personnel, should have access to and representation in the policy-making group on campus and in sport governing organizations.
3. Adequate funding is necessary to provide a comprehensive program. Sufficient funds should be provided for:
  - A broad spectrum of sports experiences;
  - A variety of levels of competitive experiences;
  - Travel using licensed carriers;
  - Appropriate housing and food;
  - Rated officials;
  - Well-trained coaches;
  - Equipment, supplies, and facilities which aid performance and appeal to the aesthetic aspects of sport;
  - Competent staff for administering and publicizing the program;
  - Qualified medical and training personnel;
  - And regular opportunities for social interaction with opponents.
4. Careful consideration is needed for scheduling practices and games. The athletic schedule should ensure sufficient time to gain personal satisfaction from skill achievement, but should not deny the student the time to participate in other activities. Factors to be considered include:

- Equitable compensation at all levels;
  - Adequate pre-season conditioning;
  - Appropriate spacing and length of practice sessions;
  - Sufficient number of events in each sport; and
  - Comparable length of seasons between sports.
5. Separate but comparable teams should be provided for women and men. In addition to separate teams, intercollegiate coeducational teams comprised of an equal number of women and men competing on opposing teams is desirable in those sports in which such teams are appropriate. Athletic ability is one of the talents which can be considered in the awarding of financial aid to students. However, students should be free to choose the institution on the basis of curriculum and program. Staff time and effort should be devoted to the comprehensive program rather than to recruiting efforts.<sup>7</sup>

This is more a manifesto than a set of playing rules. The women in charge of the AIAW were fighting for equal funding and equal recognition on their own campuses, accustomed as they were to having to pile into players' and coaches' cars to get to a road game. While they wanted their fair share of funding, they really wanted to maintain the independence to conduct their own sports programs with their own values.

Among those values was a certain egalitarianism. In the first AIAW championship in volleyball in 1972, participation ranged from huge urban campuses like UCLA to tiny rural ones like Sul Ross State in Alpine, Texas. In fact, Sul Ross beat UCLA in the championship match. The NCAA had separated into college and university divisions fifteen years earlier, and was on the verge of creating even more divisions.

Early rules were carefully drawn to be restrictive. The AIAW forbade flying recruits onto campuses for visits. Christine H. B. Grant, one of the AIAW's presidents, described the organization's approach to recruiting as "a system that attempted to achieve three goals: (a) to avoid the harassment of high school athletes; (b) to create a system that was financially reasonable to all member institutions; and (c) to prevent the burnout of coaches who spend excessive time in the recruitment of athletes."<sup>8</sup>

The AIAW was accepted widely and quickly. A total of 275 colleges and universities signed on as charter members, including junior colleges, women's

<sup>7</sup>AIAW, "Policy Statement" (AIAW Archives: University of Maryland at College Park, May 1974).

<sup>8</sup>Christine H. B. Grant, "The Gender Gap in Sport: From Olympic to Intercollegiate Level," *Arena Review* (July 1984), 43.

colleges, liberal arts colleges, regional universities, and state flagship institutions. However, women were still in a world of postgame meals of fast-food hamburgers and self-transportation while their male counterparts ate steak and took chartered planes and buses.

The issue of whether female athletes should be competing on male teams remained controversial. The *Athletic Director*, a newsletter published by the National Council of Secondary School Athletics Officials, said in 1974 that "while positive experiences for the exceptional girl competitor may occur through participation in boys' or men's competitive groups, these instances are rare and should be judged acceptable only as an interim procedure for use until girls' programs can be initiated."<sup>9</sup>

This was a crucial issue. The NCAA reconsidered its decision to ban women from its championships in 1972, fearing that it could be sued for violating women's rights under the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, even before Title IX had been introduced in Congress. Some male athletics directors believed they could accommodate women in sports simply by opening tryouts to everyone, male and female: Women could go out for a team and get cut because they were too small, too slow, or lacked other skills, but the school would have protected its legal obligations.

But that end run around the law never became popular. Women's officials pressed the point that women needed sex-segregated sports programs. Thus, women created perhaps the only context in civil rights law where "separate but equal" was tolerated and even endorsed.

