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# Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport

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www.tuckercenter.org

**NATIONWIDE,  
ONLY 21% OF  
ALL MEN'S  
AND WOMEN'S  
TEAMS ARE  
COACHED BY  
FEMALES.**

## WANTED!

### Female Coaches at All Levels of Sport

Despite the explosion of female sport participants in the post-Title IX era, there has been a significant decline in the percentage of women who coach these athletes. The scarcity of female coaches at the professional, Olympic, intercollegiate, interscholastic, and youth levels is well documented. A brief summary of the “state of the playing field” is outlined below along with a number of reasons why the dramatic decline of female head coaches is of such concern.

With respect to Olympic sports, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) recognized the need for female representation at both the international and national level. In 2005, the IOC mandated that a minimum of 20% of all National Olympic Committee decision-making positions—including coaches—be held by women. Unfortunately, current data are not available to ascertain if the National Governing Bodies are in compliance with the IOC mandate.

We have better data at the intercollegiate level because for over three decades, Vivian Acosta and Linda Carpenter have documented the employment patterns of women in leadership positions. Their 2008 report indicates that nationwide, just 21% of all men's and women's teams are coached by females, and only 43% of head coaches for women's teams are female. This latter figure reflects how dramatic the decline of female coaches has been: Prior to Title IX, over 90% of all head coaching positions in women's sports were occupied by females.

Data from the Minnesota State High School Coaches Association 2007-08 season show similar trends at the interscholastic level—only 17% of all teams (boys' and girls') are coached by females. Broken down by gender, just 38% of all girls' teams are coached by females and they are virtually absent as coaches of boys' teams where they represent only 2.2% of all head coaching positions. Perhaps not surprisingly, the highest percentage of female head coaches represented in girls' high school athletics was in sports historically deemed “appropriate” for girls: Synchronized swimming (100%), volleyball (70.1%), and gymnastics (69%).

Less is known about gendered patterns in coaches of youth sport. However, sport scholar Mike Messner, our Spring Distinguished Lecturer (see back panel for lecture details as well as Messner's Guest Column on page 2), and Nicole LaVoi each completed separate studies examining youth soccer and discovered similar results. Messner's data from a Southern California youth sport community revealed that a small but increasing number of females (13%) served as head coaches in the American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO). LaVoi found a similar rate (15%) of female head coaches within the Minnesota Youth Soccer Association, although they were more likely to coach girls' teams (24%) than boys' (5%). LaVoi also found that as children mature and reach higher competitive levels—when sport “starts to get serious”—female

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### Letter from the Director

Twenty-five years ago I published an article about the high rate of attrition among youth sport coaches. Two unintended results emanated from this research—85% of coaches were parents of one or more of their players, and the parent doing the coaching was always the father. Unfortunately, today's landscape of coaching youth sports has not changed appreciably. In recreational and competitive youth programs all over America, fathers and other male role models still dominate leadership positions.



Dr. Maureen Weiss

Title IX provided tremendous opportunities for girls. In 1972, only 1 in 27 girls played high school sports; today the ratio is 1 in 2.5. Such increased participation created more coaching opportunities—so why are so few females coaching young people? Understanding *why* a phenomenon exists helps us formulate *how* to effect change for the greater good—in this case, positive sport experiences for girls *and* boys.

Some reasons for the low percentage of female coaches are sociological. For example, the greater value placed on women's sports made coaching more appealing to men. And in spite of social progress in the wake of Title IX, some stereotypes die hard—research indicates that athletic administrators and athletes perceive that female coaches are less qualified than males. Psychological reasons include women expressing less confidence and competence to coach even when their training and leadership qualities suggest otherwise.

Whatever the reasons, female coaches are important for children and adolescents. Research shows that women possess the instrumental and expressive skills to be excellent coaches, place emphasis on teaching life skills, and know how to nurture values that transcend sport to other domains. Girls and boys have much to learn and benefit from having their mothers teach and reinforce skills and qualities that sport has the potential to foster.

So how can we make a difference in recruiting women to coach? School-based and community educational workshops have proven successful in motivating and training women to coach. Efforts are needed through professional conferences, coaching associations, and leadership networks to develop curricula and strategies that increase the number of female coaches at all levels.

