



College Sports

Tennis legend Billie Jean King was honored by the Peabody Award in New York City on Tuesday, June 4, 2007. The award recognizes distinguished achievement in public service by radio, television, motion picture, producing organizations and other media.

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King gives schools 'A' for gender equity

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NEW YORK — For Billie Jean King, opportunity means everything. On Tuesday, she honored Purdue, Tennessee Tech, Washington State and SUNY at Buffalo for making gender equity a priority. The four schools were winners of the Women's Sports Foundation's inaugural "Opportunity Awards," created in honor of the 35th anniversary of Title IX.

"We are still underrepresented, but we're getting there," said King, founder of the Women's Sports Foundation. "We know it's invaluable to be in sports."

Each school earned an "A" in a new study entitled "Who's Playing College Sports?" that addresses college sports participation levels from 1995-2005.

Compiled by Dr. John Cheslock of the University of Arizona in conjunction with the Women's Sports Foundation, the report looked at Division I, II, III and all six major college athletic organizations — NCAA, NAIA, NCCAA, NJCAA, COA, NWAAC.

The 'A' schools had a gap of two points or less in the percentage of female athletes to the female student body. An 'F' required a gap of 22 points or more.

"Gender equity is a part of who we are," said SUNY-Buffalo athletic director Warde Manuel, whose eighth-grade daughter, Emma, is a tennis player and wants to be a pediatrician. "Emma drives my determination to continue to provide equitable opportunities."

A sampling of grades at prominent schools: Arizona (B+), Connecticut (B+), Colorado (B), Florida (B-), Georgia (C+), Iowa (C+), Kansas (B+), Michigan (A), Minnesota (B+), North Carolina (C-), Notre Dame (A-), Oregon (C), Rutgers (C+), Stanford (A), Temple (B-), Tennessee (B+), Texas (B+), USC (B+), Washington (A-) and Wisconsin (A-).

The NCAA earned a C.

The study indicated women's sports made steady gains in the mid-1990s, but those increases have stalled since 2001. As of 2004-05, women comprised 56 percent of undergraduates but only 42 percent of athletes. According to the report, an additional 151,000 female athletes would need to be added to reach 56 percent.

To comply with Title IX, a school can show proportionality of female athletes to female students on campus; a history of increasing sports for women; or prove it has met the interest and ability of the underrepresented group.

Some 87 percent of schools did not achieve proportionality, according to the report, and 75 percent did not increase the number of women's sports since 2001.

Soccer was the fastest growing sport among women by more than 4,000 participants, followed by rowing (2,779), softball (2,203), swimming (1,630) and lacrosse (1,550).

Division II had the largest increase in women's teams, while Division I-A and I-AA had the lowest from 2001-2005.

"A lot of people keep thinking and reading where men's sports have been decreased, and that's not true," King said. "People say 'What happened to my wrestling, what happened to my tennis program?' Well, things have shifted. It's the decision of the educational institution where they want to spend their money."

Cheslock pointed out almost two-thirds (16 of 25) men's sports had gains between 2001-2005.

"It is true that men's gymnastics, tennis and wrestling have declined over time," he said. "It's also true, that in terms of participation, men's baseball, football, lacrosse and soccer have increased by much larger amounts, meaning there's been an overall increase."

While men's participation decreased slightly for Division I-A, it remained mostly the same in Division I-AA and Division I-AAA and grew in Division II and III.

"The only subset that experienced declines in men's sports was Division I-A, the richest institutions, 100 out of almost 2,000 schools," said Donna Lopiano, CEO of the Women's Sports Foundation. "It leads you to believe it's (caused by) anything but Title IX. It's money."

Eric Pearson, chairman of the College Sports Council (CSC), disagreed, saying his group's data suggests men's teams and numbers have declined.

"To us, this report card proves all they care about is gender quotas and provides a hit list for litigation," Pearson said. "It focuses on one way of compliance — proportionality. There are three ways of complying, why focus on one?"

But King said the CSC's data focuses too much on one, too — wrestling.

"They'll take one program that's been dropped, but they don't give the whole picture," she said.

King contends female athletes remain significantly underrepresented in college sports and Title IX should not be weakened.

"Young people are the future," she said. "Young girls are still underserved. We need to keep working on girls having equal opportunity."

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