Some male officials were extremely supportive. The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics' (NAIA) leadership sent the AIAW a letter saying, "The NAIA Executive Committee is fully aware of the problems which face our member institutions in financing separate programs of intercollegiate competition. . . . We are free to admit we have no magical or painless solution. However, NAIA is most sympathetic to the AIAW program and is committed to giving every assistance to make it possible for opportunities for women to develop."<sup>10</sup>

Even as women won these initial battles for separate teams, however, they found themselves embroiled in a bigger war: the struggle to decide who would ultimately govern women's sports. In the mid-1960s, the NCAA decided that it needed to begin sponsoring women's programs. Its espoused reasons were legal—as the women's movement was so ably demonstrating, institutions

<sup>9</sup>National Council of Secondary School Athletics Officials, *Athletic Director* (February 1971), 1.

<sup>10</sup>AIAW Newsletter 2, no. 1, 3.



available to men ought also to be available to women. AIAW leaders believe to this day that the NCAA was angling to cement its control over all of collegiate sports.

The first steps were cautious. In 1966 the NCAA's Neinas wrote again to CIAW officials asking if they planned to conduct championships. "Please do not misinterpret this letter," he wrote. "The NCAA has enough problems of its own without irritating DGWS or the gals. It should be recognized, however, that some of the athletic directors in the NCAA believe that national competition for women will stimulate activity at the grass-roots level."<sup>11</sup>

In 1967, the NCAA Council, a group of athletic administrators and college presidents that served as the organization's board of directors, appointed a study committee to consider "the feasibility of establishing appropriate machinery for the control and supervision of women's athletics."<sup>12</sup> In explaining the council's actions, Arthur W. Nebel of the University of Missouri wrote:

All of us are aware of women's role [in society]. They now are becoming more interested in intercollegiate athletics. NCAA championships are limited to male athletes. Also, the Association's rules and regulations governing recruiting, financial aid, and eligibility apply only to the male student.

It was recently brought to the Council's attention that an increasing number of NCAA institutions are sponsoring intercollegiate athletic activities for women. Some of these institutions have sought the advice of the Association as to the proper administrative procedures for an intercollegiate program for female students.

As a result, the Council has appointed a committee to study the feasibility of establishing appropriate machinery to provide for supervision and administration of women's intercollegiate athletics. . . . This should not be misconstrued as an effort on the part of the NCAA to establish women's championships or extend present Association regulations to women's intercollegiate athletics. It is possible that this may be the eventual result.<sup>13</sup>

That fall, the NCAA became more direct. Walter F. Byers, the association's cantankerous executive director, fired what many women considered a shot across the bow in October 1967. In a letter to women's leaders, he wrote, "The question of whether the NCAA is the organization to take this job [of governing

<sup>11</sup>Lopiano, 35-36. Neinas could not confirm the exact wording of the memorandum but recognized the language and the intent.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>13</sup>Falla, 161-162.

women's sports] is a question yet to be determined. Likewise, I presume that the question of whether the AAHPER (through DGWS) is the appropriate organization to supervise and control women's sports has not been determined."<sup>14</sup>

Byers continued to press the question as the decade turned. In 1971, he wrote to Elizabeth Hoyt of the AIAW to say that he had asked the NCAA's lawyer, George H. Gangwere, to evaluate whether the men's association could be held liable for not permitting women to participate in its championships. This letter predated Title IX by a year and a half, and it was written four months before Edith Green held hearings in the House of Representatives about inequities in education. "It appears that the NCAA is in a difficult legal position on the basis of its present posture and I suspect that it is quite likely that we will proceed to remove such barriers and, in fact, provide competitive opportunities for women as well as men," he wrote.<sup>15</sup>

A month later, Byers reported to his members on Gangwere's opinion:

Because there are numerous opportunities for female athletes to participate (e.g., the Olympic Games), they would have justification to complain that the NCAA does discriminate by preventing females from competing in events against other female athletes. (If the United States constitutional amendment for women's rights is adopted, there probably no longer would be any legally tenable grounds for disqualifying an athletically talented female from competing in an NCAA event against males.)

