

**BOOKS**

**Sporting chances**

Sara Gogol's latest book celebrates victory and challenges homophobia in women's sports

BY MEG DALY

Portland lesbian writer Sara Gogol has made a name for herself chronicling the rise of women's professional basketball. Her books *Playing in a New League: The Women of the American Basketball League's First Season* and *Katy Steding: Pro Basketball Pioneer* are a part of the growing literature about women in sports.

Her latest project took her off the court and onto the sidelines—but by no means into the background—of women's athletics. *Hard Fought Victories: Women Coaches Making a Difference* profiles these leaders, chronicling their important contributions to sports and women's history.

The Portland Community College literature and women's studies instructor spent a year traversing the United States talking to more than 60 women coaches about their experiences, methods, challenges and successes. She visited Division I schools as well as lower divisions and included a variety of sports: basketball, ice hockey, volleyball, tennis and more.

The result is a compelling set of interwoven stories chronicling the lives of, in Gogol's words, "strong women who have made a difference."

Take, for instance, Marianna Freeman, head women's basketball coach at Syracuse University. When she graduated from high school in 1975, she was part of the first generation of girls to have athletic scholarships available to them. Freeman was recruited by three schools and accepted a scholarship from Cheyney University, a historically black college outside Philadelphia. Her coach was C. Vivian Stringer, now head coach of Rutgers'



Sara Gogol records the history of "strong women who have made a difference"

women's basketball team and Women's Basketball Hall of Fame inductee.

It was Stringer who encouraged

Freeman to go into coaching, and eventually Freeman became her assistant coach. As Gogol writes, "It was a coaching move that inspired Marianna to work even harder to excel."

One of the issues Gogol's book highlights is mentoring. Stringer is noted by several coaches as a primary role model.

Now in her role as head coach at Syracuse, Freeman told Gogol, "It's important that I use basketball to teach young people about life." Being a role model for African American players is essential too, Freeman says. "I think it's real important that I'm out there as a woman and as an African American woman."

One of the similarities the writer found among the coaches is how they treat their players both on and off the court or field. No matter how tough they are, most use an ethic of caring. University of Texas track coach Beverly Kearney tries to create "a family relationship" with players, while Willamette University volleyball coach Marlene Piper emphasizes "respect for human dignity." Says Texas A&M

volleyball coach Laurie Corbelli, "I tell them how important they are to me and that I'm there for them."

One reason Gogol wrote *Hard Fought Victories* was to make a contribution to the recording of women's history. Born and raised in Chicago, she grew up before Title IX—the 1972 educational amendment that bans sex discrimination in schools, whether it be in academics or athletics—and had little to no opportunity to participate in competitive sports.

Instead of teams for girls, she explains, "We had P.E. classes and a little intramural play called Girls Athletic Association, for which there was no coaching."

Lack of sports opportunities meant Gogol and other young women missed out on having a female athletic mentor. She cites her aunt and mother as her role models of "women who could use their minds and who had a strong political awareness."

Though girls and women today have many more opportunities to participate in competitive sports, we're a long way from gender parity with men in sports—and especially in coaching.

Gogol, like Donna Lopiano, executive director of the Women's Sports Foundation,

sees a vital need for more professional coaching opportunities. With the number of women holding head coaching positions for women's teams at an all-time low of 45.6 percent in 2000, Lopiano warns, "Women coaches and administrators are an endangered species."

A major barrier for women in coaching is homophobia. In a section called "A Question of Attitude," Gogol reveals how insidious—and deeply painful—this continues to be in college sports. "Homophobia is in the bone marrow of women's sports," says sports sociologist Mary Jo Kane.

Gogol found that Division I coaches are least inclined to be open about their sexual orientation "because they have especially strong pressure to win, to recruit top athletes and to present themselves as public personalities." Readers will be inspired, however, by Beth Bricker, Helen Carroll and Jenny Allard—several "out" head coaches.

*Hard Fought Victories* has been selling well, and Gogol enjoys being able to "tell some of that history" to so many people. Her next project, though, is "totally different. After doing three nonfiction women's sports books, I'm now turning back to fiction," she says, referring to a

novel in progress about three generations of women in a Jewish family, including a Holocaust survivor.

Learning about one's history, she feels, is vital inspiration. "The more I learn about women's history, the more important it becomes to me." □

MEG DALY is a Portland free-lance writer.

**History in the making**

Sara Gogol interviewed a number of area coaches for her book, including Willamette University volleyball coach Marlene Piper and head basketball coach Paula Petrie, University of Oregon assistant track coach Sally Harmon and Portland State University softball coach Teri Mariani.

You can support your local women's sports teams by filling up those stadiums. Check out these season schedules online:

- **Portland State University:** goviks.ocsn.com
- **University of Oregon:** goducks.ocsn.com/calendar/ore-calendar.html
- **Willamette University:** www.willamette.edu/athletics

**The sport of surfing**

Find more information on women and minorities in sports on these Web sites:

- **Black Coaches Association:** www.bcasports.org

- **Center for the Study of Sport in Society:** www.sportinsociety.org

- **Women's Sport Foundation:** www.womenssportsfoundation.org

- **Sexual Minorities in Athletics:** www.smia.org

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