

Equality within Male and Female High School Sports

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In the past few years, we have heard a lot about the equality for gender in professional sports. What about where it starts, high school? Many schools devote all their time, money, and attention to football, specifically boys' football. There have been many instances at my high school and other high schools surrounding mine, where the athletic director gives more attention to male sports. These sports include basketball, baseball, and football where female sports are forgotten about by the staff and student body. They say it is because that is where the money is generated, and they need that attention because they are “better.” People tend to believe they are “better” because it has been taught that men are bigger, better, and stronger. Most people only go to male sports and have never gone to a female sports game because it is not advertised. I have seen some girls supporting girls, and girls at many boys' activities, but not very often do I see males supporting their female peers. I find this unfair and misogynistic. Female athletes have so much to give and show yet are not paid any attention to. Unfortunately, due to the lack of support, they often feel they failed and do not continue to pursue their athletic careers. Females do not get anywhere near the same attention, equipment, perception, convenience, or school participation as male sports in high school do.

Right now, all districts in the United States must have equivalence with the number of boys' and girls' sports teams but they are still struggling to give equality beyond that. They really are not allowing females to have the same attention as the males. Whether the athletic directors notice it or not, it is happening. For example, a lawsuit happened in 2011, similar to those in the mid-1900s. In “Top Ten Sports Law Issues Impacting School Athletics Programs” Lee Green (2015), *NFHS* journalist writes, “[...] equivalence between girls' teams and boys' teams with regard to facilities and locker rooms, equipment and uniforms, travel and transportation, access to quality coaching, publicity and marketing support, game and practice scheduling, and other

categories of program resources and support are lacking.” Because of Title IX females have been given many opportunities through sports yet the numbers still show females are being neglected in the attention they are given. *Champion Women* (2023), an organization that researches schools to check equality, says, “In 13 of the last 19 years, more participation opportunities have been added for men than women.” This is just more information on how high schools favor male sports over female sports and how difficult it is to overcome for females. Males tend to receive a little bit more from schools and athletic directors look over this most times. It is not always evident and for some it is hard to see unless it is spoken about. Many female athletes choose not to speak on it because of the fear of being told they are ungrateful because they do not “recognize” what they do have. This has silenced most females which has created a space for no improvement. The boys will continue to get what they want, whereas the girls will be fighting to get the bare necessities.

In addition, many athletic directors and faculty at high schools believe that each sport has already been given exactly what they need to succeed. However, female athletes disagree strongly as they see their male peers receiving more than them even if they win and compete at a better level. In the article “Sports Funding and Equality,” Karen Rivera (2020), a reporter from *The Blue and Gold*, conducted a study done in 2017. In the study, majority of public-school students said female sports lacked recognition, appreciation, and the necessities they must have to succeed. It is common for males to receive more equipment and newer uniforms making females believe the males have an advantage and more privileges. Many of the schools' coaches also agree that females are not given the same attention and money towards their sport. At my high school, I played soccer and because it was the same season as football, we got no attention. Boys' football has always been popular amongst students and staff and in my experience only a few people made the effort to go to soccer. Seeing the football team get so much compared to us

was defeating. They would get new jerseys every year plus special jerseys for our annual pumpkin bowl game personalized with their names. Our athletic director would push success on their team and even when their record was 2-3-0 and ours was 8-6-2, they would get shoutouts, new training equipment, and more training time. Even though we felt our performance was above average it was never noticed. The boys were never unnoticed. This made my teammates and I feel defeated and unseen. Our experience with sports felt downgraded just because of our gender.

