

# Opinion: Title IX was terrible for female coaches

By Megan Greenwell

I once had a soccer coach who stalked the sideline in cowboy boots, snarling helpful commentary such as “Man up!” and “Don’t be a sissy!” When I broke my arm diving for a ball during practice, he asked if I was going to “cry like a girl” or get back in position. Being a 14-year-old girl, I cried.

I never played for anyone else who seemed to disdain girls quite like Coach Cowboy Boots, but he did have something in common with every other coach I had during 15 years of playing organized sports: a Y chromosome. From kindergarten rec-league soccer through two years of Division I college fencing, I never played for a female coach.

That puts me in good company. Female college athletes have never been less likely to have a female coach. The same trend holds in this summer’s Olympics: Of the five sports in which the United States is fielding a women’s team under a single head coach – basketball, field hockey, soccer, volleyball and water polo – only the soccer coach is a woman.

Surprised? After all, opportunities for female athletes have skyrocketed since Title IX prohibited gender-based discrimination in educational institutions 40 years ago this summer. More than 200,000 women play college sports today, compared with 16,000 in 1972. When the Olympics opened on Friday, the U.S. team included more female athletes than male ones for the first time.

And there’s the dirty little secret of Title IX: Female coaches have become a casualty of the same law that provided such huge benefits to female athletes. In 1972, more than 90 percent of the people coaching women’s teams were women.

Today, that number is 43 percent, according to data compiled by two retired Brooklyn College professors who have tracked the number of female college athletes and coaches in the United States since Title IX became law.

The explanation for the downward trend is as simple as it is discouraging. By legitimizing women's sports, Title IX bestowed a new level of respect – and significantly higher salaries – on college coaching jobs, transforming them from passion projects for the most dedicated women's sports advocates to serious career paths. When she began her career at the University of Tennessee in 1974, legendary basketball coach Pat Summitt earned \$250 a month. Before retiring at the end of last season, she drew a salary of more than \$2 million.

As soon as salaries began to rise, more men became interested in jobs coaching women, says Judy Sweet, a longtime athletics administrator who became the NCAA's first-ever female athletic director of a combined men's and women's program at the University of California at San Diego in 1975. Assistant coaches of men's teams saw a chance to be promoted faster by applying to head-coach jobs on the women's side. Job opportunities doubled for graduating male athletes who weren't going pro but wanted to stay in the game. Athletic directors, whose ranks have always been overwhelmingly male, increasingly hired other men for open positions.

The result has been a consistent decrease in the percentage of female coaches. In 1987, the share of women's teams coached by women dipped below 50 percent for the first time. Since 2000, men have been hired for more than two-thirds of open jobs coaching women's teams.

"In too many cases, athletic directors take the easy way out," Sweet says. "Instead of actively recruiting outside of their networks, they hire the people they already know, and their networks are likely to be male-dominated."

In other words, the institutional factors that have kept women out of coaching in the Title IX era are the same ones that have kept them out of the ranks of executives and partners and board members. Study after study shows that men are more likely to hire other men across many professions, even when there are equally or better-qualified female candidates. That gradually discourages many women from applying for those positions, exacerbating the problem.

Meanwhile, women are almost never seriously considered for jobs coaching men – not a single woman coaches male Division I athletes in a team sport – so the total proportion of female coaches is less than 20 percent. The percentage of female coaches increases slightly at schools where a woman heads the athletic department but remains under 50 percent.

When girls and young women don't have the chance to be coached by women, they lose an opportunity to have strong female role models. Having exclusively male coaches sends female athletes the message that coaching jobs aren't for them. And when athletic directors consistently hire men over similarly qualified women, they send the message that men make better leaders.

Because I never had a female coach, my female sports role models were exclusively athletes, from Florence Griffith Joyner to Brandi Chastain. I was 15 when Chastain scored the championship-winning penalty kick in the 1999 World Cup, then ripped off her jersey in celebration. Though I was no longer playing soccer, I wanted to be just like her.

Chastain says that aside from serving as mentors, female coaches show their athletes a viable career path in the sport to which they've dedicated their lives. After the Women's Professional Soccer league folded this year – the second failed attempt to create a U.S. pro league – coaching college teams is one of the only ways for retired players to make a living in the game. And though the best female basketball

players can get by in the WNBA, where salaries range from \$36,570 to \$105,000, coaching offers a much more stable option. Title IX was just the first step toward legitimizing women's sports; fully leveling the playing field means giving women a chance to make their game their career.

"Ultimately, I hope that women stay in sports if they've played their whole life and gained all this experience," Chastain says. "I would hope that they would be able to share it."

Chastain, 44, had a roughly equal number of male and female coaches during her soccer career, but she knows that's increasingly rare for younger athletes. The generation gap is apparent among coaches as well – especially in basketball, the most prominent women's college sport, which has seen the percentage of female coaches drop from 79.4 to 59.5 percent in the Title IX era. The most prominent female college coaches – Summitt, Stanford's Tara VanDerveer and Rutgers's C. Vivian Stringer, among others – are either retired or in the twilight of their careers. Although Summitt was replaced by a female assistant coach, the percentage of paid female assistant coaches has dropped in the past 20 years, weakening the national pipeline.

Sweet and an alliance of women are trying to reverse the trend. In 2003, Celia Slater, then the women's basketball coach at Division II Lynn University in Boca Raton, Fla., earned an NCAA sponsorship for a series of four-day workshops designed to boost female college coaches' leadership and communication skills as well as their networks. Last year, Slater and Sweet expanded the effort into the Alliance of Women Coaches, a professional-development group for coaches at any level that aims to increase the number of women in sports leadership.

But Sweet says she's not optimistic. "I wish I could say I think the numbers are about to stop going down, but the signs

don't point that way," she says. "It requires breaking this cycle of male university presidents hiring male board members hiring male athletic directors hiring male coaches."

Qualified female candidates are out there, agrees Chastain, who volunteers as an assistant coach under her husband, Santa Clara University women's soccer coach Jerry Smith. Asked if she's considered becoming a professional coach, she sighs.

"I've put myself out there to U.S. Soccer and others several times, and I haven't heard back," she says. "I'm hoping it will happen at some point."

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