

# Women athletes, not "lady jocks"

by Anita Diamant

Will sports co-opt American women? Will football and field hockey make women aggressive and competitive, concerned with proving themselves at the expense of others? Is athletics just another trap that will eventually sell out the real strength of the women's movement?

Sports has been identified with machismo for so long that the increased interest in athletic activity by women looks suspiciously reactionary to many leftist men, and even some women.

But this fear shows a basic insensitivity to the physical-emotional handicap of growing up female, and blindness to the liberatory potential in sports for women, and for all people.

Girls grow up watching themselves. Their bodies are on display from baby-cuteness on and their maturity as women is measured by the degree to which they can identify their own bodies as mysterious, alien and finally, sexual.

I remember being told never to cross my legs at the knees. When I find myself sitting in public places, hands folded on lap, ankles crossed, I recall being told how to look (pose) for a grade-school pageant.

It was, even then, my responsibility to oversee my limbs, my hair, my smile. I was a "picture," a "sight," a "vision." But since I was the creator of my own image, I was split in two: the surveyor and the surveyed.

It's hard to run, jump and play ball if you're thinking about appearance rather than action. To enjoy yourself in athletics, you have to let go of a part of self-consciousness, take risks and challenges without visualizing yourself.

But a "feminine" body-image is based on turning the self into an object—an object valued for its appearance. Growing up feminine can link intrinsically pleasurable physical activities with shameful, painful "exhibitions." Why is there any amazement at the extent of female frigidity in this culture?

Getting rid of the split-image of a woman's self is a rough process. It requires replacing the Man who lives in your head (and judges for the Miss America contest) with a

woman. This feat is not accomplished when you learn to understand the emotional, economic and physical oppression of all women. It's something you have to learn and unlearn with your body.

In spite of growing peer support and the media sell of the "lady jock," there's still more to stop women's participation in athletics than to encourage it. For example, girls were (and still are) imbued with a strong fear of injury. When I approached my mother with bloody knees, she told me, "If you don't want to get hurt, don't run." Who wants to get hurt? Professional sports reinforce that identification of pain and action and applaud it: He plays hurt. He's got guts.

Add to this the universal fear of failure and ineptitude, and the old fear of not looking good. Taking to the street, to the courts and fields "invites" harassment and ridicule. (Am I asking for it? Should I respond or does that "invite" more flak . . . or worse?)

But in overcoming this list of fears and taking to sports, women have a chance to reclaim the pleasure of their own bodies, to forget themselves-as-objects, to demand their rights as athletes.

Fifteen years after swearing it off, I'm learning how to run. It's a slow process but I never felt better or more in control of my life. Mirrors and scales don't hold me in terror anymore because I have a new knowledge of my body. It comes from the inside.

Today, girls are allowed, if not encouraged, to try everything from soccer to skateboarding. The presence of world-class women competitors, of Title IX, and even of corporate supporters of women's athletics, are bound to have far-reaching effects on the women of the future.

Many women are aware of and worried about the pitfalls of sports, especially of competition. But the problems and dangers involved in changing the face of sports, in seizing this special kind of self-control, do not outweigh the rewards. Reprinted from *In These Times*.

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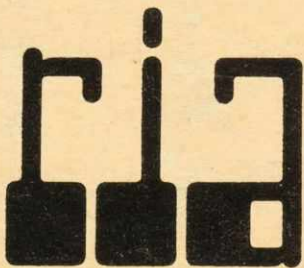
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## Swimmers place well at nationals

Top Dalhousie swimmer Geoff Camp confirmed his selection as A.U.A.A. Swimmer of the Year with some fine performances at the 1978 CIAU Swimming Championships held at the Etobicoke Olympium in Toronto, March 2-4. Camp, a triple AUA title holder placed in the top six in the nation in both the 200 and 400 individual medley events and placed ninth in the 200 metre backstroke setting a new AUA record of 2:16.34.

Team Captain Richard Hall-Jones established a new AUA record in the men's 200 metre freestyle with a 2:01.73 clocking. Steve Megaffin also went under the old mark with a continued on page 15