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Women Coaching Women—A Model for Sports(wo)manship?

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Abstract: The purpose of this position paper on "sports(wo)manship" is to address the need for a care-giving women's coaching philosophy in athletics. The 1972 passage of Title IX changed the landscape of participation opportunity in athletics for girls and women. Today, millions of girls and women have the opportunity to participate and compete at the highest levels of athletics. However, the change also negatively affected first, the number of women coaching and second, the moral development of girls and women. In 1972, the majority of coaches for women were women, today the reverse is true: the majority of coaches for women are men. Why this shift occurred is many faceted including women choosing not to coach and women not being permitted to coach, it is the contention of the authors that the reasons why women are not coaching is important, however, the greater issue is that women should be coaching women. And, because women are not coaching women, there are adverse affects to the millions of girls and women who participate in athletics. A better model than the present results, objective, skill

acquisition coaching model is preferred for both men and women, boys and girls. This position paper reviews these issues as well as offers an action plan to address the need for a model of sports(womanship) in education, training, and coaching.

Key Words: women in athletics coaching; coaching education for women; sportswomanship

Introduction

The purpose of this position paper on "sports(wo)manship" is to address the need for a care-giving women's coaching philosophy in athletics. The 1972 passage of Title IX changed the landscape of participation opportunity in athletics for girls and women. However, the change also negatively affected first, the number of women coaching and second, the moral development of girls and women. This position paper reviews these issues as well as offers an action plan to address the need for a model of sports(wo)manship in education, training, and coaching.

The History of Women in Athletics

Historically, the coaching of girls and women in athletic activities, as well as the teaching of girls in physical education and sport, was traditionally a female role (Spears & Swanson, 1989). Before the 1972 advent of Title IX, when opportunities for women in and out of sport expanded, the philosophy preached and practiced throughout American teacher educator institutions was: **Only** women should teach and **only** women should coach girls or women. In fact, the whole notion of competition was long "viewed with mixed feelings" (Van Dalen & Bennett, 1971, p. 532 – 533).

Hence it was that when women, with athletic talents, entered college their goals were usually influenced and directed by female college physical educators to become teachers and coaches of girls and women in athletics, sport, and physical education (Swanson & VanOteghen, 1994). Throughout their undergraduate experience, these aspiring physical educators were taught that one must give back and should be an active part of the profession. The philosophy was a communal and sacred trust that physical education, sport, and competition existed to magnify and augment education. It was an honorable trust to value movement for movement's

sake and to share the philosophy of "the joy of movement" to all girls and women (Metheny, 1972). Teaching was a cherished professional responsibility and the community of teachers was women dedicated to the honorable trust. A teacher learned through traditional modes of physical education and communal ritual practices including fireside teas and play days. Moreover, teaching and coaching was a valued and important part of helping girls and women to become unselfish contributors to society (Vannier & Poindexter, 1968).

This trust was also magnified as women learned to be dedicated to the profession. As women progressed through their collegiate educations, they joined professional organizations that mirrored their same philosophy and professional goals. Hence, before 1972 most coaches and students became active members of governing organizations such as the Division of Girls' and Women's Sport (DSWS)—later to be the National Association for Girls and Women's Sport (NAGWS) -- and the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics (AIAW). These organizations were developed and governed solely by women and each had very explicit stated philosophies about sportsmanship and the building of character through the physical activity experience. They rejected the commercialization rampant in men's sports and envisioned a new model of competition, which was student-centered and education-oriented with built-in safeguards to avoid abuses (Hult, 1989).

Heraclitus said in the fifth century BCE that all that endures is change (Heraclitus, 2007). Change occurred drastically for women teaching physical education and coaching athletics. Change blew into the profession under the veil of powerful internal and external forces of law and social transformation specifically, Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments. Most women were ecstatic when the law was enacted for the law was clear that women would not be treated differently and would have equal opportunity in all educational opportunities. "No

person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program for activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (20 U.S.C. §1681-1688, 1972). However, by 1974 male athletic organizations lobbied Congress to reject application of Title IX to athletics. Nevertheless, the plain language of Title IX was held to cover all educational programs, and by 1987 Congress passed the Civil Rights Restoration Act which clarified that Congress intended Title IX to apply to an entire school if any of its programs or activities received federal funding (20 U.S.C. §1687).

