



Unequal treatment for college women's basketball players has deep historical roots

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Fight for equity in women's college sports has been a decadeslong battle. Aaron J. Thornton/Getty Images

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When college women basketball players began to post [photos](#) and [videos](#) of how they got [less food](#), [less accurate COVID-19 testing](#) and [less exercise equipment](#) in the [NCAA March Madness Tournament bubbles](#) than their male counterparts, a sense of collective outrage ensued.

U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, a Democrat from New York, tweeted out: "This is outrageous – but it's not just about the weight room. From their facilities, to their food, to giving them less reliable COVID tests, the women's NCAA basketball teams are being shortchanged."

Kirsten Gillibrand @SenGillibrand · Follow

This is outrageous — but it's not just about the weight room. From their facilities, to their food, to giving them less reliable COVID tests, the women's NCAA basketball teams are being shortchanged.

Give women athletes the respect they deserve.

SEDONA @sedonaprince_ Let me put it on Twitter too cause this needs the attention



6:10 PM · Mar 19, 2021
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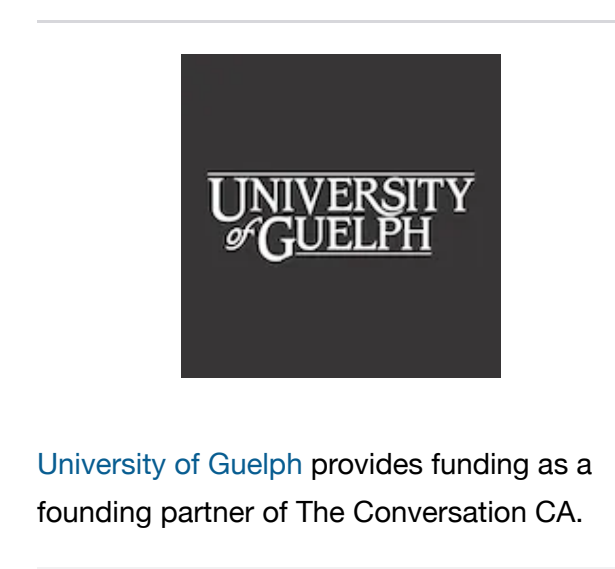
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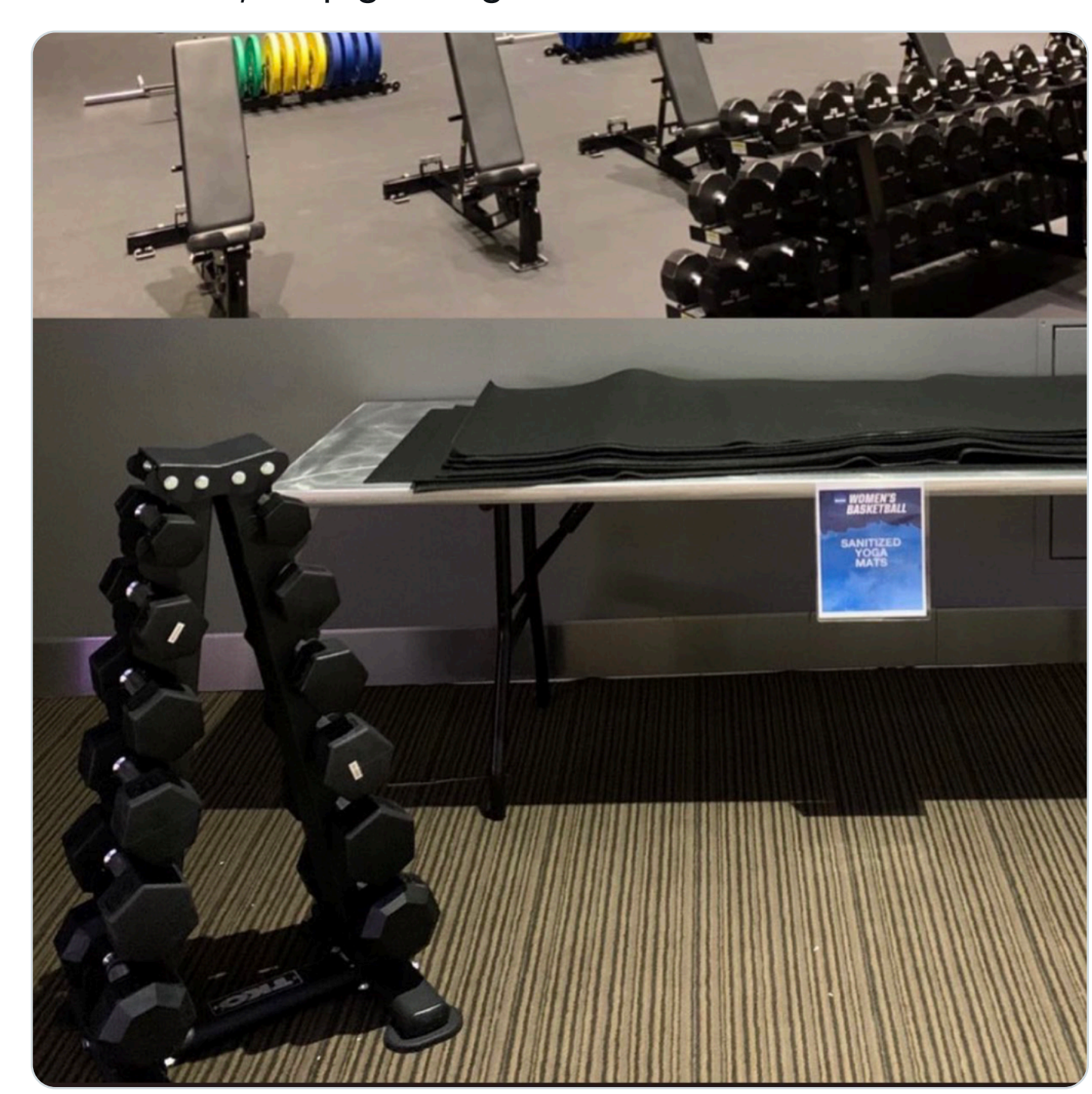
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Sabrina Ionescu, the star Women's National Basketball Association player with the New York Liberty, [added](#): "Women's @NCAA bubble weight room vs Men's weight room... thought this was a joke. WTF is this!?! To all the women playing in the @marchmadness tournament, keep grinding!"