The scarcity of women coaches is a complex matter that requires community, school, and personal efforts to reverse the situation. The first step is awareness—the intent of this newsletter. The next step is action—we are all responsible for ensuring that female role models are elevated to their rightful place on the courts, fields, and other sport venues across the country.

—Maureen Weiss, Co-Director



## RESEARCH UPDATES

The Tucker Center has a number of exciting research projects underway. Research Assistant **Austin Stair Calhoun**, Tucker Center Associate Director **Nicole LaVoi**, and Tucker Center Director **Mary Jo Kane** are examining online coaching biographies of NCAA Division I coaches in the Big 10 Conference in their research project, “Examining Online Intercollegiate Head Coaches’ Biographies: Reproducing or Challenging Heteronormativity and Heterosexism?” The purpose of this pilot study is to explore ways in which female coaches might be marginalized and trivialized in new media—patterns of representation well-documented in other forms of print and broadcast journalism. Online biographies are a universal component of intercollegiate athletic Web sites and provide the public with an accessible “up close and personal” source of information about coaches and teams. Results of the study were presented at the Sport, Sexuality, and Culture Conference held at Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY, this March and highlighted how online biographies of coaches both challenge and reproduce gender stereotypes in college sports.

Research assistant **Erin Becker** is exploring gendered occupational employment patterns within a state-wide youth soccer organization. Research on intercollegiate and interscholastic sport indicates that when males occupy positions of power (e.g., as head coach, AD), they are more likely to hire individuals like themselves, meaning other males. Becker’s project—“Examining Gender in a Youth Soccer Organization: Homologous Reproduction and Marginalization of Female Youth Soccer Coaches”—examines whether similar patterns of gendered hiring practices also exist in youth sport by asking such questions as, are male or female Coaching Directors more likely to hire male coaches? A second purpose of Becker’s project is to investigate if female coaches are marginalized within youth sport. For example, are they more likely to be assigned to coach “less prestigious” teams such as younger age groups and less competitive recreational teams? Stay tuned for her exciting results!

Affiliated Scholar **Lisa Kihl** and **Kathy Babiak** (University of Michigan) conducted a first-of-its-kind evaluation of the Minnesota Twins’ Rookie League and Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities programs. Both programs provide participation opportunities for underserved youth in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Their project examined possible benefits of the programs, barriers to participation, ways to improve program delivery, and stakeholders’ perceptions of the Minnesota Twins. The authors commend the Twins for striving to be the best at delivering urban youth sports.

To increase the number of female coaches in youth sport, **Nicole LaVoi** and **Sarah Leberman**—a Fulbright Scholar from the University of Massey, New Zealand who did her research at the Tucker Center in 2007—interviewed mothers of youth soccer players for their project, “Developing Mothers as Youth Sport Coaches.” The mothers discussed numerous barriers to their involvement in coaching, but also suggested strategies to recruit and retain female coaches such as increasing their sense of competence and confidence. More specifically, they emphasized actively encouraging and inviting females to coach, holding female-only coaching clinics run by women, and helping mothers understand that parenting skills can be transferred to the world of coaching. The next phase of this research involves working with youth sport organizations to implement these and other strategies.



## GUEST COLUMN: MICHAEL A. MESSNER

### “You Gotta Be Tough”: Challenges and Strategies of Female Coaches in Youth Sports



Mike Messner and his son Sasha

When we arrived at our six-year-old son’s first soccer practice in 1995, I was delighted to learn that his coach was a woman. Coach Karen was tall, confident and athletic, and the kids responded well to her leadership. “Great, a woman coach!” I observed cheerily. “It’s a new and different world than the one that I grew up in.” But over the next 12 years, as both of my sons played several seasons in the American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO), as well as Little League baseball, they never had another female head coach. It’s not that women weren’t contributing to the kids’ teams. All of the “team parents” (often called “team moms”) were women. I was fascinated, and studied this gender division of labor for the next eight years. The numbers were stark: from 1999 to 2007, only 6% of 538 Little League Baseball and Softball teams in my Southern California community were managed by women. AYSO was better—13% of 1,280 teams had a female coach.