Since Title IX, many people believe that all our problems are fixed through sports. They believe we have the same opportunities and are treated equally with male athletes. While Title IX has created many opportunities for women to compete and nothing would be possible without it, there are still barriers like perceptions, equity, and representation. In “Examination of Gender Equity and Female Participation in Sport” Joshua Senne (n.d.), an author at *The Sports Journal*, states, “Even though Title IX has caused a significant impact in sports participation, a study (7) found that women are still participating significantly less than men in athletics. This is most likely attributed to the fact that women are still greatly gender stereotyped, underrepresented in the media, and ridiculed at a young age for participating in sports (12, 16).” Throughout youth sports I saw the number of female athletes drop while male athletes increased at a fast pace. Some females were not given the opportunity to grow like male athletes did. Many females receive less support from their home life and school. Not having many female athletes to look up to growing up made it harder to get into sports. When we were younger all, we saw televised, advertised, and talked about was men's sports and this made it extremely difficult to relate to sports. Many girls dropped their sports by the time high school rolled around because they had no desire to play. At my school we had 38 girls my freshman year for soccer, and this was amazing for our program. Unfortunately, due to poor treatment many girls left the program, and

we were left with 12 girls my senior year. Seeing this as a player made us realize the poor treatment, we put up with for 4 years just to play a sport we loved.

Many high school teams are faced with the challenge of inconvenience. Both genders see old sports equipment, lack of trainers, and run down facilities. However, female athletes often put up with this inconvenience more due to the belief that it is all they will ever be able to get. In the video “Decades after Title IX, girls face tough battles on and off the sports field” Amna Nawaz (2022), a co-anchor of *PBS NewsHour*, had an interview with Sydney Prenatt. Sydney is a former High School Softball Player who said, “Changing in the parking lot sometimes and the bathrooms, it definitely wasn't convenient.” Later in the interview another player Ellis states, “We had never seen an example where girls were kind of treated more equitably, I guess you could say. It just kind of seemed like that was just the way things are, and, as girls, we just had to kind of tough it out.” This was something we saw the US Womens National Soccer team bring up in their lawsuit in 2019. The women were getting paid significantly less than their male counterparts while they were winning multiple World Cups and placing in the Olympics when the males had nowhere near that success. The opposite side’s argument said that it was because they did not attract the same crowd the men's teams did, which is exactly what happens in high school sports. We do not attract the same amount of people because how do we compete with boys’ teams that get attention from staff, principals, and athletic directors? I remember seeing my principal and athletic director at one of my soccer games this past season. I saw them at every single game for football. At that point we realized we were not treated the same nor given the same opportunities to succeed. The changing in the parking lot or school bathroom became normal. We didn’t think anything of it.

In schools, a main topic of interest for the student body is sports. All sports are talked about whether their team is doing well or if people are willing to go to a game. This is a fantastic

way to get participation, yet many female sports have low attendance rates while boys' sports get way more attention no matter their record. In a podcast, “Generation Z- sport through the eyes of the next generation” Suzanne Robinson (2018), from *The Women in Sport Podcast* on Spotify, talked about school sports attracting many students to play and watch. The number of people who support a team boosts their confidence and allows them to play on a new level. With that a lot of female sports such as soccer, volleyball, softball, basketball, hockey, and more are overlooked. They don’t get many people as far as attendance or support from the student body. Much of a school’s faculty will also give “shout-outs” to the football team for winning a game but will not pay attention to the girls' soccer team with a winning record. The most attention I felt like I ever had when playing a sport in high school was powderpuff during homecoming week. The senior girls all played football on a Wednesday night and it was very successful. Don’t get me wrong, it was one of the highlights of my senior year playing under the lights and having everyone cheer us on. Yet I wished we had gotten the same attention towards us when we were playing our actual sport.

Throughout my research I touched on female athletes not getting the same attention, equipment, perception, convenience, or school participation as male sports in high school do. In this I have been able to dive deeper into my own thoughts on how I was treated as a female athlete in high school. Overall, the experience of being an athlete in high school was an incredible privilege that I will never forget or want to take away from myself. Yet, there were times I wished my teams had more opportunities like the males did. There are many areas I have seen improvement in certain sports, but I hope in the near future all female athletes feel wanted and accepted in their sport. Looking back at the little girl on the soccer field I want better for her. As we continue to make the effort for equality in sports, let's not forget where it all starts. On that high school field.

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