

December 2002

Do We Need Title IX?

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Recommended Citation

Arthur, Emily (2002) "Do We Need Title IX?," *Ethos*: Vol. 2003 , Article 6.
Available at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol2003/iss2/6>

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Do We Need Title IX?

THIRTY YEARS LATER,
THE DEBATE RAGES ON.

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Lindsey Wilson hates this headline. Take away Title IX, and you might as well take away the 19.1 points per game she scored last season as a junior on the ISU women's basketball team. Or the Big 12 Championship she helped to win the previous year. Wilson thinks that without the legislation passed 30 years ago saying men and women must be given equal opportunities, she might not even be playing.

"People who think we have gone beyond the need for Title IX are in a dream world," she says. "Things are still unequal even with this legislation. Without it, women would go back to playing in sub-par facilities with no funding."

And yet — and there's always a "yet" with Title IX — there are people like Mike Moyer, who say Title IX, in and of itself, is not the problem. It's the execution of it. "Gender quotas are not applied to any other part of society as much as in college athletics," says Moyer, the executive director of the National Wrestling Coaches Association.

Moyer and the NWCA filed a lawsuit

in January against the Department of Education, arguing that in 1996, the department unlawfully altered the way it interprets Title IX. The NWCA claims "improper rulemaking and its enforcement have led to the arbitrary elimination of hundreds of athletic programs at schools across the country, costing student-athletes both scholarships and their opportunity to compete."

Here's how Title IX works: For a school to be in compliance with Title IX, the number of male-to-female varsity athletes must closely reflect the number of male to female undergraduate students. According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, females at Iowa State in 2000 and 2001 made up 44 percent of the undergraduate population; and of all varsity athletes, 38 percent were female. Close, but not substantially close enough. Only two Big 12 schools — Texas A & M and Kansas State — were in compliance with Title IX that year.

Still, one can't refute the opportunities Title IX has provided. Between 1981 and 1999, the total number of women's varsity collegiate teams increased by 3,784, according to the United States General



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Accounting Office Reports.

But Title IX as it relates to football is where debates rage. Let's say a university has only 100 scholarships available. If 44 percent go to female athletes, 56 percent go to male. Football, with its 85 scholarships, will eat up a vast percentage — a disproportionate percentage — of the male scholarships available. So sports like wrestling often are squeezed out. Indeed, the NWCA estimates more than 350 wrestling programs have been cut because of Title IX.

In Iowa State's case, in the spring of 2001, baseball and men's swimming were cut, although ISU Athletics Director Bruce Van de Velde has, to this day, never attributed it to Title IX. (Quick aside: In 1974, two years after Title IX's inception, the "Tower Amendment," which would have exempted revenue-producing sports like football from Title IX's compliance, was rejected.)

Moyer says the goal of the NWCA is to restore Title IX to its original intent.

"It is a very good law that has been very poorly regulated," he says.

It sure has, Mike Christianson says.

Christianson, a senior, was part of the

ISU swimming and diving team. "The first reason we were cut was because of the budget constraints, but Title IX ended up being part of the reason we were chosen," Christianson says. "It wasn't the direct reason, but if there wasn't Title IX, they would have probably cut women's sports... Title IX did great things, but it's off right now in the way it calculates. You have to do something completely different, or throw football out of the equation."

Lindsey Wilson disagrees. It's not a matter of "filling a quota," as Moyer has suggested, but something else.

"It is unfortunate that men's programs have to be cut in order for schools to be in compliance. But the problem is not Title IX, it is the lack of funding for all athletics," she says. "While I don't think football should be taken entirely out of the equation, it is difficult for schools to be in compliance when they have football teams. There possibly could be some compromise."

That's where schools struggle to find a solution. The University of Northern Iowa's athletics director Rick Hartzell was forced to drop men's and women's swimming and men's and women's ten-



nis less than six months ago as a result of budget cuts. "I hated the decision," Hartzell said after it was made. "I agonized. I puked. It still bothers me. But when the checkbook is overdrawn, you've got to make a decision. We made one."

It didn't last long, though. After receiving threats of a lawsuit from Trial Lawyers for Public Justice on behalf of UNI women athletes concerning Title IX violations, the women's programs were reinstated.

"We are caught between Iowa's expenditure reductions and the national drive to increase intercollegiate athletic opportunities for women," Hartzell told reporters at the time of reinstatement. "When we cut the programs, we were making the best decision we could at that time given the seriousness of our budget situation. We dropped both the men's and women's programs in these two sports to make every effort to be equitable. The action we are taking now is in the best interests of gender equity."

So is Title IX really doing what it's supposed to?

"Most universities are not in compliance, and right now there seems to not

be any consequences for this," Wilson says. "I don't think that many places are cutting men's teams in order to be in compliance. I think it is that there simply is not enough money, and the first programs to cut have to be men's because of the fact that these places are not in compliance and cannot cut women's sports. In a perfect world, schools would simply add women's teams in order to maintain equality without ever cutting a men's sport."

But until that happens, athletes in low-profile sports will wonder, "Is our program next?"

"Men and women deserve equal opportunities to participate because it is fair and also because of the benefits of athletics," Wilson says. "Women have been more prone to eating disorders, low self-esteem and a lack of belief in themselves. Athletics is an antidote to these horrible things. Whether someone is involved in music, dance, sports, they should have equal opportunities regardless of gender, sex, et cetera because all of these activities have the potential to have a positive impact on them and change their lives for the better." e



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