



If you meet resistance, try persistence

by Mitzi Witchger

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

—Title IX of the Education Amendments, 1972

In my high school there is a boy's hockey team, but the athletic director here says the girls aren't good enough yet for the school to have a team, and anyway our school doesn't have the funds for another sport. What can we do?

First of all, let your athletic director know that you and other girls want to play ice hockey. To give evidence there is demonstrated interest in your school to play girls hockey, go to the very next school board meeting and let them know that you want a girls hockey program this next winter season.

Ask an adult who pays taxes in your school district to speak in support of your request. (Not your own parent. Ask another parent or someone else, so that the school board sees there are several people who want this.) They will not tell you 'yes' or 'no' that night, but will study the situation. Often a reporter from the local newspaper is there and may ask you some questions. Be positive, even if you feel frustrated.

Ask around your city to see if other girls would play hockey if it were available at their school. Usually the answer is an enthusiastic "YES!" Name those schools, so others will know it is not just the girls in your school who want hockey. There may be someone on your school newspaper or in-school cable TV who would do a story on your quest. Search them out, ask a teacher for help, or write a piece yourself.

Ideally the youth hockey program would be sponsoring girls teams in your community. That may or may not be the case in your area. They can offer girls teams this next season, too.

However, when girls first got high school hockey teams in Minnesota in the mid-1990s, there were very, very few teams — they could be counted on one hand — across the state made up of all girls, no matter what the level. The youth hockey programs said 'girls don't want to play hockey,' but all too often what was meant was 'We don't want any girls to play hockey,

because we don't have enough ice for the boys teams as it is now, and girls teams would take up even more ice hours.'

More than once I said to youth hockey associations: 'No longer will YOUTH hockey be spelled 'B-O-Y-S'.

Nor is the skill level of females the issue. You and your friends may or may not have the same skill level as boys who were practically born with a hockey stick in their hands. With coaching you can learn. If you have determination and a competitive spirit and the will to succeed, you will improve.

Ice time for games and practices will have to be divided. Yes, that does mean you may have to skate before school, but so will the boys. They will not get the 'good hours' and

you would just go away. They may try to wear you down, but you are in the right. Seldom will hockey be given to you without your asking and making a case for it, even though the boys in your school got it handed to them.

Someone may tell you there is no money right now to add girls hockey. The answer to that is: Divide the money that is available for our sports programs so that girls get half of what the boys hockey program has now. It does not matter who 'raised the money'. The law says there should be equity in the sports program in any school that accepts federal dollars.

The issue is equity and whether your school district is in compliance with Title IX.

Many schools offer more sports opportunities for their male students than their female students. This is another reason there can be girls hockey: to help balance the sports offerings, especially in the winter season. Hockey is a contact sport. As an example, swimming and gymnastics are not. Where there is demonstrated interest there also needs to be a balance for contact sports.

Ask your AD in writing for the boys sports budget and the girls sports budget. Look at boys hockey: the revenue, the expenses, the

member (and me, if you choose).

In many cases, more money may be brought in by boys sports, but way more money is spent on boys sports, thus making your school's program out of compliance. Title IX is used to help get a school's sports program more balanced. Your request will help your school get closer to compliance with Title IX.

The recent decision by the US Supreme Court in the *Brown v. Cohen* case reinforces the responsibility of schools to be equitable to females and males in their sports programs.

Brown University lost all of its appeals in the lower courts and was found to have illegally discriminated against its women athletes. The Supreme Court said the lower court rulings were correct in requiring schools across the country that accept federal funds (nearly all school districts, colleges and universities) to offer balanced sports opportunities using the resources available in their school.

Ask who your Title IX officer is and then speak to that person about getting a girls hockey program started. One can file a grievance against the school through the Title IX officer. (This is not a lawsuit, and no attorneys are needed.) Let other administrators, faculty and staff know a group of girls wants a hockey team for next season: your superintendent, principal, dean of students, teachers, coaches, etc. If you meet resistance, try persistence.

You will be successful. It is important to do some of this work in writing so the issue of equity does not dissolve into name calling, finger pointing or administrative shuffling or stalling. You and your friends will be winners. Margaret Mead said: "Never doubt that a small group of dedicated, committed people can make a difference. Indeed they are the ones that do!"

Every time someone says "Great!" to you, remind them that GREAT! stands for Girls Really Expect A Team! ♦



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you, the 'bad hours' for practice and games; that has to be balanced as well.

You can see why there are some who want to resist this, and others who wish

profit/loss associated with running the boys program. Request that the information be sent to you within two weeks in written form. Copy your letter to a school board

Mitzi Witchger is a gender equity consultant who founded GREAT! (Girls Really Expect A Team!). As a parent of two sons and a daughter, who have been varsity high school and collegiate athletes, and as a member of the sports equity committee which produced the *Gender Equity in Athletics* book for the MN Dept. of Education and the MN State High School League, she is aware of the problems and possibilities of implementing Title IX. Presently, Witchger serves on the board of directors of Indiana Citizens for Sports Equity.

If you have any questions regarding gender equity or Title IX, e-mail Mitzi at <great@quest.net> or send letters to her attention at Women's Hockey, P.O. Box 1007, Okemos, MI 48805-1007. In Canada write Women's Hockey: 1502-6369 Coburg Rd. Halifax, NS B3H 4J7.



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