For the present, action, if any, will more than likely come on the grounds of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment . . . It could be argued that any illegal discrimination is that of member institutions, not the NCAA.<sup>16</sup>

Neinas told AIAW officials that he hoped their organization would be the appropriate venue for collegiate female athletes, but that the NCAA had to make plans if AIAW leaders felt "that you cannot make the adjustments necessary to accomplish that end."<sup>17</sup> The implication was that the AIAW's emphasis on participation would not provide female athletes opportunities "comparable" to those of male NCAA athletes.

The NCAA by this time was well established as the largest athletic organization in the country, sponsoring championships for hundreds of schools of all sizes and missions. The NAIA was very viable, especially in basketball, but

<sup>14</sup>Lopiano, 39.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 49.

NCAA officials controlled the airwaves for football and basketball broadcasts, and their championship events were becoming fixtures on the American sporting scene.

Contempt might be too strong a word, but the men of the NCAA were not very impressed with the AIAW's attitude toward sports. To NCAA officials, the AIAW's model was one of playing sports and having postgame teas, while the men were the "real" athletes. They were dubious that a professional association of educators could manage a sports program, and they certainly did not think the women's organizations were up to the task of administering women's athletics.

Neinas recalls approaching DGWS officials in the 1960s in one of the conversations about improving the United States' medal count in the Olympics. The U.S. Olympic Committee "was willing to put some development money into women's sports, and I said, 'Can you [the DGWS] help us channel it?' Their response was, they weren't interested in competition. That was the group that believed in Play Days, and they didn't want to have too high a level of competition."

Byers's 1971 memo brought a furious response from Rachel Bryant of the AIAW:

No action the NCAA could take would be a bigger mistake [than to try to co-opt female athletes or the AIAW]. A group of professional women educators have designed an organization and a program in accordance with their accepted philosophy and standards to meet the needs and interests of college women students. To have it now threatened by an organization designed for men and controlled by men would cause such a furor that the NCAA would have a real battle on its hands. The possibility of one girl instituting a court suit to participate on a male varsity team would be a very pale issue in comparison.<sup>18</sup>

The passage of Title IX in 1972 and the kickoff of the AIAW's championships pushed the issue of the NCAA and women's sports to the forefront. The women's movement, according to Byers, made Title IX a national battle instead of a local one: "It's tough for a woman to do battle with the football coach on a Division I-A campus, but a collection of determined women at the national level—with political support and media attention—could take on the NCAA and look very good indeed," he theorized.<sup>19</sup>

While mounting its own challenges to the law through sympathetic congressmen, the NCAA pushed ahead on the question of whether to start champion-

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>19</sup>Walter F. Byers and Charles Hammer, *Unsportsmanlike Conduct: Exploiting College Athletics* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 242.

ships for women. In 1975 the association sent another of Byers's assistants, Thomas A. Jernstedt, to address the AIAW's convention in Houston. Jernstedt remembers a very chilly reception. "I flew to Houston and made a very brief presentation to say that the NCAA sent me here to share with this organization that the NCAA had been involved in discussions to establish women's championships, perhaps in the next academic year, that hadn't been totally resolved." According to the AIAW's minutes, Jernstedt says that:

The Association has attempted to cooperate with women's amateur sports organizations for more than eleven years.

This is not a new area of concern for the Association; it is simply that the emphasis and problems involved here have increased markedly over the past two years.

In response to the membership's request for direction in this matter, the Council directed the NCAA staff to prepare a report and recommendations regarding NCAA's role in women's intercollegiate athletics. That report was received by the Council. It recommends that the Association move now to provide the same meaningful services in high quality national championship competition, backed by the same administrative support, for women student-athletes and teams of its member institutions as it does for men student-athletes. It recommends that the only satisfactory approach, considering the demands of court decisions, to the necessary institutional control of all of its intercollegiate athletic programs is to place men's and women's programs under the same administration, the same legislative body, and the same legislative rules. It further recommends that the NCAA begin immediately to offer national intercollegiate competition for women in selected sports. The [NCAA] Council approved the concept of that report and referred the recommendations to the Special Committee on Women's Intercollegiate Athletics for implementation at the earliest possible time.<sup>20</sup>

Before he had finished speaking, Jernstedt says, delegates were streaming off the convention floor, heading outside to call their campuses to see if their presidents would support an effort to quell the NCAA's plan.

