

Girls' Sports: Focus on Equality

by Phyllis Zatin Boring



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Sex discrimination has been more prevalent in athletic programs than in any other area in public school education. The Citizens' Advisory Council on the Status of Women points out that less money is spent on girls' sports than on boys' sports; girls are often discouraged from participating, and facilities are more generally available to boys than to girls.

"Short-changing of girls in physical education and sports deprives them of the opportunity to establish life-time habits of exercise which lead to a high level of continuing good health in adult life," reports the Council. Short-changing of girls in school athletic programs is also now against the law.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 forbids sex discrimination in admissions, services and benefits by any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Although specific guidelines had not yet been released by the Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, it is the apparent intention of the law to require equality of access to recreational facilities and athletic activities, as well as to all other facets of the educational program. This law, in conjunction with

the Equal Opportunity Act of 1972, also provides that women teachers have the right to equal pay and equal employment opportunity.

There can be no doubt that the impact of Title IX will be felt in many school districts. Although there were extensive athletic programs for women in many parts of the country in the 30's and 40's, sports programs for female students declined in the 50's and 60's. As a result, high school girls in several states have gone to court in recent years demanding a right to equal play. The thrust of these suits has been to give the star female athlete, the right to compete on boys' teams.

While such court decisions have provided a needed opportunity to the exceptional girl, the average girl cannot compete at that skill level. The real solution to the problem must be the development of girls' sports programs comparable in resources and staff to those of the boys.

In most school districts, resources are not now being divided anywhere near 50-50. In one city in Pennsylvania last year more money was spent filming the boys' football games than was spent on the entire girls' interscholastic program. In New Jersey in 1971, 10 times more boys than girls had the opportunity to compete on interscholastic teams.

Only part-time facilities

In community after community, girls only have access to the gym in the late afternoon after the boys are through or are denied the use of facilities available to boys. It is common practice to provide the boys' teams with uniforms—while the girls wear their gym suits. Rather than being encouraged to participate in their own sports contests, girls are urged to be the cheerleaders and spectators at the boys' events.

To compensate for the inequities in girls' athletics in New Jersey, in 1972 the state Interscholastic Athletic Association adopted the policy that girls be allowed to compete with boys in non-contact sports when their school failed to provide a girls' team in that sport. Simultaneously, however, the NJSIAA and the State Department of Education hoped that local districts would expand athletic opportunities for girls generally.

In the winter of 1973, the New Jersey division of the Women's Equity Action League surveyed school districts

around the state to determine the relative access of girls to athletic programs, particularly at the high school level.

Results of WEAL Review

A review of over 50 districts in 17 counties reveals a general pattern of continuing inequities. Only three of the districts responding to the survey reported that they provided as many interscholastic sports for girls as for boys. Three other districts indicated that 100 per cent of their interscholastic program was for boys. The average district provides twice as many sports activities for boys as girls and also allocates $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the use of time-shared athletic facilities to the boys. Of the eight districts reporting that boys and girls shared facilities 50-50, six indicated, however, that the district offers two times as many boys' programs as for girls. One of these districts clearly indicated that the boys and girls equally shared the facilities per sport, but as there are 12 sports for boys and only six for girls, the "equal time" for the boys is actually twice that of the girls.

While most of the districts surveyed provided three or four more sports for boys than for girls, one district had an 11-sport gap: 14 sports for boys and three for girls. While four districts reported five or fewer boys' sports, 27 districts had five or fewer girls' sports. Only one district, indicated as many as ten sports for girls, but 15 districts reported ten or more interscholastic sports for boys. In general, districts with the largest total athletic program were the ones most likely to provide a variety of girls' sports.

The survey did not ask for budget allocations for the two sports programs or for numbers of children involved. It is reasonable to assume that many of the girls' sports programs receive less funding and can accommodate fewer students than the comparable boys' sports.

Although NJSIAA issued its policy on girls being allowed to play on boys' teams in 1972, one year later almost a third of the districts responding stated that they do not allow girls to compete with boys.

On the other hand, some districts with excellent girls' sports programs are cognizant of the NJSIAA policy and are willing to implement it should the need arise.

One of the best programs found was at Shore Reg. H.S. (Monmouth Co.). The school sponsors 11 sports for boys and nine sports for girls. The athletic director feels very strongly that co-ed interscholastic teams would destroy girls athletics. Physical educators agree with his position, and a diversified, well-developed girls' program such as that of Shore Regional is the equitable approach professional organizations are now supporting.

Girls are not being given equal access to athletic programs and facilities in New Jersey according to the WEAL survey.

A few school districts answering the survey reported offering several girls' sports and then proceeded to list cheerleading, drill team, twirlers, majorettes and color guard. Such activities are not really part of an athletic program and are not an acceptable substitute for sports activities for girls. Some cheerleading squads begin as early as junior high, serving to reinforce sex-role stereotyping and very probably having a harmful impact on girls' athletics. The attention is now focused on boys' competition while the girls are relegated to the sidelines.

The survey revealed that most elementary school sports programs are coeducational and that interscholastic competition does not usually begin until junior high or middle school. At that level interscholastic sports are offered for boys only, with basketball the most likely sport.

Several schools reported providing equipment for boys that was not available to girls. Most frequently mentioned was the whirlpool. Several other schools mentioned that they had solved this problem. Although the whirlpool is located in the boys' locker room, the girls are allowed to use it on a time-

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shared basis.

Another major discrepancy is apparent in the numbers of coaches involved in the two programs. Although the numbers of regular physical education teachers are about the same, many additional coaches, some part-time, are used in boys' athletics. The number of faculty members involved in the boys' program is therefore usually four or five times as many as in the girls' program. One district reported five phys. ed. teachers or coaches for girls' sports and 43 for boys'. The difference in numbers of coaching staff indicates both an inequality in the girls' athletic program and a lack of equal opportunity for women teachers as coaches.

Although the numbers of men and women phys. ed. teachers at the middle school level, where classes are usually sex-separated, was about equal in most districts, there is a disparity at the elementary school level where classes are typically coeducational. At the elementary school, male teachers were favored. In districts where the numbers of male and female elementary phys. ed. teachers were not equal, the men outnumbered the women two to one.

Problems in Elementary also

In the elementary grades, little girls may not yet have been convinced that athletics is "unfeminine," but such negative attitudes are beginning to develop because of societal pressures. It is therefore crucial that the positive role model of the women phys. ed. teacher be presented at one time or another in the children's early school experience.

The WEAL survey would indicate that girls are not being given equal access to athletic programs and facilities in New Jersey and that women teachers are therefore not being given equal employment opportunity with male physical educators.

The defense districts may present is that girls are not asking for more sports activities, but it may be that districts cannot wait until the girls demand their fair share of time, money, and facilities. Because activities are not being offered, girls are not encouraged to participate.

It is the school, not the individual girl, that must take the first step in correcting the inequities. Certainly if interest is great enough in some districts to run nine or ten different interscholastic sports programs for girls, other districts could surely generate similar enthusiasm if they tried. □