



Myth-busting around Title IX will empower college athletes to their own equity

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Myth: Funding for men's and women's sports is required to be equal under the legislation. Specifically, many people believe equal money should be spent on men's and women's programming.

Truth: That's not the fight. The fight is for equity because women's sports has been disadvantaged for years, so providing the same amount of funding as men's sports keeps women's programs at a disadvantage.

As we recognize the golden anniversary of this important civil rights act, recognize that many misconceptions still exist.

Many people in society misinterpret Title IX as "us against them," and blame the act for men's sports teams being cut at higher rates. This is also not true. Revenue-generating sports like football and men's basketball are the true cause of these cuts.

Understand: Title IX is an educational amendment that seeks to provide equity for all, not just women or athletes. The Office of Civil Rights, which regulates Title IX, allows each institution the flexibility of selecting how it will comply, and correct any imbalance. Therefore, it's not required that institutions cut men's athletic programs; rather, institutions must focus on building equity and not equality for programs.

After 50 years, there's more progress to make in terms of equality in access and opportunity. While overall participation has improved over that past half century, girls and women of color participate in sport at lower levels, face greater barriers to participation, and are historically excluded in sport leadership.

Female coaches, especially Black female coaches, are vastly underrepresented in professional sports. Currently, there are only two black female head coaches in the WNBA (80% of players are Black). This lag in equality paralyzes innovation, impact and progress throughout the sports world.

However, the creators of the law aren't concerned — because to make changes would shift the balance of power. Perhaps change will come from the people most affected by the policy: the athletes.

College athletes who understand the nuances of Title IX will be a powerful force for the overhaul of its dated language. Only then can they see Title IX with a fresh perspective, and address the issues most relevant to their personal dreams and ambitions — to gain unprecedented equity.

To become this force for change ...

Education is first. Empowering college athletes begins with educating them, and athletic administrators must capitalize on this moment. Developing programming around educating athletes on all facets of Title IX is vital. One main source of education is sport management and law programs within college institutions. Tapping into this resource provides a service learning experience for various stakeholders, athletes and future sport management professionals. Additionally, explore recent cases like the NCAA women's basketball championship, which highlight unequal facilities, game-day marketing, and access for women's basketball.

What you'll collectively uncover along the way is the alarming lack of familiarity among the athlete community when it comes to understanding of Title IX. Elevating this familiarity makes teams and businesses more genuine, and ultimately more marketable in a landscape that is constantly changing. And constant change opens up opportunities to improve equality as we are starting to see education transition into advocacy.

So, question all assumptions in the process. Although Title IX has been around for 50 years, let's not assume that all stakeholders are aware of the various ways that Title IX affects sport business.

Personal stakes are second. As the reader, ask yourself, "Where do I fit into all of this?" "What frustrates me about Title IX?" "What prevents me from doing something about it?"

For those whose voices aren't nationally or globally recognized, opportunities to effect change don't necessarily have the potential to be as widely heard as those who are. But take a minute to examine the privilege you do enjoy, and how it could be used to make a difference. Do you have a platform or a social media account with followers that number into the millions? Have you been a victim of a Title IX infraction, thus qualifying as an "expert" on the subject? What about your partnerships or connections with people who could answer in the affirmative on these questions?

These are all ways for someone to make an impact not only for yourself, but for those who will come after you.

Community connection is third. Social media is a great resource to connect with other athletes and share your concerns — and the platforms college athletes have are astounding. Use them to speak your message to an audience who will listen. Mass media is another resource to help elevate your voice and spread your advocacy.

Remember that unified voices reach a greater audience and there is power in numbers, so collaboration is key. Group advocacy and community support will get noticed by the government. Use these steps as strategies to make the needed changes. Unite as a community to generate maximum impact.

Because ultimately, as athletes, you have the power. Act on the knowledge presented to you. Advocate for change where needed. Support and create campaigns that will improve sport participation and upward mobility for all athletes.

And don't stop just because the 50-year celebration ends. Stay in the fight. You can be the change agents who have a positive impact on the ultimate rule-makers.

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