As I started to observe things, I noticed that a male coach was referred to as “the coach.” In contrast, a woman was usually called “the woman coach,” thus linguistically marking her. But it was more than gendered language that barred women’s entry into coaching and ultimately caused most of those who did venture into coaching to quit after a year or two. While I found very little overt sexism or hostility toward these women, the stories about their experiences revealed informal—but very powerful—processes that marginalized or discouraged them: Feeling a constant sense of scrutiny from other adults (“is she really qualified to coach my kid?”); being made to feel like an outsider in the midst of the “old boys’ network”; having to contend with men’s “intimidating” loud voices on the playing fields. As one woman told me, “I just couldn’t take that.”

In spite of such challenges, some women do manage to survive and thrive as coaches. They develop strategies to contend with challenges they face as “the woman coach.” “You gotta be tough,” one told me. The women who survived by being more competitive than men ran head-on into the same sort of double-standard that women face in corporate and professional life: If you’re not competitive

and aggressive, you’re not taken seriously; if you are overly so, you are labeled a bitch. Clearly, the most successful gender strategies are group ones. In AYSO, I found the beginnings of what one woman called (with an ironic chuckle) an “old girls’ network” to recruit and support more female coaches.

In Little League Baseball and Softball, the number of women is still too low for this kind of women’s network to develop. Baseball (and by extension, softball) still “belongs” to men, leaving female coaches as isolated tokens. In sum, a successful strategy is one that results in a critical mass.

It is very important to increase the numbers of female coaches in youth sports. Why does it matter? Because what adults do in youth sports is linked to gender divisions of labor in other realms; an “unfinished feminist revolution” in work and family life is further reinforced by such a skewed male dominance in youth sports. It also matters because, as preparation for the world they will inhabit as adults, boys need to see and experience the full range of women’s leadership skills and physical abilities. And it matters because women coaches can be an inspiration to today’s girls, giving them a vision of what they can do when they become adults. As one coach told the girls on her softball team, “Someday, most of you girls are going to be moms. You don’t want to just let Dad do all that stuff. Not when you’ve got this kind of experience. You want to do it too.”

## DID YOU KNOW?

### FEMALE COLLEGIATE BASKETBALL COACHES GOT GAME!

This February, University of Tennessee’s **Pat Summitt** became the first-ever collegiate basketball coach in Division I to accumulate 1,000 career victories. Summitt also has eight national championships to her credit, and her teams have made appearances in every NCAA Tournament, reaching the Sweet 16 an amazing 27 times. Under Summitt’s leadership, the Lady Vols have gone to the Final Four on 18 different occasions.

Summitt is not the only women’s basketball coach with a host of wins. Joining Summitt in the Top 5 of all-time Division I women’s basketball winners are **Jody Conradt** of Texas (900, retired), Rutgers’s **C. Vivian Stringer** (815, active), **Sylvia Hatchell** of UNC (801, active) and Stanford’s **Tara VanDerveer** (739, active).

The Tucker Center would be remiss without mentioning the sixth on that list of remarkable women head coaches—long-time North Carolina State head coach, legend, and trailblazer, **Kay Yow** (737 career wins). Yow passed away last January after a courageous two-decade battle against breast cancer.

There has been a total of 27 NCAA Division I Championships, dating back to the inaugural Final Four in 1982. Since then, 21 of the 27 championship teams have been led by female head coaches, including the last four championships, won by Summitt (2007 & 2008), **Kim Mulkey** (2006, Baylor University) and **Brenda Frese** (2005, University of Maryland).