Carol Gordon, chairwoman of the AIAW's executive board, fired off a telegram to the NCAA's convention, which was taking place at the same time in Washington:

AIAW views with grave concern the announced intention of NCAA to commence a pilot program of intercollegiate athletics for women. For the

<sup>20</sup>Minutes of the AIAW Delegates Assembly, January 5-8, 1975, Houston, Texas.

sake of future harmony in administration of intercollegiate sports programs for all students and to restore an atmosphere of cooperation in which a mutually beneficial exchange of views and exploration of future alternatives might continue, the Executive Board of AIAW urges the Executive Council to reconsider immediately its decision to initiate any pilot program in women's intercollegiate championships. AIAW has no choice but to view failure to reconsider as an effort by NCAA to undermine the existing women's intercollegiate championship program.<sup>21</sup>

"So it was not met with any noticeable enthusiasm," says Jernstedt of his efforts. "I think there were individuals like Linda Estes [the women's athletic director at the University of New Mexico], and I'm sure others in the crowd, who understood it and thought, 'This was very interesting,' and that it may be better for women student-athletes, and they were silent. This was a very genuine desire and effort by the NCAA to see if we could provide better and more extensive competitive opportunities. Exposure, I think was one of the primary components. . . . The NCAA, because of the broad scope of programs on the men's side, was in a stronger position to move women's athletics to a higher level."

The time was not quite right, however. The mass exodus from the convention that Jernstedt's address caused came back to swamp the NCAA. Enough of the AIAW women had prevailed with their presidents and male athletics directors to force the NCAA convention to table the matter.

The campus debates over the governance of women's sports mirrored the national one. As college presidents realized they would have to provide "equitable" programs for female athletes, many of them decided they ought to make women's programs look like men's programs. They moved women's sports out of physical-education departments, often making the women's athletics director an associate athletics director (in addition to her teaching responsibilities) and placing her under the supervision of the men's athletics director.

Said one women's sports administrator: "I think what started us actually doing anything about moving into 'athletics' as such was a group of students in the early 1970s who said, 'We are world class and national class athletes. And when we are swimming in the summer, we are just as good as the guys, and we get [the same competitive opportunities and benefits]'. And it was those students who stirred up such a ruckus in the early 1970s. Then came the emphasis of Title IX when it started to come along in 1972. The combination of the two got the attention of the administration in this school."<sup>22</sup>

State legislatures and universities often kicked in money from general funds to help start women's programs, and the number of women participating in

varsity programs spiked immediately after the law's passage. The NCAA puts the number of female athletes on varsity teams at 15,182 in 1966-1967. In 1971-1972, even before the passage of Title IX, that figure had doubled, to 29,977. By 1976-1977, the number of women playing sports had doubled again to 62,886. (The number of male athletes also increased, from 151,918 in 1966-1967 to 168,136 in 1976-1977.)<sup>23</sup>

But the increases were not always comfortable. Many women had to learn that varsity sports were not "church league," according to Judy Rose, who began her coaching and administrative career in 1975. Another female administrator described the transition in the administration of women's sports:

The first cuts were made in team selection, but you still didn't have extensive schedules and you didn't practice all the time. In 1972 things changed a little bit more and we renamed our women's sports organization the Women's Intercollegiate Sports Association. And several sports were dropped as concentration was put into about five sports, because we had only \$5,000 at that point. At that was the beginning of the change to an intensified coaching situation which was mild by comparison with today.