Only a few short years after Title IX became law, the AIAW was forcibly eliminated through political action of the NCAA. The NCAA saw a good deal when it was presented, and knew that there was a potential possibility to appear magnanimous in its inclusion of women to its power base of governing athletics. The law was clear that women and girls were to be given equal opportunity and the male governed NCAA knew that by including women, they, the NCAA, would appear to be following the mandate of the rule of law. The AIAW posed no real financial threat to the NCAA, however "enforcement of Title IX meant that money, facilities, personnel, and authority over amateur athletics must be shared equitably with women's programs" (Hult, 1989, p. 255). By 1981, the NCAA offered championships for women, and for one year both the AIAW and the NCAA offered championships, "...forcing colleges to choose between them for each sport championships. The rate of defection from the AIAW and the loss of TV contracts made it clear which organization would prevail" (Hult, 1989, p. 256). The same story occurred for high school sports. "A concurrent series of events and outcomes ...was closely paralleled in the state athletic associations" (Hult, 1989, p. 257). When high school sport and athletics were subsumed in a general governing body, the National Federation of High School

Activities Association (NFHS), the power of DGWS—now the NAGWS, was reduced to being almost non-existent in its athletic governing power or its athletic coaching philosophic voice.

The NAGWS presently is an advocacy organization for girls and women. The ideal philosophy that drove the professional organizations and the teaching of sports(women)s became an afterthought in the NCAA and the NFHSAA. Within a very short period of time, physical education texts for women became historic relics. Preparing women for coaching and "giving back" to the profession ceased to exist except in rare cases¹ as the community of women who believed in this philosophy moved into coaching, or changed their direction and left the field, and/ or retired.

In its place evolved a professional preparation practice of "on the job training." Coaches in women's sports no longer came through the physical education profession. Instead if they chose to coach, they transcended from being an athlete to being a graduate assistant to being a coach. No longer was there a body of knowledge dedicated to women and education, rather knowledge was technical and the actual motor skill acquisition was the focus with the requisite "being compliant" under the NCAA rules and regulations. If women came through physical education, sport education, or sport management programs, the focus was toward practical application of theoretical knowledge that was research driven. Seldom did these women choose coaching or teaching of physical education. The ideals and philosophy of the AIAW or DGWS no longer appeared to be relevant.

¹ Though are a few of these believers of giving back, such as Pat Summit—head women's basketball coach at the University of Tennessee. When Summit accomplished the 1000th win, one of her former players spoke in an interview about Summit's commitment to "giving back to the sport." Summit holds not only the 1000 win record, but a 100% graduation rate with her players being role models and coaches in girls and women's basketball (Hersh, 2009).

Even though women may not have chosen to study coaching, the change fostered by Title IX had a positive effect on increasing the number of women who participated in sport and athletics. In 1972, 294,000 high school girls and 29,977 college women participated in athletics; today 3 million high school girls (1000% increase) and 150,916 college age women (a 500% increase) participate (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008).

However, the change unfortunately negatively affected the community of women who are dedicated to sports(woman)ship and the sacred trust of giving back to the profession. Today women are the minority in the coaching of women and girls across the spectrum in athletics from high school where only 20% of the coaches are female to college and university where only 42% are women. These statistics paint an interesting picture when in 1972, over 90% of girls and women's sports were coached by women (Acosta and Carpenter, 2008).

More than three and a half decades after the passage of Title IX, women coaching women's teams still do not represent the majority of coaches in the women's game. In addition, this year's numbers show no progress in women coaching women's sports in most sports. Women head coaches in Division I basketball stayed virtually the same (64.7 percent in 2007-08 and 64.3 percent in 2005-06). Head coaches of Division I Track/Cross Country, which combines the head coaches of Cross Country, Indoor Track and Outdoor Track, saw a slight decrease in female head coaches from 20.8 percent in 2005-06 to 20.2 percent in 2007-08. In all other sports, men led 57.4 percent of the women's teams while women were head coaches in only 42.1 percent of the programs (Acosta and Carpenter, 2008).

Interpretation of the data as to why women are not coaching may relate to economic biases, social myths, or personal reasons. That is, the loss of women in coaching may be a result

of gender bias by athletic departments or gender bias by athletes themselves (Women's Sports Foundation, 2009). Or, perhaps women choose not to coach under the NCAA "results" model where competition and motor development drives the program. Why women choose not to coach should be studied more fully as well as the possibility that women coaches may not be permitted to coach because of glass ceiling limitations of athletic administrations (Acosta and Carpenter, 2008).

