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Athletics experience vital to both sexes

By Norma V. Cantu

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The following remarks were presented April 20 at the NCAA Title IX seminar in Baltimore.

In the heated and sometimes emotional discussions of intercollegiate athletics, it is easy to lose sight of the bigger picture we are dealing with. And when we narrow the focus to a specific legal or compliance standard, as we will be doing on these panels, we again run the risk of compounding our short-sightedness.

So, I want to begin by reminding all of us why it is so important that we provide both male and female students nondiscriminatory opportunity to participate in athletics.

What drove this point home for me was a letter I received a few weeks ago from a woman in New Jersey regarding the Office for Civil Rights' enforcement of Title IX. I want to share with you excerpts from that letter. It starts out:

"My concerns are not self-directed, for my opportunity has long since passed. My concerns are not for my daughter, who had a very limited opportunity. My concerns are for my granddaughters and other young females whose future I have hope for.

"As a child, I loved athletics and physical activity. I was talented, but my talent was not appreciated or approved of by most...I watched my older and younger brothers compete on school

teams. It didn't matter that in the neighborhood pick-up games, I was selected before my brothers. Society dictated that I should watch, and they should compete. So at home in the back yard, I would catch as my brother worked on his curve ball, I would shag flies as he developed his batting prowess and, as I recall, I frequently served as his tackling dummy.

"...The brother I caught for, and shagged for, and served as a tackling dummy for, went on to Georgetown University on a full athletics grant. He later became vice-president of a large banking firm...Since I was also a better student than my brother, as well as a more proficient athlete, I am forced to conclude that his greater success is directly related to his greater opportunity and access to education.

"So, while I rode in the backseat on the bus of opportunity during my lifetime, I want my daughter's daughter and her peers to be able to select a seat based on their abilities and their willingness to work. Don't deny them the things I dreamed of."

How powerful. And this letter touches on only a few of the positive outcomes brought about by participation in athletics.

There are many other benefits to participation. According to the Institute for Athletics and Education, girls who participate in sports are three times more likely to graduate from high school, 80 percent less likely to have an unwanted pregnancy,

and 92 percent less likely to use drugs.

The health benefits are extensive. For example, studies are reporting that women who participate in sports lower their risk of breast cancer between 40 and 60 percent. The medical literature indicates that certain sports and exercises can reduce osteoporosis, which is costing this nation \$18 billion each year.

There also are psychological benefits. The research finds that women athletes have a higher level of self-esteem and a lower rate of depression than nonathletes. They also are shown to have a more positive body image, which is particularly important in the development of a positive self-image. As my fellow panelists will discuss later, the availability of athletics scholarships dramatically increases the ability of athletes to pursue a college education and to select from a greater range of institutions. Eventually, this has implications for future employability of persons who will go on to become productive members of our society.

And then there are important values we learn from participation in sports — teamwork, standards, leadership, discipline, work ethics, self-sacrifice, pride in accomplishment, strength of character — lessons that are as important to women as they are to men.

Donna de Varona, who won two gold medals at the 1964 Olympics, has talked about this. I had the pleasure of speaking with her when she visited my office several months ago.

A number of former women athletes point to communication learned in sports competition as key to their upward mobility. Ninety-three percent of women in one study agreed that women who participated in sports would be better able to compete successfully later in life. Another interesting statistic — 80 percent of women who were identified as key leaders in their Fortune 500 companies had sports backgrounds.

This connection of sports to work is more critical than ever. The dynamics of the work world are changing dramatically. According to the

latest Department of Labor projections, women will account for 59 percent of the net increase in the civilian work force between 1992 and 2005. By 2005, the 72 million women workers will constitute 47 percent of the civilian labor force.

Unlike previous trends, the vast majority of these women will not be leaving the labor force to assume full-time child-rearing responsibilities. In fact, men will be leaving the labor force in greater numbers than women. The capacity of women to assume employment opportunities will affect America's ability to compete in the world economy as well as our security and quality of life.

A Federal commission was asked to examine the new demands of the workplace and whether our young people will be capable of meeting those demands. Specifically, the commission was directed to advise the secretary of labor on requirements for entering employment. What interested me was the commission's identification of competencies, skills and qualities that lie at the heart of job performance.

Again, many relate to those that are often by-products of athletics participation. Consider the following identified by the commission:

- Participates as a member of the team.
- Negotiates.
- Interprets and communicates information.
- Monitors and corrects performance.
- Applies technology to task.
- Responsibility.
- Self-esteem.
- Self-management
- Integrity.

It is no wonder that public support for women's participation in athletics is stronger than ever. Eighty-seven percent of parents now accept the idea that sports are equally important for boys and girls.

We saw a tremendous outpouring of enthusiasm and respect for women athletes during the

exciting NCAA basketball finals and the come-from-behind victory of the University of Connecticut. Walter Cronkite has gone so far to suggest that sports participation is more necessary today than ever before. Let me share with you a statement that Cronkite made before the National Football Foundation:

“The discipline of sports that teaches you to keep on trying even when the odds are against you has even more relevance amid our many persistent frustrations today. There’s a place for the sporting discipline that trains you — under intense pressure — to keep cool and act with grace and courage. A sportsman’s training may be more necessary than ever just to live in today’s society. But, even more, the sports, man’s courage, devotion, dedication and — most of all — the discipline of fair play are needed to nudge this world of ours a little for the better.”

And this is true for the sportswoman as well.

The case for providing equal athletics opportunity seems clear and more compelling than ever. There seems to be misunderstanding, however, about compliance standards developed under Title IX.

This is particularly true about the standard applied by the department in determining whether a school provides nondiscriminatory participation opportunities for males and females. Since 1979, the position of the department has been and continues to be that a recipient will be found in compliance with Title IX regarding its obligation to provide nondiscriminatory participation opportunities if it meets *any* part of a three-part test: (1) by providing athletics participation opportunities in numbers that are substantially proportionate to enrollment by gender; *or* (2) by establishing a history and continuing practice of program expansion for members of the underrepresented sex; *or* (3) by fully and effectively accommodating the interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex.

No one part of the three-part test is preferred by the Office for Civil Rights or used exclusively by OCR over another as a method of ensuring

compliance with the law. Let me underscore that the first part of this test is not and is not projected to be the primary measure of compliance under Title IX. Rather, the three-part test furnishes three individual avenues for compliance.

An institution has flexibility in choosing which part of the three-part test with which it will comply. The purpose of the three-part test is to enforce Congress’ intent that neither men nor women will be discriminated against when being provided opportunities to participate in athletics. OCR’s bottom line has been and will continue to be one of fully executing the expressed will of Congress. I would like your help in getting the public to understand the Title IX compliance standards.

The public also must understand that contrary to some popular thought, men’s athletics participation has not suffered as we have moved toward increasing athletics opportunities for women. Information furnished by the NCAA shows that the number of male college athletes increased by more than 16,000 between 1982 and 1992.

We also would like — and we need your assistance in identifying ways for enhancing equal opportunity in intercollegiate athletics. We need your advice and suggestions on all aspects of our compliance and technical-assistance program.

There is no place for discrimination in sports. Discrimination goes against the very grain of what competition is all about. In sports, we encourage and reward only on performance. In our history, sports have been the great equalizer, crossing all artificial social and class distinctions and barriers. We need to showcase sports as a model of equality in American society. With your help, we will make greater strides in establishing a level playing field for all who wish to take advantage of athletics opportunity.

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