

RACE AND SPORT

INTRODUCTION

Title IX has increased sports participation and scholarship opportunities for all female athletes, including significant numbers of women of color. However, there is still work to be done for women of color to gain equal representation and opportunities in athletics. The following position paper discusses the relationship between Title IX and discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity and addresses those steps that must be taken to further advance opportunities for women of color in sport.

I. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ADVANCE ATHLETIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR FEMALE ATHLETES OF COLOR?

POSITION: Sports participation is critical for a female of color just as it is for all females.

Sport and physical activity are effective interventions to addressing the obesity crisis, and research shows that sports and physical activity participation has an incredibly positive impact on the lives of girls, especially girls of color, who are in greater need of both opportunities and encouragement. Participation in sports can help reduce a girl's risk for obesity, diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis, breast cancer, depression, unintended pregnancy, anxiety and low self-esteem.¹ Furthermore, girls who participate in sports and physical activity are academically more successful,² more likely to graduate from high school,³ more likely to matriculate in college,⁴ and more likely to experience greater career success.⁵ According to an NCAA study, black female student-athletes in NCAA Division I are graduating at a far higher rate (59%) than black females in the general student body (42%).⁶

II. HAS TITLE IX HELPED TO ADVANCE ATHLETIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR FEMALE ATHLETES OF COLOR?

POSITION: Yes. Opportunities for female athletes of color have grown exponentially since the passage of Title IX.

Since the passage of Title IX, athletic opportunities for female athletes of color have grown at double the rate of those for white female athletes. At the college level, for female athletes of color, there was a 955% increase in participation opportunities from 1971 to 2000 (2,137 to 22,541 participants, respectively).⁷ For white female athletes, there was a 320% increase in participation (27,840 to 116,918, respectively.) Scholarship assistance for female athletes of color has increased by 820% (from \$100,000 to more than \$82 million), while white females receive over \$300 million in scholarship assistance.

III. ARE FEMALE ATHLETES OF COLOR EQUALLY REPRESENTED IN SPORTS?

POSITION: No. While there has been an obvious increase for women of color in athletics since the inception of Title IX, there is still work to be done in order to gain equal representation and opportunities in collegiate athletics.

Female athletes of color remain underrepresented compared to their enrollment in the student body, and their participation is concentrated primarily in two sports.⁸

- Female athletes of color comprise 26.2% of the female student population, yet they receive only 17.5% of the total female athletic opportunities.⁹ Comparatively, white females comprise 68.5% of the female student population and receive 75% of the total female athletic opportunities.
- African American female athletes are heavily concentrated in a limited number of sports, with close to 68% participating in two sports: basketball and track and field, compared to only 28% of white females participating in these same sports. There has been no change in this concentration phenomenon of African American female athletes in these sports from 1999-00 and 2005-06.

Additionally, women of color are underrepresented in administrative and coaching positions in collegiate athletics.¹⁰

- 17% of college athletic directors are women, yet only 1.7% (15 out of 885) are women of color.
- One third (34%) of senior administrative posts (associate and assistant athletic directors) are women, yet only 3.2 % are women of color.
- Among coaches of women's programs, 42.5% are women, yet only 4% are women of color.

While female athletes of color remain underrepresented in regard to total participation opportunities, they are actually receiving a greater proportion of scholarship dollars than their white female athlete counterparts.¹¹

- In 1999-2000, female athletes of color comprised 17.5% of all female athletes, but 19.3% of all female athlete scholarship recipients.
- Male athletes of color comprised 20.6% of all male athletes but 32.6% of all male athlete scholarship recipients.

IV. ARE MALE ATHLETES OF COLOR EQUALLY REPRESENTED IN SPORTS?

POSITION: No. The underrepresentation of athletes of color is not just an issue for female athletes. Male athletes of color have yet to achieve equal representation and opportunities in all areas of athletics.