Year	Champion	Record	Coach
1982	Louisiana Tech	35-1	Sonja Hogg
1983	Southern Cal	31-2	Linda K. Sharp
1984	Southern Cal	29-4	Linda K. Sharp
1985	Old Dominion	31-3	Marianne Stanley
1986	Texas	34-0	Jody Conradt
1987	Tennessee	28-6	Pat Summitt
1988	Louisiana Tech	32-2	Leon Barmore
1989	Tennessee	35-2	Pat Summitt
1990	Stanford	32-1	Tara VanDerveer
1991	Tennessee	30-5	Pat Summitt
1992	Stanford	30-3	Tara VanDerveer
1993	Texas Tech	31-3	Marsha Sharp
1994	North Carolina	33-2	Sylvia Hatchell
1995	Connecticut	35-0	Geno Auriemma
1996	Tennessee	32-4	Pat Summitt
1997	Tennessee	29-10	Pat Summitt
1998	Tennessee	39-0	Pat Summitt
1999	Purdue	34-1	Carolyn Peck
2000	Connecticut	36-1	Geno Auriemma
2001	Notre Dame	34-2	Muffet McGraw
2002	Connecticut	39-0	Geno Auriemma
2003	Connecticut	37-1	Geno Auriemma
2004	Connecticut	31-4	Geno Auriemma
2005	Baylor	33-3	Kim Mulkey
2006	Maryland	34-4	Brenda Frese
2007	Tennessee	34-3	Pat Summitt
2008	Tennessee	36-2	Pat Summitt

... "Wanted!" continued from page 1

coaches become less prevalent.

Finally, at the professional level, the WNBA is the only sport league to have any female head coaches, but even then they represent just 36% of all head coaches (5 of 14 teams).

The major pattern seen across all levels of sport is that females are severely under-represented at the head coach position—arguably the most visible position of power and prestige throughout the sports world. Numerous scholars have detailed the factors and barriers that influence the scarcity of female coaches—but why does it matter? First, research indicates that children and youth benefit when females hold positions of power. Without female coaches as role models, scholars have discovered that sportswomen may devalue their own abilities, report lower self-efficacy, accept negative stereotypes, fail to realize their own potential, and limit their sport career aspirations. Scholars have also found that female athletes who were coached by women are more likely to enter coaching.

Females in positions of leadership have the potential to be a mechanism for change: They provide evidence that women can be successful at the highest levels, and challenge outdated stereotypes about gender and power. Visible female role models who are important to children and youth can also provide a pathway toward a lifetime commitment to physical activity that in turn can lead to sustained health and well-being. The Tucker Center recognizes the importance of fostering women in leadership positions. This is one of the many reasons our research, education, and outreach explore ways to reduce barriers and thus increase the number of females in the coaching profession.



## LEARNING OUR LEGACY

### LINDA WELLS: LEGENDARY COACH

Linda Wells—pioneering women's softball coach—is the epitome of a pre-Title IX athlete who made a career of her passion for sports. Wells is a visionary, the type of individual who creates immediate rapport with strangers and fills a room with her presence and wisdom. Over the course of her celebrated career, Wells has empowered countless girls and women through her willingness to put herself—and her career—on the line to fight for what is right. A self-described small-town kid from the town of Pacific, Missouri, Wells played five collegiate sports (volleyball, basketball, softball, field hockey, and tennis) at Southeast Missouri State in the 1970s. But it was in the sport of softball where Wells enjoyed a long and successful career (over 37 years of organized teams!) in the Amateur Softball Association and the Women's International Professional Softball League. Wells' accomplishments earned her seven Hall of Fame inductions either at institutions where she played or with organizations which she helped develop (e.g., National Fastpitch Coaches Association).

While Wells' career as an athlete is certainly impressive,

her coaching and leadership accomplishments are even greater. In 1974, at the age of 21, she was named the first full-time head coach at the University of Minnesota in three women's sports—basketball, softball, and volleyball. While her peers were still formulating their life plans, Wells was settling into an office next to a legend in his own right—Herb Brooks—while she battled to overcome the "playday" mentality which dominated the college sport experience for women. She was also going toe-to-toe with athletic directors and school presidents to get what she needed for her teams. After 15 successful years coaching the Gophers and earning a Master's degree in Exercise Physiology from the U of M, Wells headed south to take over the softball program at Arizona State University. "I love Minnesota and would have stayed forever, but I got tired of the winters," she laughs.

