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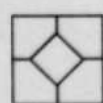
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I'm a muscle fan

Shero worship, love of the game, and a predilection for buffed biceps draws fans to women's basketball

I have discovered a new identity for myself. In addition to being a wife, mom, artist, writer, lesbian and dog owner—with a capital D for Disaster—I'm now a basketball fan. That is, when the players are women, and pros at that.

In our neck of the woods, I'm talking about the American Basketball League, and the Portland Power in particular.

These women play some mean ball. They have incredible skills, show great sportsmanship, and are role models for countless kids including our neighbors' son across the way (a soon-to-be sports great himself, I predict), whose mom and dad send him to the women's games because they want him to see some "real basketball." But let's address the heart of the issue: I know that all the lesbians I'm sitting with aren't going to see the game. The women we sit with spend large amounts of time regaling the musculature of our star player and marveling at the way she seems to saunter, panther-like, across the court while simultaneously scoring more points than you can fit on all your fingers and toes. In the first half.

Why is it so easy to objectify athletes? All my feminist education becomes meaningless the minute I hit the stands. My mind drifts toward sexist scenarios involving the sinewy, sweaty torsos of these sports sheros and large amounts of rope. And I know I'm not the only one.

I've always liked jocks, in a secret, Twinkie-loving sort of way. Having been raised by intellectual snobs to whom athletes were a lower life form, my relationship to the sports-inclined is like the rich boy who scurries off to the bad part of town and finds true love and a wonderful way to rebel, in one fell swoop. Had I but known in high school that the whole hetero-phase bit could have been skipped with a little physical coordination and the opportunity to spend time in the girl's locker room, I might have applied myself with fervor and saved one heap of trouble.

However, once in college, safely ensconced in the women's studies program and therefore receiving college credit for my lesbian transformation, I discovered jocks. My college had a fabulous women's basketball team (as well as an infamous women's rowing team made up entirely of women who could shame Arnold Schwarzenegger into doing a couple of pushups), and there was a lot of team support. Largely from what is now being called by the press "unmarried, professional women."

The lesbian ball players at my college called them "Marvanas" (an in joke I have yet to learn the origins of). At that time, those women thought they were playing their last games. There was a dream they shared called women's professional basketball, but it was only a dream.

And now it's come true.

The wife and I jumped right on the bandwagon the first year. We share season tickets with our neighboring lesbian moms. We trade off: One couple watches three kids and gets drooled on, the other couple goes to the game and drools. We get the better deal, I'm afraid, since we have two kids and a dog the size of Godzilla and they have one angelic toddler

and a fish. Our friends emerge bleary-eyed and in a need of a dose of Prozac after a spell among our breed; however, we are grateful and gleefully let them do it again.

The women's basketball phenomenon is fascinating for two other reasons. First, with the ABL at least, there's finally some recognition of the lesbian fan base. At one of the last games we went to, there was an announcement at the beginning of a dance at the Lesbian Community Project. The vendors go around saying "lemonade, lemonade, one lemonade, two straws" to all the passing female couples. There was even a headline article recently in the *Willamette Week* about our presence at the games that estimated attendance was 40 percent lesbian. That's a pretty big bunch of positive stuff, right?



And yet, second, I don't think there's a woman there who would identify any of the players as gay except among the closest of friends. You don't see signs saying, "Lulabelle, the local dykes on bikes loves you," or even "Lulabelle, you're number one," despite there being some definite favorites among the Marvanas in the audience. You hear rumors; there's the usual gossip about who's going out with who, or what player's got wheat-for-brains but who cares with a bod like that. But there is a strict unwritten code that no one is going to blow the ride for any one of these women we so admire for their strength, skill, agility and 10 status on a rating scale. And I think there's a general understanding, whether or not it's true, that being all the way out of the closet would be the end of a player's game.

So the fans ride the edge. They are ardent, enthusiastic and devoted, but also extremely protective of this new field that's been opened up for women. And it's important, the existence of the league, being able to actually sit in the stands and see women play good ball and get paid for it. It revitalizes the hoop dreams of generations, from retired collegiate stars who remember packing up their high tops and saying goodbye to sports to the many young daughters there with their dads, their eyes alight with competitive spirit.

And what better arena for mingling—gay, straight or who cares—than athletic stadiums, where for once we are not the minority, nor blending at that. Instead, we are a loud, shouting, excitable majority that won't pipe down even while living in peaceful coexistence with equally exuberant straight fans in the next seat. It's a beautiful thing.