Male athletes of color are proportionality represented compared to their enrollment in the student body, yet their participation is also concentrated primarily in two sports.¹²

- Male athletes of color comprise 22% of the male student population, and they receive 22% of the total male athletic opportunities.
- Over 60% of the total male student-athletes of color compete in two sports: basketball and football, while only 28% of the total white male student athletes compete in basketball and football. Additionally, men of color are underrepresented in administrative and coaching positions in collegiate athletics.¹³
- Among college athletic directors, 81.7% are men, yet only 6.2% are men of color.
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) of senior administrative posts (associate and assistant athletic directors) are men, yet only 6.1 % are men of color.

- Just 8.8% of the coaches of men's athletic programs are men of color. While male athletes of color are proportionally represented in regard to total participation opportunities, they are actually receiving a greater proportion of scholarship dollars than their white athlete counterparts.¹⁴
- Male athletes of color comprised 20.6% of all male athletes but 32.6% of all male athlete scholarship recipients.

V. CAN TITLE IX BE USED TO ADVANCE ATHLETIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN OF COLOR?

POSITION: Yes. Title IX can be a vehicle to advance opportunities for women of color in sports.

Title IX prohibits schools from discrimination on the basis of sex, not race. Title VI prohibits schools from discrimination on the basis of race. Therefore, legal challenges to practices of race discrimination in sport must be brought under Title VI, not Title IX. While Title IX does not provide legal protection on the basis of race, it can be part of the solution to creating more opportunities for women of color as a means to combating sex discrimination. Overall, women and girls continue to be underrepresented in athletics compared to men and boys; girls receive 1.3 million fewer participation opportunities than boys at the high school level and 86,305 fewer opportunities in college. As schools add more programs to address this gender participation gap, schools should give priority to adding those sports and creating opportunities that will also increase the representation of women of color. For example, the New York City schools recently added double dutch as a varsity sport. As a sport with high participation rates for athletes of color, particularly among girls, this addition will help expand opportunities for girls and improve diversity in competitive athletics.

However, as the data above demonstrates, the underrepresentation of athletes of color in sport cuts across sex lines in that it affects both men and women. Title IX cannot address the issue of why more people of color are not accessing the entire range of sports opportunities offered in schools and colleges. Thus, a broader range of issues that extend beyond sex discrimination under Title IX must be addressed to resolve the under representation of athletes of color in most school-sponsored and Olympic sports.

VI. WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC BARRIERS TO ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION THAT WOMEN OF COLOR FACE?

POSITION: Economic limitations, societal stereotyping, cultural barriers and the lack of baseline data all contribute to the underrepresentation of women of color in sport.

1. ECONOMIC CHALLENGES: Historically, the clustering of males and females of color into certain sports and not others has been highly influenced by economic inequalities and institutional disadvantages that exist in many communities of color and impoverished school districts. People of color are overrepresented in lower socioeconomic groups. Economic inequalities present challenges to sports participation, such as adolescents having additional responsibilities at home like the care for younger siblings, needing to get part-time jobs and having limited transportation options, and any cost to participants being a prohibitive factor for participation. These challenges often result in the underrepresentation of people of color in sports that are more costly to participate in or which require access to facilities that are not located within easy reach of lower socio-economic populations.

Additionally, many of the sports in which African-American athletes are most prevalent are sports that are already sponsored by NCAA member institutions. Of the 10 sports that contain the largest shares of athletes of color, five (basketball, volleyball, cross country, softball and tennis) are offered by more than 835 of NCAA institutions. Two other sports, (indoor and outdoor track and field) are sponsored by 59-68% of NCAA schools.¹⁵ Thus, there is only a very limited opportunity for schools to expand the participation opportunities of persons of color by adding sports in which they are over represented. Most schools already sponsor these sports.

2. GENDER STEREOTYPING: Women of color face additional challenges in overcoming cultural stereotypes that sports participation contradicts the accepted gender roles for women in their communities. These stereotypes can manifest themselves in a lack of family support or encouragement for women of color to participate in sports.

3. CULTURAL BARRIERS: Women of color face cultural challenges that also present barriers to sports participation such as language, religious traditions prohibiting bodily contact or required covering, as is the case for some Muslim women.

4. BASELINE DATA: Comprehensive baseline data about the participation of athletes of color at the grassroots level is non-existent. Contrary to their requirements under the 1978 Amateur Sports Act (ASA), all National Governing Bodies (NGBs) are not reporting the race of their athletes, coaches and administrative staff.