And then in 1973 the chancellor appointed a task force to take a look at women's athletics and decide what to do with it. The upshot of the task force was that women's athletics should become part of the Athletics Department and not be part of physical education any longer, because they determined that it wasn't appropriate, from a financial standpoint nor a philosophical standpoint. And so in June 1974, two weeks after the task force made their report, I was hired as the Assistant Athletics Director, and we moved into the Athletics Department. At that point our women's budget jumped from \$10,000 to \$83,000. The men's budget at that time was about \$2.5 million.<sup>24</sup>

The first major conflict between the AIAW's idealism and the pragmatism of implementing Title IX came a year after the law passed. Female tennis players at Marymount College and Broward Community College sued the AIAW in 1973 over the ban on scholarships. No matter what good reason the AIAW might have for banning scholarships, the plaintiffs argued, if colleges were going to provide men with a certain benefit, they needed to provide women with an equitable benefit.

<sup>23</sup> 1982-2000 Participation Statistics Report (by NCAA), [http://www.ncaa.org/library/research/participation\\_rates/1982-2000/153-164.pdf](http://www.ncaa.org/library/research/participation_rates/1982-2000/153-164.pdf) (accessed July 14, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Rosenbrock, 53.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Rosenbrock, 51-52.

Many college administrators believed that they needed to provide scholarships for members of both sexes. Even before the Florida lawsuits were filed, some colleges experimented with scholarship programs, leading to even more chaos among women's programs. A memorandum indicates the precariousness of the situation:

Pennsylvania State University did not use the DGWS sanctioning approval for the National Intercollegiate Women's Fencing Association Championship held on April 6-8, 1972. Della Durant, Coordinator of Women's Varsity Sports, Penn. St. U., reported that the directors of the event felt that they could not rightfully use the sanctioning since three to four schools would not sign a statement asking for specific information regarding the status of scholarships at their institutions.<sup>25</sup>

The AIAW settled the cases and changed its rules to permit scholarship to avoid losing members, but tried to convince administrators to stick to educational criteria for awarding scholarships rather than athletic ones:

The DGWS reaffirms its concerns that the provision of scholarships or other financial assistance specifically designated for athletes may create a potential for abuses which could prove detrimental to the development of quality programs of athletics. Specifically, the DGWS deplores the evils of pressure recruiting and performer exploitation which frequently accompany the administration of financial aid for athletes.

The DGWS is concerned that many collegiate athletic programs as currently administered do not make available to female students benefits equivalent in nature or extent to those made available to male students. While a curtailment of programs of financial aid to female students involved in athletics does eliminate the potential for abuses inherent in any such programs, this remedy is overly broad because it operates inequitably to deny to female students benefits available to their male counterparts. Specifically, those benefits might include the recognition of athletic excellence and the opportunity for economic assistance to secure an education.

Therefore, DGWS belies that the appropriate solution in our contemporary society is one directed to avoiding abuses while providing to female students, on an equitable basis, benefits comparable to those available to male students similarly situated.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Addendum to AIAW Executive Board Minutes for Meeting June 1-4, 1972, AIAW archives, University of Maryland at College Park.

<sup>26</sup>DGWS, "Statement of Philosophy" (AIAW archives, University of Maryland at College Park, April 1, 1973).

Many female administrators viewed the awarding of scholarships as a critical change for women's college sports. They had built their paradigm around the idea of providing the best experiences to women who were already enrolled. They did not allow coaches to recruit off-campus, nor to send prospective students anything more than a simple brochure describing their programs. Colleges were not supposed to compete for prized women athletes as they did for males, and coaches were restrained from recruiting so they could devote their time to teaching.

Scholarships shifted the emphasis from women already enrolled to those who could be recruited. Armed with scholarships, coaches needed to go out and find the best possible recipients. They had to choose athletes on the basis of athletic ability, not as a way of providing students with a healthy extracurricular activity.

