

# Sports

Sports Editor Ed Piwowarczyk

It's been a long time coming

## Women athletes make inroads to locker rooms

By MARILYN SMITH

The locker room, with its chauvinist jokes and jock straps, will be the last to collapse. But already women are making inroads in the long male dominated realm of sports and their progress marks a radical change for all athletes.

In four short years, 14 to 16 year-old girl swimmers have trained to a level where they're smashing world records in international competition. In the high schools, young girls have raised the calibre of their play to a standard that three years ago was typical of university women's teams. And in the communities, little girls are flocking to hockey arenas and baseball diamonds as fast as leagues are set up.

### NEW YORK OPENS TEAMS

These developments are reverberations of the women's movement. A recent test case in New York has opened up all school teams in that state to both boys and girls who succeed in the try-outs. But for little girls and women in sport, the battle will be longer and harder than battles fought in other male dominated areas.

For sport perpetrates the "male image" more pervasively than any other function in our society. The vanquishing of a weaker opponent by aggression, brute strength, win-at-all costs and cut-throat competition are nowhere more sanctioned than on the playing field of professional sports. No other societal function feeds the notion of male dominance as efficiently as sport. And no other institution, carried to the ends of professional leagues, so effectively exploits this image to create a product that is marketed and consumed by a spectator public made sedentary by the intimidating myth of the virile male super-athlete.

Along the way, sport has become the preserve of a few super stars capable of competing because there is only one acceptable standard. The rest of us sit in the stands or in front of our TV's, intimidated and fearing to play. Worse still, a mass body of the population is turned away from physical exercise and sport by demands of a value system that makes anything less than a star performance unacceptable and second-rate.

### SPORTS NOT "LADYLIKE"

For women, an anti-sport socialization is the major stumbling block. Little girls get dolls and skipping ropes, little boys have bats, balls and hockey sticks thrown in their cradles. A Victorian England government pamphlet warned women that sport would make them flat-chested and impair their ability to reproduce. In some high schools still, women aren't allowed a broad jump event because "it isn't good for them". Young girls are left with the impression that their anatomy will somehow fall apart if they undergo the stress and physical exertion necessary to be a good athlete. Worse yet, they are told that the serious pursuit of their sport will deprive them of the social life, the parties and boyfriends so important to any young girl's existence.

Although there is very little research on women in sport, the available studies, notably by Dorothy Harris, a physical educator at Penn State University, reveal that women can easily bear the stress of athletic training and get the same positive benefits as her male counterpart. Harris said that athletes, both male and female, tend to be achievement-oriented, tough-minded, enduring, and competitive.

Yet all these attributes are seen by our society as the prerogative of the male — a woman who has these things in her character is viewed as "unfeminine". Scholars have scoffed at the notion that women are passive by nature. The link is cultural, as evidenced by comparative studies, both geographic and historic, of different societies.

### TOM-BOY GIRLS

"In North America, a boy's involvement in sport reinforces what he's expected to become, but it's a negative association for the female who's followed the same pattern," Harris says. She gave the example of fourth-

grade "tom-boy" girls who exhibited high levels of anxiety because they enjoyed their role, but felt the stigma of not "growing out" of their tom-boy stage into their expected female roles. Conversely, for the little boy who doesn't exhibit he-man sports enthusiasm, there is also anxiety.

For the female athlete who does brave the negative labels, the long anti-social hours spent training and conditioning, the rewards do not compare with her male counterpart who makes the same sacrifices. For the women, facilities, coaching and training techniques are inferior. Her opportunities are narrower, and once she leaves school, there are few industrial leagues or other structures that allow her to play sports for enjoyment alone.

At York, for instance, in 1969, women had seven varsity teams. This year there are 12, but the budget for women is \$23,000 and for the men, \$58,800. York women students complain that the only training room is located in the men's shower room and that there are no women trainers to work on women's athletic injuries.

