

MALE PRACTICE PLAYERS ON FEMALE TEAMS

THE REGULAR USE OF MALE PRACTICE PLAYERS MAY TAKE PRACTICE AND PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES AWAY FROM FEMALE ATHLETES ON VARSITY TEAMS

- If male players are used regularly, this may be true, especially if all female players are not fully involved in practice sessions and are receiving less coaching and skills training because of such participation. However, it is recognized that a situation like rotating first and second team female players against a male practice squad may provide practice opportunities that enhance the skills of all female players while permitting them sufficient opportunity to rest between bouts of intensive play. Such an example would not be considered a situation that reduces practice opportunities for female players. Indeed, such use may reduce fatigue and lessen the risk of injury of female players.
- If male practice players are used selectively in preparation for games, emulating the plays or characteristics of players a team is about to face, and all female players on the team are involved in such competition simulations, this practice may be an important teaching tool.

THE REGULAR USE OF MALE PRACTICE PLAYERS MAY BE A TITLE IX VIOLATION

- Technically, if male players receive any benefits (training room privileges, insurance coverage, practice uniforms or equipment, etc.), they must count against a school's or college's participation numbers as male participants. Since females are still

underrepresented in most school or college athletic programs, such a practice may make it more difficult for schools to comply with Title IX because male participation numbers are inflated.

- However, if the male practice players are bona fide members of an institution's intramural or club teams or an outside team, participation against a female varsity team would be analogous to a practice game or scrimmage, and the male players would not be considered part of the athletic program of the institution. It should be noted that males and females participating in an institution's club and intramural programs are counted separately, and gender equity under Title IX is determined separately within each of these programs, which are considered different than varsity athletic opportunities.

THERE ARE SITUATIONS IN WHICH USE OF MALE PRACTICE PLAYERS MAY ENHANCE THE SKILL DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE PLAYERS

- It is good teaching and practice technique to prepare for a game by practicing against players that reflect the size and skill characteristics of upcoming opponents. Football teams carry 30-40 more players on a roster than they need just to be sure they have healthy practice players that can imitate opponents in practice situations without risking injury to regular players.
- Many coaches believe that the average squad size of some teams (i.e., a basketball team) is too small. With smaller basketball squads, if players are injured, there aren't enough players to simulate a game. Many teams will regularly use coaches or assistant coaches in these roles in such situations, which may take away instructional opportunities. Or, if coaches are of an age or health status that they cannot play without risking injury, teams may not have such opportunities without the use of outside players. Many coaches believe that all players improve their skills, both starters and second-team players, when they have the opportunity to play against male practice players who are bigger and stronger. Some coaches point out that when starters play against the second team players, they aren't as tested as when they play against male players.
- Many coaches believe that use of male practice players for women's teams with smaller squad sizes reduces fatigue problems and lowers the risk of injury in practice because players have more time to rest.

WHAT IS THE POSITION OF THE WOMEN'S SPORTS FOUNDATION ON THE USE OF MALE PRACTICE PLAYERS?

- Coaches should be allowed to create teaching situations that are designed to enable their players to improve their skills. Practicing against male or female teams that are bigger and stronger or which otherwise emulate superior players can enhance such opportunities.
- Coaches should use male or female practice players selectively in game preparation or in situations where injury of regular female players prevents game simulations due to an insufficient number of players to conduct game-like competition (i.e., 5-on-5 competition in basketball).
- Coaches should not allow the use of male practice players to reduce practice opportunities for female players on the team.
- A situation like rotating first- and second-team female players against a male practice squad can provide practice opportunities that enhance the skills of all female players while permitting them sufficient opportunity to rest between bouts of intensive play, thereby reducing the onset of fatigue and lessening the risk of injury.

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