VII. WHAT MUST BE DONE TO ADVANCE ATHLETIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND MEN OF COLOR?

POSITION: The current state of athletes of color in sport results from a combination of factors, and thus the solution must attack all levels and areas of sport from grassroots participation to elite participation, from recruiting and hiring to the media.

1. GRASSROOTS PARTICIPATION: First, a concerted effort is needed to create opportunities for boys and girls of color at the grassroots levels in the sports in which they are underrepresented. With the exception of track, basketball and football, where athletes of color are overrepresented, athletes of color are not participating at the same rates as white athletes. Participation starts in grassroots programs. How can individuals be expected to participate in these sports at the collegiate level if they never had the opportunity to learn the sport, train under good coaches or access competitive experiences at the youth or high school level?

The United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and NGBs must act to fulfill their obligation under the Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act (ASA), which promised a commitment to grassroots sport for everyone and efforts to increase opportunities for females, males and females of color and individuals with disabilities. NGBs must create programs or sensitize the leaders of existing programs to make affirmative efforts to recruit and include athletes of color at the grassroots level in all sports. Further, the school community must recognize its role in the encouragement of early sports participation in a broad variety of sports. Middle school and high school teams should affirmatively recruit athletes of color to participate in sports in which they are underrepresented.

2. BASELINE DATA: Baseline data on the participation of athletes of color in sports must be acquired and maintained so we can track progress and identify those sports in which we need to work harder to increase opportunities. NGBs must comply with their requirements under the ASA to report the race of their athletes, coaches and administrative staff. The High School

Sports Information Act should be passed, which will require high schools to report the participation of their athletes by race and gender. This data must be gathered, a report card issued and media utilized to disseminate the data to ignite public concern and pressure for change. Discrimination cannot be allowed to hide in the closet and go unnoticed, uncriticized and unaddressed.

3. FINANCIAL INCENTIVES: The Women's Sports Foundation, NCAA, USOC and other organizations that give grants should consider the adoption of policies that require grant applicants to have programs in place to address issue of racism in sport as a condition of eligibility for funding. In addition, these organizations should focus their youth scholarship programs and grants on programs that will create opportunities for athletes of color. Urban centers need to work with businesses to create sponsorship opportunities for girls and women of color to participate in sports that are expensive, such as figure skating, ice hockey, gymnastics, golf, tennis and so forth. Such efforts will remove socio-economic class barriers to their sports participation and are necessary because individuals of color are overrepresented in lower socio-economic classes.

4. RECRUITMENT IN EMPLOYMENT COACHES AND STAFF: Schools and athletic associations must improve their efforts to recruit and retain people of color as coaches, administrators and staff. In addition, education and sport leaders should insist that coach and administrative staff employment search committees and nominating committees for governance boards include persons of color and produce more diverse candidate pools that include greater numbers of individuals of color. Raising organizational sensitivity to issues related to individuals of color begins with those in leadership positions.

5. PUBLIC EDUCATION AND IMAGERY: Sports organizations should be asked to self-examine publications and promotional materials to ensure that athletes of color are included as "faces" of the sport organization. The role-model images of athletes of color must be celebrated in the media in order to inspire children of color to follow in their footsteps.

6. MEDIA REPRESENTATION: Currently, the sports in which most athletes of color are seen are basketball, football and track and field. The marginalization of athletes of color may be one of the reasons that people of color are not entering into certain sports. Therefore, those who control the media need to make a conscious effort to show athletes of color participating and succeeding in all sports. We, as media consumers, need to demand that athletes of color are visible on television, online and in print.

7. STANDING COMMITTEES: Every coaches and sport organization should have a standing committee or interest group responsible for creating a plan and programs that increases the participation of athletes of color in sport as well as coaching and administrative opportunities for employees and volunteers of color. These groups should track organizational progress towards goals.

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Endnotes

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- ⁹ Athletes of color includes African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Americans.
- ¹⁰ 2003-04 Race and Gender Demographics of NCAA Member Institutions' Athletics Personnel Report.
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