We should care about this loss for other reasons as well—because the loss has had a direct affect on the moral development of girls and women, the practice of sport(wo)smanship, and even perhaps brain development. In the study of moral reasoning and moral development, the research is rather clear that moral reasoning and moral development of female athletes has been dropping since data banks were first established in 1987 (Beller & Stoll, 2009). Even though female athletes' scores are significantly higher than males, their scores are significantly lower than the normal population and researchers are projecting that their scores will match the men's scores in 5 to 10 years. Unfortunately, the males' scores are very low and interpretation of the data suggests that male athletes reason at a 6th grade level of moral reasoning (Beller & Stoll, 2009, 1995).

Is this information important? We think the information is very important considering the research in women's studies and moral development, which states that women have a different modality of making decisions. Some researchers have suggested that a woman's voice is focused directly on a care-giving model and that women may think and feel differently about responsibilities in life and their role in relation to their students, their athletes, their charges, i.e., the people with whom they work (Gilligan, 1982, 1993; Noddings, 1984, 1999). Interestingly, the actual process of moral reasoning can also affect the moral growth of the brain. Through

innumerable studies in neuroscience, there appears to be a direct relationship of moral development to brain development. How we are taught, how we act, how we think about others, and how we value others appears to directly affect either positively or negatively our brain development (Tancredi, 2005; Gazzaniga, 2005; Snowdon, 2008).

Considering the above, it may be that the results, objective, skill acquisition coaching model has negatively affected moral brain development of women and girls in athletics. Further study is needed to better understand this phenomenon. What is true today is that it appears to be very unusual for athletes to care about their competition, or to be beneficent in their actions toward others. Consider the media response when women athletes do what is normal for them—to care about another. The incident is replayed in the media again and again and again.

Thus it was when a true act of caring for others occurred—people were incredulous at the "magnanimity" of the event. In a softball game in Portland Oregon, a player hit a homerun but injured her knee when rounding first base. She crawled back to first but could do no more. The first base coach said she would be "called out" if her teammates tried to help her. The umpire said that if a pinch runner was called in, the homer would count as a single. The members of the opposing softball team then stunned spectators by carrying an injured opponent around the bases so the three run homer would count—an act that contributed to their own elimination from the playoffs. When later questioned about their action, the opposing team members thought nothing of the action—their response—we just knew "it was the right thing to do" (Central Washington, 2008).

Considering that coaching and teaching in athletics is now focused almost exclusively on objective outcomes and motor skill acquisition, it is seldom that we are able to enjoy stories about positive sports(wo)manship in women's athletics. It is not that women are

unsportsmanlike—rather the educational focus, role modeling, and environment for athletes appear to be about success as measured by final scores. This model appears to be a "results" skill acquisition model, and if the researchers (Gilligan, 1993; Noddings, 1994, 1999; Hoffman, 2000) are correct, this may not be the best model for women or for that matter men either.²

A Better Model

What would be a better coaching model for women and girls? First, more women in coaching and teaching would be a "better model" if only because of the suggested female "care driven" perspective. Women's organizations should continue to actively campaign to increase the numbers of women coaching and this could transpire if more action occurred in supporting education for women coaches. Could men be care givers? Probably, but the point should be clear. Women coaching women is preferred. Men are not women as women are not men.

Second, teaching programs in physical education should consider the importance of training **women** as coaches focusing on a women's perspective rather than assume that the practice of coaching is gender neutral. Would this have a negative effect on the competitive, results model – i.e., winning games. No, the record of Pat Summitt, the highly successful basketball coach at The University of Tennessee, speaks for itself. A coach can be a caregiver, a role model for giving back, and still be highly successful. However, the model that Pat Summitt came through appears not to exist today. Thus, we need to create a new model in which women learn the philosophy, the goals, the direction, the ethics, and the role modeling needed to make a positive difference in sport for girls and women.

² The model is probably not the best for male athletes either. Research is rather clear that moral reasoning scores of males are also dropping.

Third, coaching education programs throughout the US should focus on the specific needs and gender differences of moral development as affected by competition and athletics. Research has been very clear that the "results" focused philosophy of current competition negatively affects the moral reasoning of athletes (Beller & Stoll, 1995; Bredemeir 1985, 1994; Bredemeir & Shields, 1984a, 1984 b, 1986a, 1986b, 1998; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995, 2005; Shields, Bredemeier, LaVoi, & Power, 2005). If Gilligan (1993, 2009), Noddings (1984, 1999), and the numerous other researchers in women's studies are correct, the effect of the "results" model is ethically the wrong choice for the developing woman who is by nature "care focused." The "results" oriented, skill acquisition-only model of coaching must be addressed for what it is and the damage that it causes.

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