

Overtime

Reclaiming the language

By LISA TIMPF

TEAMS "DUMP", "DEFEAT", "drop", and "destroy" their opponents. Volleyball players register "kills" and hockey players "fire" goals.

Sports writers, this one included, too easily slip into a formula format of writing. It wasn't until a friend brought it to my attention, however, that I realized that not only do I slip into "formula writing", but I also, perhaps inappropriately, apply the same style of writing to women's as to men's sport.

Sport has been described by sport sociologist Ann Hall as exemplifying "*partriarchal power relationships in microcosm*". This is reflected, in many cases, in the words used to describe sport.

Perhaps writers and broadcasters, in describing women's sport, should attempt to transcend not only the "jock talk" jargon, but also transcend the conventional way of writing about, and perceiving, women's sport.

One way of attempting to resolve the problem is to examine it in the context of feminist theory.

Susan Birrell, another sport sociologist, suggests that there are three ways of seeing women's involvement in sport.

One is the *conservative* approach, which suggests that men and women are fundamentally different, and that sport is a male domain. Therefore, women should not participate in sport.

Liberal feminist theory suggests that sex differences are the result of culture. The fact that women have not been involved in sport to the same degree as men is a reflection of sexual inequality in other aspects of society. In sport, as in other areas, women should strive for equality with men, within the institutional framework currently established.

The *radical feminist* perspective suggests that the value system of sport, like other male-created and dominated systems, should itself be questioned, and that women should attempt to re-define sport for themselves. Within this ideology, sport for women should emphasize process over product. Equal value would be placed on competition and cooperation, while emphasis on aggressiveness and specialization would be decreased.

Even some of the men involved in sport are arguing that this is the direction sport for both males and females should take. However, the majority tend to support the present system which places a high premium on aggressiveness and competitiveness at the expense of other values.

A feminist perspective can be applied to sports writing, chal-

lenging the traditional portrayal of sport in the media.

The conservative journalistic approach to women's sport is best illustrated by the women's golf and tennis coverage seen in the 1970's in which a high degree of emphasis was placed on the physical attractiveness and clothing styles of the athletes. This has been referred to as the "apologetic" approach toward women in sport—if women do participate, their femininity must be correspondingly re-emphasized to negate fears that they will become "masculinized".

A liberal feminist perspective would suggest that sport coverage for women's events should be increased within the conventional media coverage framework. The radical feminist perspective, on the other hand, might call for a different way of seeing and portraying women's sport. This new way of seeing would, among other things, place a higher emphasis on the importance of the experiences of the female athletes themselves in interpreting the meaning of sport for women.

As Birrell noted, "*To some extent, we are who others allow us to be. Within integrated structures, women are who men allow us to be*". This has been the case for the female athlete—largely interpreted for women by men, rather than having women attempt to define and express for themselves what their sport experience means. Hall argues that there are three levels of social reality: *social fact*, the structure of society; *social definition*, which is the "mythology" surrounding these structures; and *social behaviour*, which is how people behave within these structures and why they behave as they do.