This may seem like an obscure point to someone familiar with the NCAA's scholarship system, but it meant that women's programs in the 1970s "would take a 180-degree turn," in the words of one administrator. "[I'd been here all these years trying to develop a program for the young women who came to this university to get an education, and [also] liked to compete in sport. As they came we tried to allow our program to grow as rapidly as they could take that growth. Now suddenly, with this act, we were going out to find the student-athlete who we thought the university should have. And then we were going to have to provide the program for those student-athletes. And as soon as we began to do that the emphasis for women's sport changed."<sup>27</sup>

Lopiano says that the AIAW held firm to its philosophy, keeping coaches from going off-campus and instead permitting them to hold on-campus "auditions," just like college drama or music programs would. "It was a very healthy experience in that parents came to college with the kid [prior to enrolling], and after it was all over, both parents and kids knew whether they belonged," she says. "The organization didn't look to the NCAA model and say, 'We're going to do this,' but said, 'We don't believe in off-campus recruiting; we believe the kid should recruit the school, and play with the program to see if there's a fit.'"

Grudgingly, the AIAW set caps of eight scholarships a year each for basketball, field hockey, gymnastics, lacrosse, softball, swimming, track and field, and volleyball; and four per year for archery, badminton, bowling, crew, golf, fencing, riflery, skiing, squash, and tennis. Scholarships required athletes to pass minimum academic standards and were limited to tuition, room, board, and fees, excluding books. In men's sports, the NCAA at that time had no limits on the number of scholarships.

NCAA studies show that women's sports grew rapidly in the 1970s. By 1977 women were getting 14 percent of athletics departments budgets nationally, but

<sup>27</sup>Rosenbrock, 53.

55 percent of their budgets were coming from nonathletic sources, such as campus general funds, donors, and state appropriations.<sup>28</sup> Given the meager size of those budgets, colleges were clearly not choosing to cut men's programs to finance women's.

Some colleges even got into a bidding war over coaches. In 1976, the University of Kentucky tried to lure Pat Summitt away from Tennessee by offering her \$9,000 a year to coach the Wildcats. The sum was only \$100 more than Summitt was making at Tennessee, though, and so she stayed in Knoxville. (Male coaches at the time were making \$60,000 to \$70,000 in base salaries.)<sup>29</sup>

"Being at Texas, you win a national championship and they love you," Lopiano says. Her budget went up exponentially in those years, often doubling. She and her basketball coach, Jody Conradt, made women's sports a cause célèbre in Austin, taking lessons from the men's department in marketing their programs to the public. "There's nothing wrong in marketing," Lopiano says. "We had great graduation rates, articulate kids, and great coaches. . . . It can be done."

Texas finances its women's program with mandatory student fees, proceeds from campus soft-drink machines and from leasing their facilities back to the university, and "making every effort to find money from nonacademic sources," Lopiano says. Not until the late 1980s, when money began pouring into college football from new television and bowl-game contracts, did the women's department at Texas get funds from the men's athletics department.

At the national level, Byers had not given up. He pressed the NCAA's annual convention every year to inaugurate championships for women, but throughout the 1970s the delegates from the association's colleges turned him down. But a few voices joined his. In 1975, John A. Fuzak of Michigan State University told delegates that the NCAA Council "recognized that the moral obligation to provide meaningful services for the female student-athlete of its member institutions is greater today than ever before, and that to temporize further is to deny the NCAA's own statements of purpose and fundamental policy."<sup>30</sup>

The council further concluded that:

It is not feasible or desirable for the NCAA to confine future services and programs only to male student-athletes;

It is not possible under the provisions of the law to restrict application of NCAA rules only to male student-athletes competing on intercollegiate varsity teams; and

<sup>28</sup>John R. Theelin, *Games Colleges Play: Scandal and Reform in Intercollegiate Athletics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 395.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 396.

<sup>30</sup>Falla, 164.

It is not permissible or plausible for the NCAA to enter into agreements with other organizations that, for example, would accord the NCAA exclusive authority over male intercollegiate athletics and accord a like monopoly position to an organization for control of women's athletics.

Existing rules of law and policy contemplate that qualified females will participate on teams which formerly were exclusively male. The NCAA cannot legally or practically limit its services and programs so as to exclude such qualified females.

