

Women gain in sports; at what price?

by Henry Duvall

It has been eight years now since Title IX forced many schools to ensure female participation in athletic activities or face a loss of federal financial assistance.

Gains have been made, to be sure, but Howard University sports sociologist Dr. Doris R. Corbett believes women have lost some ground, too.

The former president of the National Association for Girls and Women in Sports feels that women lost leadership roles in athletics after Title IX of The Education Amendments of 1972 became effective in 1975. Before Title IX, women's sports and physical education were virtually controlled by women physical educators, she says. Today, many of the programs are run by men.

As far as intercollegiate sports are concerned, Corbett points out that when a majority of women's athletics came under the authority of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, it helped to cause the demise of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, which had been the primary governing body for women in sports.

Many women's athletic programs, especially in track and field, tennis and swimming, are now coached by men, she says. Basketball programs, in many instances, are coached by men, too. "Women aren't as visible as they once were in these areas."

There are still some people who believe that men make better coaches and are more committed to sports than women, says Corbett. Howard University's first women's basketball coach, who initiated the women's athletics program at Howard in 1973.

Corbett emphasizes that the goals of women's athletic programs have shifted, primarily because men put more emphasis on winning rather than encouraging participation in sports for the fun of it.

There's a threat to women in positions of authority, she contends,



Future Olympians? Title IX regulations enhance future for women athletes.

noting that female role models are needed for young female athletes.

Women are already facing a role conflict in many cases, she says, which would make a female role model all the more important. There's the lingering question: "Is she less feminine because she's an athlete?"

Corbett acknowledges that there has been a greater acceptance of women in sports today by society, and that women athletes are getting increased visibility. She notes also that there's a sense that women are capable of quality performance. "In

the past, society thought that women weren't interested in sports, that athletics would be physically harmful to women athletes, or that women don't play well enough in sports activities to deserve equality in sports."

When President Ford signed the



regulation implementing Title IX in 1975, the law in essence stated, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance," she says.

"Such an extension of equality will enhance the meaning of democracy in education, even as the concept continues to support opportunities for the advantaged sex," Corbett stresses.

She is optimistic that enforcement of Title IX will be carried out, although she laments, "There will always be a segment of our society that will challenge Title IX."

But one issue that concerns Corbett is that some people, including women, feel that for female athletes to be accepted as equal competitors with men, they have to compete with them at least in professional sports, such as in tennis and golf. Corbett disagrees with that notion.

Society has to reach a point when it doesn't define equality on the basis of a female's doing as well or better than a male in order to be considered a good athlete, she stresses.

Corbett believes there's a general interest in professional women's

sports. "I think we will reach a period when professional women's basketball will be a viable entity in our society," she says, noting that it will take the development of one sport at a time for women to make a mark in professional sports.

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