Wells retired in 2005 after 30-plus years of collegiate coaching with an overall winning record of 884-653 (58%), numerous conference championships, All-America awards, an array of medals, national tournament berths, and no doubt countless memories. She has also



Linda Wells (back row, 5th from left) with the 2008 Dutch Olympic Softball Team which competed in Beijing.



coached at the international level overseeing both the Dutch (2008 Beijing) and Greek (2004 Athens) Olympic Softball teams. If Wells wasn't busy enough, in 1982, she founded her own business, *Wells Sports Corporation*, which is still going strong and specializes in coaching clinics, speaking engagements, and products and services for youth sports. According to Regina Sullivan, Senior Associate AD at the U of M, "Linda Wells is a true pioneer in Gopher athletic history. Her dedication and passion have helped to advance opportunities for girls and women in sport and she has become a national role model for many student-athletes, coaches, and colleagues over the last several decades."

Perhaps Wells' biggest contribution is her vision of what participation and a career in sports should look like for females. Wells says most people think sports for females started with Title IX when in fact, "... women and girls have *always* played sports. They couldn't be stopped," she points out. "It seems pretty limited to only have *one day* that celebrates their participation" (referring to National Girls & Women

Sport Day held annually in February), Wells points out. Former teammate, colleague, Hall of Famer, Title IX lawyer, and Tucker Center affiliate Rayla Allison said of Wells, "She is one of the most knowledgeable, recognizable, and intelligent people in softball. She has done more to advance softball around the world than any other person. But more importantly, she is capable of seeing broader issues and has fought tirelessly to advocate for *all* girls and women in sport ... because of that, she is one of the bravest women I know."

As Wells begins to enjoy full retirement in sunny Arizona by golfing, traveling, and enjoying time with friends and family, she often wonders who in the next generation will "pick up the ball" and continue to fight for equality for women's sports. Those of us who work in the Tucker Center do our part to answer her question, always aware that it is a pioneer like Linda Wells who makes our work possible. We are proud to have her in the Gopher family and are grateful—not to mention indebted—for all she has done, and continues to do, for all of us.

## KUDOS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Honors & Awards

- Affiliated Scholar **Diane Wiese-Bjornstal** has been appointed to the 2009 Science Board of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.
- Affiliated Scholar **Daheia Barr-Anderson** was awarded a 3-year, NIH Career Development Grant (*Building Interdisciplinary Research Careers in Women's Health*) to examine environmental influences of physical activity and diet in African-American adolescent girls.
- Co-Director **Maureen Weiss** and David Goodman (Simon Fraser University) received a 3-year, \$90,000 grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Their research examines ways to reduce the incidence of concussions among youth hockey players by educating youth athletes, coaches, and parents.

### Scholarly Activities

- Wiese-Bjornstal's** chapter in *The 2007 Tucker Center Research Report* titled *Psychological Dimensions of Girls' Physical Activity Participation* will be reprinted in *Women, Sport, & Physical Activity: Challenges and Triumphs* (2nd Ed., Kendall-Hunt).
- Affiliated Scholar **Lisa Kihl** gave an invited keynote address at the University of Washington. Her presentation—*Coping with Corruption's Mess*—was delivered at the Intercollegiate Athletics Leadership Executive Luncheon.

- Co-director **Weiss** gave the keynote address titled *Promoting a "Love of the Game:" Optimizing Girls' Physical, Social, and Psychological Assets Through Physical Activity* at the First Annual Girls in Sport Symposium, University of North Carolina at Greensboro.
- Associate Director **Nicole LaVoi** and **Chelsey Thul**, Ph.D. student, presented their research, *Reducing Physical Inactivity and Promoting Active Living: From the Voices of East African Girls* at the 2009 Active Living Research Conference in San Diego, CA.
- Affiliated Scholar **Jo Ann Buysse** was invited to deliver *Framing the Female Athlete: Media Constructions of Gender* to the AAUW Northeast Branch and to students and faculty at The College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, MN.
- Co-director **Mary Jo Kane** will give an invited presentation titled *Media Representations of Sportswomen in the 21st Century* at the NCAA-sponsored Gender Equity & Issues Forum in San Diego, CA in April.
- Affiliated Scholar **Doug Hartmann** presented *The 1968 African American Olympic Protest Movement: Domestic Roots, International Reverberations* at a conference on global movements of 1986 and will present *Barack Obama, Michael Jordan, and the Complexities of Blackness in American Culture* at the Torstenson Lecture in Sociology at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, MN this spring.

