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Perspectives

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Girls got game



Interest in women's sports is increasing at a rapid rate, but female athletes continue to struggle with competing in a new arena

Excitement in women's sports has arrived. It arrived with Billie Jean King's win in the battle of the sexes. It arrived with Nadia Comaneci's dominance of the Olympics in the 1970s. It arrived with ballers Cheryl Miller and Nancy Lieberman-Cline in the 1980s. It arrived with the very beginnings of the WNBA in the 1990s. It arrived when Chamique Holdsclaw landed a major basketball magazine cover and gave young girls someone to look up to. It arrived with the popularity of women's World Cup soccer. It arrived when Laila Ali used her father's left jab to lay down her boxing opponent in 70 seconds last month.

The excitement has been arriving for some time.

And the challenge, joy and work involved in making women's sports a success will be the focus of the 5th Annual Warsaw Sports Business Symposium. The event starts today with a keynote address by the president of the WNBA, Val Ackerman, and workshops are available tomorrow.

The focus of this symposium is on "the changing face of sports business." And while that face certainly is changing, with the advances come bumps in the road. It seems that with every stride women make, complications arise. Balancing femininity with being athletic is perhaps the first complication to come. The two characteristics certainly are not mutually exclusive. But from the outside perspective, where they overlap can be confusing. For all the success the U.S. women's soccer team had in the 1999 World Cup, the ultimate victory wasn't always the hottest news. After her game-winning penalty kick, Brandi Chastain tore off her jersey to reveal a sports bra, and the theme became the perkiness of her chest and not the power of her legs.

And when women finally

burst into professional sports — the WNBA being the first breakthrough women have had in the Big Four: hockey, football, baseball and basketball — stories in Vogue magazine had the ball players in couture dresses instead of their jerseys. Apparently, they needed makeovers more than mad game.

Finally, and most importantly, look at the few women in positions of power and how they are portrayed. How many of the WNBA franchises have female coaches? Seven out of 16.

Right here on campus, Jody Runge is held up as the strong athletic female. Yet Runge is often portrayed as bitchy. No one really discusses football head coach Mike Bellotti's personal life; yet Runge's has been the subject of countless articles. Has anyone asked why?

And has anyone asked why, in sports broadcasting, the women in front of the camera always play second fiddle to the announcer with the deep, older male voice? Men are included on women's sports programs, but not the other way around.

For every advance women make, they are aware that they could go so much farther.

Thus, dwelling on the challenges for women in sports should be a motivator, not a downer. It should get women up for the game of their lives.

This business sports symposium is one path to motivation. Examining the changing face in sports business will show people that that face is more and more often female. That face is proud, graceful, strong, intelligent, fierce, stubborn, gentle, beautiful, competitive and relentless. That is women in sports.

Thinking now of all the women who have graced the sports stage throughout the 20th century and who threaten to become superstars now, women can revel in their own greatness. They've come a long way, baby. And they've got next.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

QUOTED

"Promoters still see women as a sideshow. There is talent out there. But to get air time, you have to be a Playboy bunny or have a famous name."

— Anne Vitiello, a commentator for HBO's boxing Web site, on the challenges for women boxers. TIME, May 1.

"It's the most insane thing I have ever heard in my life."

— Tony Vavasis, a Time Warner cable customer, on the feud between Time Warner and Disney that has ABC cable channels off the air in 3.5 million homes since Monday. ABCNews.com, May 2.

"N Sync's an international musical treasure. By turning to film, they will give their fans around the world a new medium in which to enjoy their remarkable talents."

— Total Film Group Chairman and Chief Executive Gerald Green on the boy band's plans to star in their own movie à la the Spice Girls. GO.com, May 2

"They're quoting the Bible at us, so we'll quote the Bible back to them. 'Love thy neighbor.'"

— Elizabeth Forbell, who marched in the fourth annual national gay rights demonstration in Washington, D.C., on Sunday. The Register-Guard, May 1.

Preserving our best seats will require compromise

For the past two years, I have worked for all of you as the lead negotiator for our contract with the Athletic Department that provides us with tickets to men's basketball and football games. It has been a struggle to say the least, and recently it has been as frustrating as ever.

Each year we, the ASU Athletic Department Finance Committee, try to protect student seats and keep the cost down. Students currently pay about \$16 for each ticket in advance and we can pick them up without any extra charge. We pay this through the incidental fee of which about \$1 million goes into the sports contract. For the last two years it has been clear that we are not using all of the seats that we pay for, thus we have kept the fee from rising by giving up some of our least desirable basketball seats. Last year we changed the agreement so that the Athletic Department would have a better opportunity to sell any

seats that we did not use during pre-season, i.e. games that occurred before the start of the academic year.

While we will pay the same amount to the Athletic Department this year as we did last year, they are asking us to give up our best seats during pre-season, the ones closest to the 50-yard line. They have not offered anything in return and say that they will not make much more money from these seats. We inquired as to why they wanted the seats and were told by the athletic director that those seats would help them cultivate prospective season ticket buyers. This seems fine to me, as anyone would want more season ticket holders, but there is a catch. They can't sell the seats they already have during pre-season. This begs the question, why do they need our seats when they are giving other ones away?

It is hard for me to be too critical, because the person that we directly deal with,

COMMENTARY

Spencer Hamlin

Sandy Walton, senior associate athletic director, is one of the most professional and fair people I have ever known. While I respect her to the fullest, my fellow committee members and I cannot agree to this with a clear conscience. Those seats have been ours ever since we started this system in 1987, which is 13 years of tradition. I feel in a way that we are entitled to those seats, especially since the students here pay more for their sports seats than any other school in the Pacific-10. Yes we get better seats because of that, but at the same time there is a threshold that we are dangerously close to crossing.

That threshold is the point where it is forgotten that the only reason that there was ever a University football team or a University in the

first place is that the students are here. That threshold is also the point where we are not the priority anymore and it is more important for the Athletic Department to have some fat-cat donor from Portland in Autzen Stadium than it is to have the people who this University was created for. Those of us who have been trying to negotiate this contract understand the position that the Athletic Department is in. We are small in comparison with the schools that we are trying to compete with, but this does not make treating the students as a source of revenue acceptable.

There is another concern about giving up pre-season seats. We will never get them back and we fear that if we give them up for pre-season then we will be putting them on the table in the near future for the regular season. To solve this dilemma, we have proposed the following: 1) The Athletic Department will sign a contract with the ASU that says the depart-

ment will be required to offer us the same seats at a reasonable price for the next 10 years; 2) while the Athletic Department would be required to offer this, we would not be required to accept if we choose to go another route; 3) we proposed that the Athletic Department agree to continue to offer the same scenario for pre-season games for the same period. We hope that these terms will be met. While we are unhappy to give up our best section during pre-season games, we are prepared to make the sacrifice if it means that it will provide us with a guarantee that we will not have to fear losing any football seats for the next decade. We, the Athletic Department Finance Committee, have been elected by you, the students, to look out for your best interests; we hope that this letter will shed some light on our efforts to do so.

Spencer Hamlin is the ADFC chairman. His views do not necessarily represent those of the paper.