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Title IX advocates speak out

By Greg Garber
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Marcia Greenberger remembers the interest tests they used to give kids in elementary school back in the day. Blue forms for boys, pink for girls.

"The boys' form," Greenberger said, "ended with the question: 'Would you like to be president?' while the girls' form ended with: 'Would you like to be the first lady?' The legacy of those old forms is still with us."

Greenberger founded the National Women's Law Center nearly 30 years ago, just in time to support the creation of Title IX. She has been intimately involved in the women's athletic movement ever since.

"The idea that women aren't interested in sports or just aren't good at it, well that's the exact kind of stereotypical thinking that has kept women out of law and medicine over the years," Greenberger said from her Washington, D.C. office. "One of the greatest ironies here is that those who want to challenge Title IX and call it a quota bill want to lock in artificial, limited quotas for women. The ones charging quotas are the ones, in the end, who are imposing quotas."

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— Marcia Greenberger, National Women's Law Center

Greenberger isn't alone. Here are 10 others who have worked diligently over the years to advance the cause of women's athletics:

Donna Lopiano
Executive Director, Women's Sports Foundation
Head of the organization founded by Billie Jean King in 1974, Lopiano has become a leading voice with regard to Title IX and gender equity in athletics.

"Even in late 1973 nobody knew that Title IX applied to athletics. And then the NCAA's Washington lobbying firm asked the question of the Department of Education: Whether or not all 'extracurricular activities' applied to athletics? I don't think they ever imagined it would apply. Once they found it applicable, all hell broke loose. Institutions were given three years to comply. That's where it all started."
Billie Jean King
Winner of 39 Grand Slam tennis titles, U.S. Olympic and Fed Cup coach

"What the United States people don't understand is that it's the government that really drives the sports in most countries, and so the national governing bodies, because the Olympics are saying we want more women's events and accepting that, then the percentage of women in the Olympics has gone up just unbelievably. We are getting there. When these governments start to say, 'Well, we are going to start worrying about the girls being active and having the opportunity in organized sports, just like the boys.' It's always important to help both boys and girls. I think the world is getting closer to that way of thinking. It is going to take centuries, but it is getting better."

Marilyn McNeil
Athletics Director, Monmouth University

"The committee's mission statement is to continually evaluate opportunities for women. We're the watchdog, the place where emerging sports come from. We've been adamant about balancing championship opportunities, adamant about marketing women's championships, not to take second fiddle to men. We've been adamant about officiating programs, too.

"We've added lacrosse, field hockey and golf (at Monmouth) in recent years. One of the sports that will make a big impact on the women's side in the future is rugby. It won't take them long to gain varsity status. It's another sport that's not too expensive and will add numbers for women."

Anne Worcester
Tournament Director, Pilot Pen Tennis

"I have a cartoon at my desk, and it's a World Cup stadium with men on the field. Somebody's holding up a sign that says, 'You play like a girl.' And a middle-aged man is saying, 'Remember when that used to be an insult?"

"We started a relationship with the Girl Scouts of Connecticut in 1999, and I was completely shocked that the largest organization for girls in the world didn't have a single sports badge. Well, in 2000, four years after the Atlanta Olympics, the Girl Scouts created a national sports initiative. We started the Pilot Pen patch program, and after a slow start, more than 500 of them showed up for a free tennis lesson. That's not just good marketing, that's a significant cultural change.

"Back during the days of the Virginia Slims tour in 1972, the winner got $1,500. Today, the first-round singles losers at Pilot Pen get the same $1,500. That's progress."

Kathryn Reith
Former assistant executive director of the Women's Sports Foundation
Reith wrote the Title IX primer "Playing Fair" in 1992, the 20th anniversary of Title IX.

"We're still working within a rule and a culture of sport that has been set up on a male model. We're judging it on that male model. When people say girls are not as interested in sports and intramurals as boys, you're looking at their reaction to a structure of sports set up on a male model of sports they may or may not be comfortable with."
Pat Meiser-McKnett  
Athletics Director, University of Hartford  
*Meiser-McKnett, a former women's basketball coach at Penn State, is in her 10th year as athletics director.*

"There's no question the issue of football is huge in terms of balance. You simply can't have 100 to 110 participants and have a clear answer to matching the other side. Within our world of limited resources, you have to make decisions. It's painful to limit opportunities. My goal is to provide as many as is economically possible."

Arthur Bryant  
Executive Director, Trial Lawyers for Public Justice  
*Bryant has represented 10 athletes or programs in Title IX cases and has won concessions every time.*

"The truly sad part about the Title IX story is that people don't understand what Title IX requires. Too many are scapegoating Title IX as forcing the elimination of men's teams. I think college administrators find it easier to blame Title IX for the budget decisions they make. That's the problem: People continue to advance things that Title IX was intended to attack."

Linda Carpenter  
Former professor, Brooklyn College  
*Carpenter and colleague A. Vivien Acosta have documented women's gains (and losses) in college sports for 25 years.*

"It seems to me that the (increased) participation reflects the fact that we are looking at a second-generation Title IX population. These moms and dads grew up participating themselves. The parents of the kids in college today saw the beginning of it, and they expect nothing less than complete equality."

Mariah Burton Nelson  
Former Stanford basketball player and a national women's athletics advocate  
*Nelson, the author of "We are ALL Athletes," to be published in July, addresses more than 50 groups each year.*

"People lobbying against Title IX, they'll contend that women would rather play hopscotch -- I've actually heard that. The bottom line is, Title IX is law, and it's not being fully complied with. We won't rest until half of the college athletes are female and half the scholarship money and coaching allocations are given to women. We need to see more women coaching, too. Athletics directors are 83 percent men, and they tend to hire people they're comfortable with."

Christine Grant  
Women's Athletics Director Emeritus, University Iowa  
*For 30 years, Grant has been a leading proponent of Title IX.*

"Thirty years later, I still see discrimination, and I can't understand it. I just don't understand it. Women are still being denied participation rights, denied the rights of empowerment, being denied equal access to a free college education.

"It's too late in the game to go back to where we started."