Sabrina Ionescu @sabrina_j20 · Follow

Women's @NCAA bubble weight room vs Men's weight room... thought this was a joke. WTF is this!?! To all the women playing in the @marchmadness tournament, keep grinding!

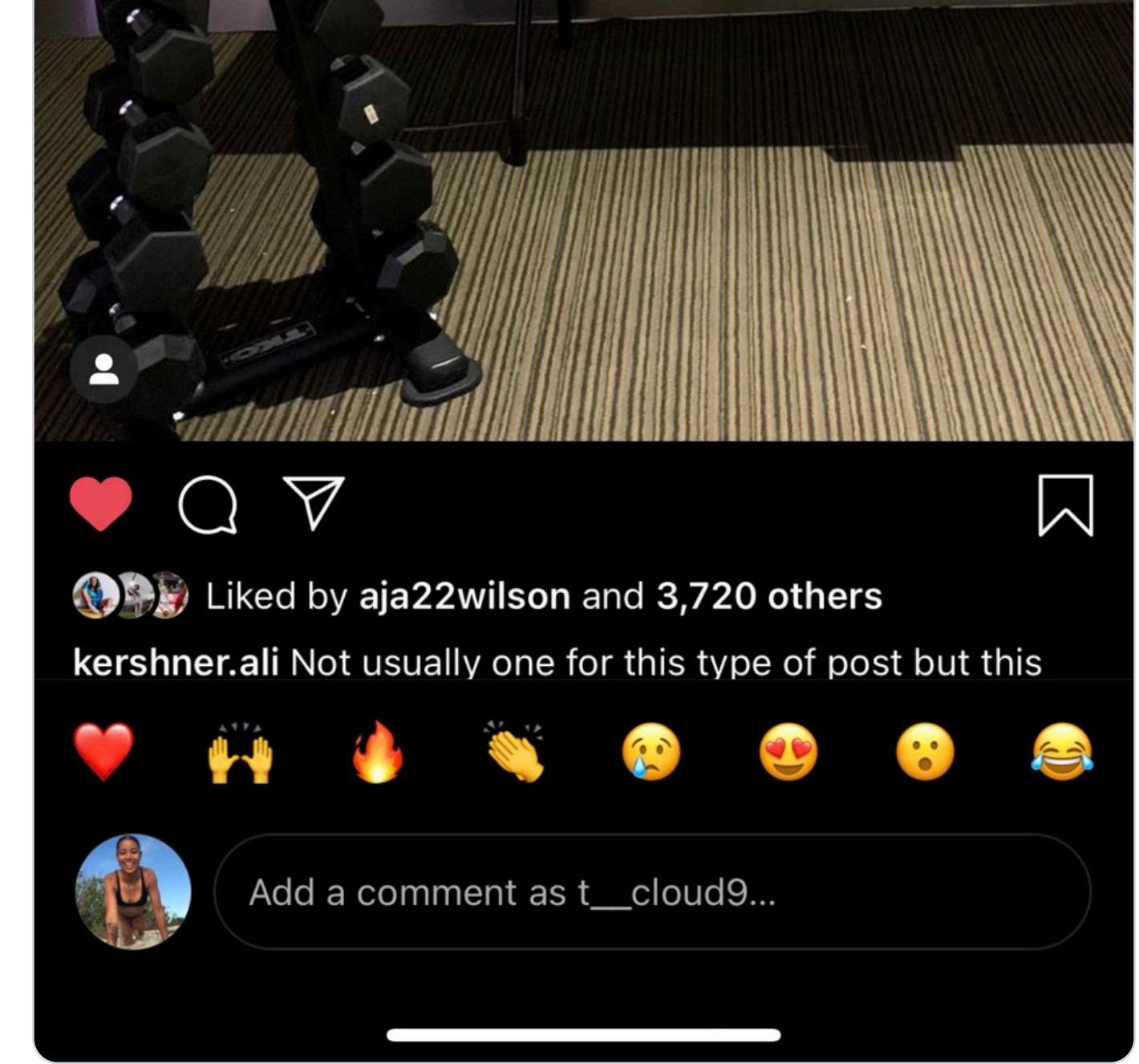


5:18 PM · Mar 18, 2021
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Natasha Cloud, a WNBA star with the Washington Mystics, was [equally outraged](#), having tweeted: "Don't worry @ncaawbb @marchmadness @NCAA we see what and who yall value. Title 9."

Natasha Cloud @T_Cloud4 · Follow

Don't worry @ncaawbb @marchmadness @NCAA we see what and who yall value. Title 9 🙄🙄🙄



2:51 PM · Mar 18, 2021
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Dan Gavitt, NCAA vice president for basketball, has [apologized](#), but [several college women's basketball coaches say](#) the situation is part of a long-standing pattern of unfair treatment for college women athletes.

As [researchers](#) who study [inequities in college sports](#) and [Title IX](#) – the federal law meant to, among other things, curtail such inequities – we, too, believe that the March Madness debacle is just the latest episode in what at times seems like an entrenched culture of [unfair treatment for women athletes](#).

As [Muffet McGraw](#), former University of Notre Dame women's head basketball coach, [tweeted](#), "the fact that there's a huge disparity between men's and women's sports is hardly breaking news. We have been fighting this battle for years."

Indeed, the fight for equity throughout women's sport has been a battle for [decades](#).

A long-standing problem

Previous research demonstrates how the NCAA leadership routinely provides women with fewer resources. [Men's sports, athletes, coaches and events have always been the association's priority](#).

For starters, female athletes were not provided consistent opportunities to participate in sports until the passage of [Title IX in 1972](#). Among other things, the [landmark legislation](#) prohibits sex-based discrimination in extracurricular activities within schools that receive federal funding. Once women did receive competitive opportunities, they still faced [discrimination, sexism and stereotyping](#).

[Men outnumber women throughout sport leadership positions](#). Consequently, the decision-making processes are mostly controlled by men. [Walter Beyers](#), the [first executive director](#) of the NCAA, [fought to get intercollegiate sports exempted](#) from Title IX regulation.

