

40 years later, Title IX still shapes female athletes

By Tom Goldman, NPR

Title IX, which turns 40 on Saturday, has helped reverse years of bias, banning sex discrimination in federally funded schools and colleges.

Its guarantee of equal access to sports was a small part of the original legislation. But it's become the most recognizable part of Title IX. That guarantee has not always played out, and the law has its critics. For four decades, however, it's played a huge part in shaping lives.

Even today, when Bernice Sandler beams with pride, watching women athletes walk, as she describes, "with their heads up and feeling like, yeah, I can handle this world," there's part of her that laughs, too.

Back in the late 1960s, when Sandler, a career educator, and other Title IX pioneers said enough with sex discrimination in education, she really wasn't thinking about a sea change in sports.

"I remember saying, 'Isn't this great news? On field day [when schools cancel classes and students participate in athletic relays and other outdoor games] ... there's going to be more activities for girls,'" Sandler recalls.

It was a time when sports was still a man's world, and it was difficult to even imagine the iconic moment of women's sports that would take place three decades later.

Banning sex discrimination in sports may be one of Title IX's most notable achievements, but the original federal legislation that President Nixon signed into law as part of

the Education Amendments of 1972 actually doesn't mention sports or athletes.

The first part of the law reads, "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 or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

In addition to unequal opportunity in student sports, discrimination covered under Title IX includes sexual harassment of students, unequal pay for female teachers, and discrimination against pregnant students. Title IX does not apply to fraternities or sororities, voluntary youth service organizations like the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, and "educational institutions of religious organizations with contrary religious tenets."

On July 10, 1999, as Brandi Chastain prepared to take the last penalty kick of the 1999 Women's World Cup soccer final, she was not thinking about the moment as a watershed in women's sports or about the record 90,185 fans at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif. Like any good athlete, Chastain was focused on the task at hand – make good contact with the ball, don't let the goalkeeper for China stare you down and psych you out.

"The only thing I could hear, because those 90,000-plus people were so dead silent, was, 'Don't look at the goalkeeper. Don't look at the goalkeeper. Don't look at the goalkeeper,'" Chastain says.

She didn't. And the picture of a celebrating Chastain – shirt ripped off, fists clenched, muscles flexed – has become a Title IX touchstone for women and girls – and at least one 6-year-old boy. Chastain's son Jaden sees the photo every day, hanging in his house.

"He used to sing cute little songs," Chastain recalls. "You know, 'Jaden is the silliest' or 'Nana is the happiest.' And I

would say, 'Daddy is the strongest,' and he goes, 'No, Mom. You're the strongest.' "

It was anything but a straight line from Sandler's hopes for field day to Chastain's "strongest" moment. Along the way, and to the present, there's been a kaleidoscope of characters and events weaving a Title IX tapestry.

In 1976, four years after Title IX became law, Ginny Gilder and her rowing teammates at Yale University were getting sick. There were no shower facilities available right after practice, and they'd have to get on a bus, cold and wet.

The men had showers. So Gilder and her teammates staged a naked protest in a school administrator's office. "We all turned around, took off our clothes and stood there naked, with 'Title IX' on our backs," Gilder remembers.

Team Captain Chris Ernst read a statement, as recounted in the documentary film *A Hero for Daisy*: "These are the bodies Yale is exploiting. On a day like today, the ice freezes on this skin."

The words and protest were persuasive. The women got their showers, and schools that ignored Title IX got a reminder: don't. And Gilder got something personal.

"You know, it's a certain outing of oneself to take a stand," she says. "And there's no going back once you do something like that. There's no place to hide."

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