While the argument may be made that it is legally possible to provide . . . programs through separate but equal facilities and staff, economy probably will dictate that there be a minimum of duplication of personnel and facilities. Furthermore, administrative necessity and the need for equitable eligibility requirements will require coordination and similarity not only at the institutional level, but also on a national level. Integrated or coordinated programs at the national level cannot be achieved if separate male and female national organizations are left to accomplish it through . . . bilateral agreements.<sup>31</sup>

This was a declaration of war, or at least was taken as such by the AIAW. The NCAA had asserted not only its desire to start a national-championship program as an alternative to the AIAW, but also its belief that only one organization ought to govern all of collegiate sport. And that organization was not the AIAW.

In his autobiography, Byers says that some individual women in college sports were less hostile than the AIAW's leaders. He recounts a 1980 meeting with Mary Alyce Hill of San Diego State University and Linda Estes of New Mexico. "They wanted women in key positions in the NCAA, and they wanted the NCAA to be the national governing body for women's athletics," he writes. "Both of them were key players in the burgeoning world of women's athletics, and their decision in favor of the NCAA gave my dwindling confidence a shot of adrenaline."<sup>32</sup>

In 1980, Byers got his wish. Divisions II and III voted to hold women's championships in basketball, field hockey, swimming, tennis, and volleyball beginning with the 1981-1982 academic year. The following year in Miami the association's annual convention, the entire NCAA membership voted to expand its committees and allocate positions to women, and to create a three-year transition period to allow colleges to adapt from AIAW to NCAA rules. The

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 164-165.

<sup>32</sup>Byers and Hammer, 244.

vote was 383 for and 168 against. The convention then voted to establish Division I championships in basketball, cross-country, field hockey, gymnastics, softball, swimming, tennis, and outdoor track and field. That measure passed 128–127, and for all practical purposes, the AIAW was rendered irrelevant.<sup>33</sup> Byers was not very sympathetic to those who regretted the undermining of the AIAW. "The men and the NCAA itself didn't discriminate against women," he writes. "Women's athletics leaders discriminated against themselves through the years by refusing to accept competitive athletics as a proper pursuit for teenage women."<sup>34</sup>

The AIAW sued the NCAA to prevent it from starting women's championships, arguing that the association was exercising an illegal monopoly power over college sports. The court disagreed and the lawsuit was dismissed.

Byers and most other NCAA historians largely neglected a crucial fact about his drive to start women's championships: It was Plan B. The NCAA spent much of the 1970s trying to kill off Title IX in Congress and the courts. Once those efforts failed, the next best option was to acquire women's sports.

## Didrikson Was a Woman Ahead of Her Time\*

Larry Schwartz

The first to prove a girl could be a stud athlete, Babe Didrikson began as a musical phenom who mastered many sports and ended as a brilliant golfer. An exuberant tomboy whose life was athletics, she was accomplished in just about every sport—basketball, track, golf, baseball, tennis, swimming, diving, boxing, volleyball, handball, bowling, billiards, skating, and cycling. When asked if there was anything she didn't play, she said, "Yeah, dolls."

As a teenager she knew her life's ambition. "My goal was to be the greatest athlete who ever lived," she said.

While others dispute her story, Didrikson said that she was nicknamed Babe early in her teens by boys awed at her long-distance homers. As she grew older there seemed to be more Ty Cobb than Ruth in her, a dark rage that made losing intolerable. Like for Cobb, animosity seemed to be the fuel that stoked Babe's competitive fire.

The Associated Press voted her the Greatest Female Athlete of the first half of the 20th century. The wire service also voted her Female Athlete of the Year six times—once for her track dominance and five times for her golfing prowess.

Babe performed at a time when female athletes were considered freakish at best, downright unacceptable at worst. For most of her life she was the antithesis of femininity; not until her later years did she dress and act less manly. "She was not a feminist, not a militant, not a strategist launching campaigns against sexual liberation," wrote William Johnson and Nancy Williamson in *Whatta-Call!: The Babe Didrikson Story*. "She was an athlete and her body was her most valuable possession."

<sup>33</sup>Falla, 168–174.

<sup>34</sup>Byers and Hammer, 244.

\*Special to ESPN.com (accessed June 29, 2007).