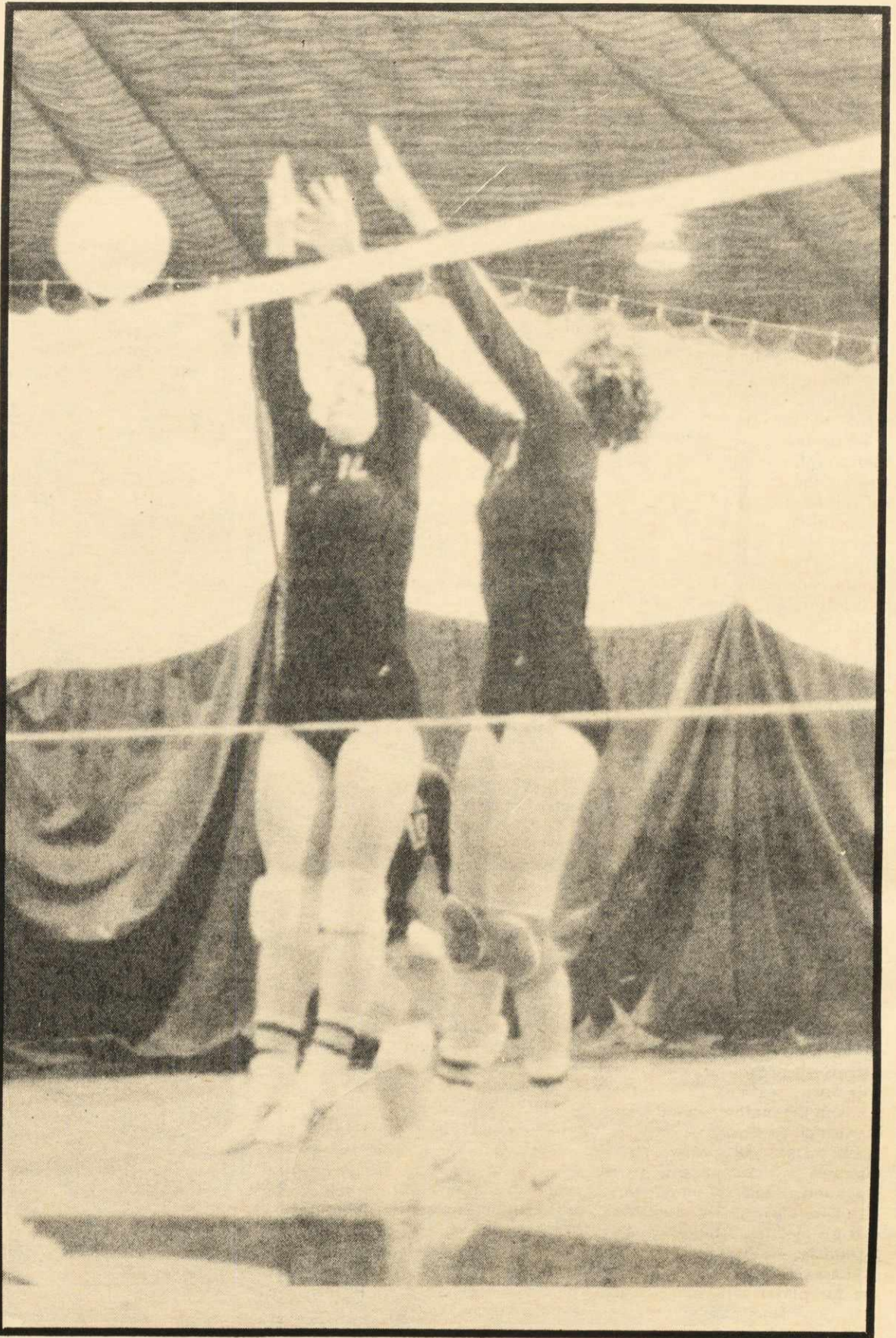
Many patriarchal interpretations of sport have stopped after the second level, making the positivist assumption that only one social reality, and one way of interpreting this reality, exists. Feminist theorists Stanley and Wise, however, argue that each of us creates our own reality by how we interpret our experiences.

For the most part, women's sport experiences have been excluded from shaping the traditions of sport.

Is it valid to look for new ways of seeing and describing women in sport? Certainly there is room for an attempt to provide some creative new ways of writing.

Women who take the radical feminist perspective must create their own alternatives by reclaiming the language, redefining the frameworks for women's sport, and placing a value on their experiences in sport.

As sociologist Oakley noted, "*a way of seeing can also be a way of not seeing.*"



Dal women's and men's volleyball Tigers finished eighth and fourth respectively at the CIAU Championships at York University last weekend. Photo: Marcus Snowden, Dal Photo.

Volleyball Tigers return from Nationals

DAL TIGERS FELL SHORT IN their bid for a medal at the CIAU Men's Volleyball championships held at York University last weekend, losing to the University of Toronto in the bronze medal match 5-15, 13-15, and 8-15.

The Tigers had advanced to the semifinal round by upsetting third-ranked University of Victoria 10-15, 15-3, 15-6, and 15-10. The sixth-ranked Tigers then lost to the second-ranked University of Saskatchewan Huskies 11-15, 5-15, and 4-15.

Dalhousie's Jamie Fraser received the second All-Canadian selection of his career and was named Tournament All-Star for his performance in the championships. The third-year Dalhousie medical student, who plays the hitter position for the Tigers, recorded 51 kills, 8 blocks and 14 digs at the CIAU finals.

Fraser was named an AUA All-Star this season for the third time in his career.

In women's volleyball action, the Dal Tigers finished eighth at

the CIAU's. The number one ranked Winnipeg Lady Wesmen captured the gold medal, with Calgary placing second and York, third.

Tournament All-Stars were Donna Kastelic (York), Reta Lichtenegger (Calgary), Laura Barber (Saskatchewan), Christina Nezc (Calgary), Bonnie McCrae (Calgary) and Jamie Hancharyk (Winnipeg). Tournament MVP was Ruth Klassen-Burchuk (Winnipeg).