BY RICHARD E. LAPCHICK

BACK TO THE FUTURE

THE THREAT WOMEN SPORTS



"...BLACK WOMEN...NOT ONLY HAVE TO FIGHT THE REMAINING RACIAL BATTLES IN SPORTS, BUT ALSO THE SEXUAL BATTLES."

RICHARD LAPCHICK is director, Center for the Study of Sports in Society, Northeastern Univ.

omen are all too rarely thought of when the issue of minorities in sport is raised. Yet women are numerically sport's biggest minority.

The denial of equality to women in sport comes as no surprise to those who recognize that sport is a reflection of society. In fact, with the sexual role expectations our society has imposed on both men and women, it might be expected that women would face an even more difficult road in sport than in other areas they might choose to pursue. That role might even be harder for black women who not only have to fight the remaining racial battles in sport but also the sexual battles. Social expectations of the demure, fragile woman who wants a home and children are in stark contrast to the image of a woman who is exploring and asserting herself through competitive activities in the world of sport.

Cheryl Miller, four-time All-American basketball player and Olympic gold medal winner, emphatically stated, "You have to realize it's no tea party out there. Just because we're women we don't work or struggle or compete or want to win any less than men."

Act of 1972 — which called for equalization between men's and women's sports — and the women's movement have brought about dramatic changes in the number of women competing at all levels of sport.

The work, the struggle, the competition and the winning Miller referred to have been rapidly advanced under Title IX. Between 1972 and now, the number of women who competed in high school sports increased by 600 percent — from 300,000 to 1,800,000. There are now 10,000 athletic scholarships for women in college when there were only a handful prior to Title IX. Nearly 150,000 women compete in college compared to 16,000 in 1972.

Lynette Woodard, this year's Woman Pro Athlete of the Year, and Nancy Lieberman, not only played pro basketball in 1986 but played on men's teams, (the Globetrotters and the Springfield Fame). Women pros in tennis and golf are earning huge prize winnings. The 1984 Olympics left us with superstar names like Mary Lou Retton, Mary

Decker (Slaney), Cheryl Miller, and Joan Benoit. Two other Olympians — Evelyn Ashford and Valerie Briscoe-Hooks — have helped break one more stereotype down — that motherhood and sports don't mix. Both Ashford and Briscoe-Hooks had babies and resumed world-class competition.

It all sounds great. Rapid advancement, rapid movement. But not all is well.

In spite of the improvements from an outrageous 2 percent of athletic budgets being spent on women prior to Title IX, only 16 percent of those budgets go to women's sports today.

Mississippi State, Northeast Louisiana and the University of Texas at El Paso are currently under CAA sanctions for violations in their women's sport programs. Chana Perry, the nation's top high school basketball player in 1985, lost a year of eligibility at Northern Louisiana because she was improperly recruited (Neither Chris Washburn nor Tito Horford, the top men's players in 1984 and 1985, could play in the freshmen years due to various problems). Stories about declines in the historically high academic performance of women athletes are now common. Evelyn Ashford warns young women athletes "Stay in school and get your education. Then work towards other pursuits in life. Education will allow you to attain your goals. Sports can be very rewarding, but always strive to learn something new every day."

e have been reading about the scandals in men's intercollegiate sport for many years. While men were illegally recruited, rarely educated, and all-too-frequently dumped back into society after their last game play, women have been able to stay on the mark. Now, as women's sports have become more prominent and profitable, scandals are emerging for the first time. Vivian Stringer, lowa's basketball coach, said, "It's beginning to happen and it's very frustrating. The men have been doing it for 30 or 40 years, so the women (who want to cheat) won't need to develop a new system."

Like Black men who compete everywhere but rarely become head coaches or athietic administrators, the ever-expanding number of women competing is juxtaposed to a more serious reversal for women.

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