For more information, visit the Tucker Center news blog at [www.tuckercenter.org](http://www.tuckercenter.org) or on Twitter at [twitter.com/tuckercenter](https://twitter.com/tuckercenter)

**SPRING 2009 DISTINGUISHED LECTURE**

# “You Gotta Be Tough”: Challenges & Strategies of Female Coaches in Youth Sports

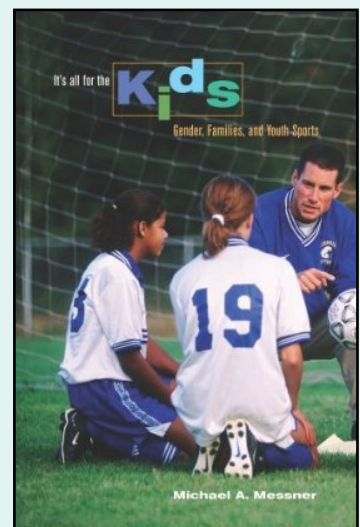
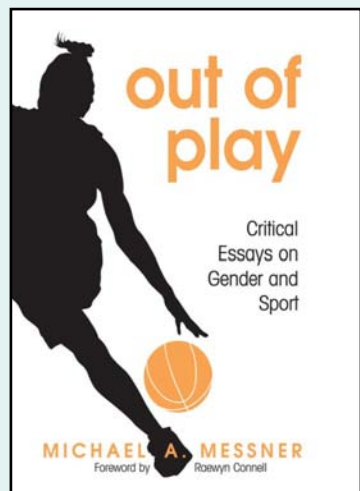
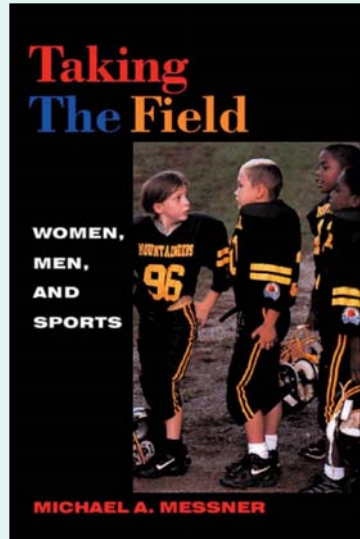
**Wednesday, April 22, 2009, 7:00-9:00 pm**  
**Hubert H. Humphrey Center**  
**University of Minnesota West Bank Campus**  
**Free and Open to the Public**



**About the Lecture:** Over the past 30 years, girls’ increasing participation in youth sports has been nothing short of revolutionary. Yet during this same time period, few women have become head coaches in youth sports and when they do volunteer, they are often relegated to the position of “team mom.” To address this “leadership gap,” sport scholar **Michael Messner** examined a Southern California community’s youth soccer, baseball, and softball leagues. His research asks the following questions: What are the barriers preventing women from coaching youth sports? What challenges are faced by the few women who do coach? What strategies do these women develop to survive—and thrive—as youth sports coaches? And what can we learn from their particular strategies and insights? Messner explores these critical questions and outlines why recruiting and supporting female coaches is so important for our families, our communities, and our children.

**About the Speaker:** Michael A. Messner is Professor of Sociology & Gender Studies at the University of Southern California and currently serves as President-elect of the Pacific Sociological Association. He is a past President of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS), and a two-time winner of the NASSS book award. He has also served as a consultant to the California Women’s Law Center related to his work on Title IX. Professor Messner is author or editor of 11 books, including *Taking the Field: Women, Men and Sports* (2002) and *Out of Play: Critical Essays on Gender and Sport* (2007). His newest book, *It’s All for the Kids: Gender, Families and Youth Sports* (2009), conducted over the years that his sons were playing youth sports, provides provocative and important insights into the current culture of youth sports and will be the focus of his presentation on April 22.

To learn more about the event, go to our Web site at [www.tuckercenter.org](http://www.tuckercenter.org).



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