Mary Lyons, the women's athletic director, says that women trainers will be brought into the student training course next year, but she says that the men get more money because they have more teams. "The question is not one of equal funding, but one of fairness — are any women being refused," Lyons says.

Marion Ley, a member of the Canadian swim team in the 1968 Olympics, talked about her training experiences recently in a Toronto conference on women. The whole team, including super-fish Elaine Tanner performed far below their expected level. It's only now, she said, five years later, that she is beginning to get over a guilt of "failing her country" and was able to analyse some of the reasons for their lack-lustre performance.

### "JUST SWIM YOUR BEST"

She described a training schedule in a Banff hotel pool — kidney shaped and shorter than competition size and directions from coaches to "just swim your best". There was no preparation for the high Mexican altitudes, disastrous to an athlete not conditioned for that difference, and finally, politics and not ability was the basis for the selection of the team's coaches.

Ley described how the women's chaperone came into their room one night as the women were exercising and admonished them not to "overdo it".

"We were all athletes who had been training and conditioning for years to get to that point. We had a serious, professional approach to our sport and knew what we could and couldn't do with our bodies. It was just ridiculous," Ley said.

Her experience is an example of the frustration women in sport must undergo. Even for the few who overcome a deficit socialization and the other obstacles to pursue sport, her achievement is still accorded a second rating. The woman athlete is still regarded as the curtain-raiser for the men's events.

### PARITY PERFORMANCE

Whether or not women will ever achieve parity of performance with male athletes is a moot point. Some probably will. Women are breaking records set by men 20 years ago, but the catch-up process has a long way to go. But most women athletes will never achieve those standards, just as most male athletes can never match such performances.

The entry of women in sport, if it does not duplicate the deficiencies of the male athletic system, has potential to revolutionize sport. The present star system doesn't accommodate anyone but the super-achievers. Just as wrestling and boxing recognize body and weight differences and accord high ratings nonetheless for achievement within many standards, so should all sports accommodate varying performances. The acceptance of women in athletics means a re-humanizing of sport so that its benefits as an activity can be shared beyond the ranks of the super-stars.



York's Debbie Van Kiekelbelt, a track star of both national and international stature, is a prime example of the success and problems facing the modern female athlete. A few women have met with recognition but still must contend with male prejudice.

## Competitive equality possible in fencing

By FRED GRANEK

Fencing is one sport in which neither strength nor size is excessively important. Speed, agility, stamina and coordination are the most significant physical requirements offsetting the other two.

Good fencing reduces itself to good headwork. It is a game of traps and countertraps; of strategy and execution; of the deduction of intent and the induction of desired response. Aggression also plays an important role; but the myth of men being more aggressive than women is just that, a myth.

Thus fencing is one sport in which men and women can compete as equals. With all of the training requisites being constant, two fencers of similar skills, one male and one female, should on the average have an equal number of victories against each other.

This, however, is very difficult to prove. In North America, women only compete in foil, but not in sabre or epee. Aside from such paired competitions as the "He and She", in which male-female teams compete against each other, men and women meet in foil and only in practice.

There are also psychological problems. Men fencing women ease up (or at least say

they do) out of sexual deference. Women, fencing men, usually seize up and get tense. The only person who could make a competent analysis of the relative skills of male and female fencers is a fencing master who teaches and trains both.

One of the top masters (who wishes to remain anonymous) opined, that, on the basis of his observation of practice sessions in which both participants got annoyed with each other and started fencing all out, the top female fencers were the equal of the top men. He also said that at the university level, aside from the men's teams from York and the University of Toronto, the OWIAA foilists were as competent (and as incompetent) as their OUA counterparts.

A few weeks ago, CITY TV filmed two foil bouts, between last year's Canadian National's Women's Champion Donna Henney and the top male foilist on the York squad. She won both bouts, 5 hits to 1. The score may or may not have been a valid standard of their respective skills, but the outcome was. The woman had about eight years more experience than her opponent.

In essence, in the sport of fencing, sexual distinction is completely unnecessary.