"The NCAA became concerned by what it perceived to be the potential weakening of its position as the dominant and controlling body of intercollegiate athletics," Richard C. Bell wrote in article about the [history of women in college sports](#) before Title IX. "If Title IX was to apply to intercollegiate sports at all levels and women were to be elevated to a status equal to the men, its financial assets and political power were threatened."

Legal questions

Across social media, some questioned why Title IX does not apply to the NCAA and the March Madness disparities.

However, in 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court held in [NCAA v. Smith](#) that the NCAA was not subject to Title IX because it was not a direct recipient of federal assistance. Title IX applies only to educational programs that receive federal financial assistance. As the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, writing for the unanimous court, stated in the decision: "Dues payments from recipients of federal funds ... do not suffice to render the dues recipient subject to Title IX."

While the NCAA is not subject to Title IX, that does not let schools [off the hook](#). Therefore, once schools were made aware of the disparities between amenities and services provided by the NCAA, they had a legal obligation to determine whether this disparity was justified under [Title IX](#).

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In fact, institutions and teams were made aware of the facility and equipment disparities within the women's bubble [via the NCAA Tournament Manual](#). The NCAA did not plan to provide the women's teams with a full weight room until the Sweet Sixteen, which is [set to take place on March 27](#).

University of Georgia women's basketball head coach Joni Taylor confirmed this in her [statement to the media](#) revealing that their staff had to make their own arrangements for workouts and meals before arriving at the tournament bubble.

So while the disparities for female athletes are not new or shocking, perhaps, in the words of Dawn Staley, a storied player and the current coach of the 2017 NCAA Women's Basketball Champions South Carolina, it is time ["for the NCAA to reevaluate the value they place on women."](#)

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Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) Title IX NCAA College basketball
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