

TITLE IX AND ITS AFTERMATH

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Sex, Law, and the Female Wrestler

Wrestling is one of the world's oldest sports, a masculine sport designed to build strength and enhance fighting skills. The ancient Greeks wrestled in their Olympic games and the sport has survived in various forms ever since. Although a few women have always wrestled, cultural norms in the United States and the rest of the world have discouraged all but a few from participating beyond the spectator level. In 1972, however, the United States Congress enacted Title IX, which prohibited gender discrimination in educational settings, and school-aged girls, inspired by Title IX, rushed to join their school athletic teams. Unfortunately for those girls who wanted to wrestle, Title IX could not help because its enforcement regulations exempted contact sport. The Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution, however, did allow them to participate.

Perhaps because of the sport's more regionalized popularity in America, wrestling has been one of the last contact sports in which co-ed participation was contested in the courtroom. In the 1970s girls seemed to simply be sneaking into wrestling, and aside from a few newspaper articles, no one seemed to care very much. However, in 1985 a girl in San Diego, California, pinned a boy and she gained national media attention. Within three years, the first court battle over co-ed wrestling was waged in Nebraska, and in 1996 another would occur in Kansas. In part because legal precedent clearly established that if schools sponsored a boys' contact sport team then they must allow girls to compete for a spot on the boys' team or provide a separate girls' squad, the courts' decisions to allow girls to wrestle were unsurprising.

This paper examines the published court decisions regarding females in wrestling and the contemporary media accounts of those girls who wanted to wrestle, and it analyzes how the public and media concerns over the sexual implication of co-ed wrestling were dealt with in the courts. I argue that by the time the courts dealt with gender segregation and wrestling, the law was clear: girls had to be allowed to try out for the boys' team if no

comparable girls' team existed. Yet social opposition to co-ed wrestling was such that communities tried to find new legal reasons to exclude girls from the sport and because of the nature of wrestling, they tried the moral and quasi-religious objection to "improper touching." The courts, however, rejected these claims and concluded that wrestling was not a sexual activity and that any sin in the sport was in the eye of the beholder. The battle over the gender integration of wrestling was another example of American courts requiring a level of social equality that American society was reluctant to accept.

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Courting Controversy: Gender and Power in Iowa Girls' Basketball

Although the state of Iowa has been recognized within the sport history literature and the national popular press for its tremendous support of girls' high school basketball, the resistance to the game within the state has not been widely acknowledged. The legal challenges to Iowa's "6-on-6" girls' basketball rules in the 1970s and 1980s brought criticism of the game and its governance to the surface. These challenges were well covered in the local, state, and even national media. At that time, the Iowa Girls' High School Athletic Union (IGHSAU), the governing body responsible for organizing and supporting competitive girls' basketball since the mid-1920s faced charges that the 6-player rules discriminated against high school females. Iowa players were at a disadvantage when competing for college scholarships compared to girls in other states who played by the 5-player rules, and they generally did not receive the same opportunities available to Iowa boys' basketball players. My research into the rules' controversy and the discourse surrounding it indicates that the critics of Iowa's 6-player basketball were most commonly identified as women and as feminists and that a University of Iowa professor in the Department of Physical Education for Women was frequently cited as a spokesperson. This was not the first time that a member of that department expressed criticism about the IGHSAU.