

THE DAILY UNIVERSE

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MAGAZINE

MARCH 2022



'The trail to fame and glory.' BYU women's sports

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A record-breaking crowd of 6,289 fans watch the pregame show for a women's basketball game in the Marriott Center on Saturday, Feb. 19.



BYU PHOTO/JAREN WILKEY

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Women's sports deliver the audience

PIONEER WOMEN:

Broken barriers in BYU women's sports history

By Jeff Salcedo

An intercollegiate women's basketball game between Brigham Young Academy and the University of Utah 123 years ago kick-started BYU's history of women's intercollegiate sports.

In the century-plus of women's sports history at BYU, the school went through some key moments in its growth: The first BYU women's sport became sanctioned in 1969, Title IX was passed by Congress, Elaine Michaelis guided BYU women's sports as director of women's intercollegiate athletics, softball became the last sanctioned sports added in 2000 and the men's and women's athletics department would merge together in 2004, helping BYU women's sports grow in the process.

Subsequently, five national championships, hundreds of all-Americans, thousands of student-athletes, an ensuing move to a Power 5 conference and full-team NIL deals have enhanced BYU's rich history of women's sports. All after the inaugural basketball game against now long-time foes.

These key moments over the years set the foundation for the success BYU women's sports enjoy today.

"(BYU's women's sports) is having so much success. Every one of our women's sport programs consistently rank in the top 25, they consistently win conference championships, they consistently win and compete at the national level," former BYU women's sports publicist Norma Collett

Bertoch said.

Despite BYU women's sports' growth over the years and the success they bring to the university, a disparity between men's sports and women's sports lingers to this day.

Just last year, women's basketball earned the 11th seed in the NCAA Women's Tournament after a 17-5 regular season and a WCC Conference Championship game appearance. Their reward for accomplishing this feat: a small dumbbell rack and a few yoga mats as a weight room. That's a far cry compared to the brand-new

squat racks, barbells and Olympic lifting areas at the NCAA men's tournament.

BYU women's sports have developed over the years to become what they are now with the help of important individuals.

The Daily Universe sports team spent weeks analyzing trends, history and discrepancies of BYU women's sports and compiled them for this issue of the Daily Universe Magazine.



BYU PHOTO/JOHN SNYDER

A formal photo of Lu Wallace for BYU Magazine during her time as the university's women's athletics administrator.



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Leona Holbrook (right) chats with students in the 1930s.

Leona Holbrook

In 1937, Leona Holbrook came to BYU as the head of the women's Department of Physical Education in an era when intercollegiate sporting opportunities were limited for women. Holbrook would flip this situation on its head three years into her role, as seven sports were added. Over 400 female athletes would participate in intercollegiate competition under Holbrook's guidance.

1969 Women's Volleyball Team

The 1969 BYU women's volleyball team did something a BYU women's sports team had never done before them when they took the court in the Division of Girls and Women's Sports nationals: play in a sanctioned competition. The Cougars performed well this season with a 19-3 record, but their impact for BYU goes beyond the court. Since breaking through the sanctioned sports barrier at BYU, nine more sports teams have competed in sanctioned play.

Lu Wallace

With the passing of Title IX in 1972 giving women new-found opportunities to compete in sports, women's athletics administrator Lu Wallace guided BYU women's sports through uncharted waters. In her 23-year tenure as women's athletics administrator, Wallace oversaw the expansion of women's sports at BYU, which included the addition of eight sports and two conference realignments. "Lu Wallace is arguably the single biggest reason BYU's women's athletics is where it is today," said former BYU swimming head coach Stan Crump in 1995.



BYU WOMEN'S SOCCER

BYU alum Ashley Hatch in her debut with the US Women's National Team.

much of BYU women's sports history would not exist. "I give her all the credit for all those years she was here, making sure there was a historical record in place. ... Before her there's not much by way of women's records," BYU Senior Director of Athletic Communications Duff Tittle said.

1997 Cross Country Team

BYU's women's cross country team found itself with a unique opportunity on a brisk November day in Greenville, South Carolina: being the first women's sports team to win a sanctioned national championship in BYU history. The Cougars accomplished the previously unattainable feat by edging out defending national champions 100-102.

The cross country team has won four additional national championships.

Tina Gunn

A prominent athlete in the early era of sanctioning, Tina Gunn helped put BYU women's basketball on a national pedestal. Gunn guided the Cougars to three AIAW Championship Tournaments from her sophomore season to her senior season. She

performed best statistically in her senior season as she led the NCAA with 31.2 points per game and 967 total points, good for Kodak All-American First Team honors.

Shauna Rohbock

A foundational piece to the early BYU women's soccer teams, Shauna Rohbock had a knack for scoring goals. She remains the leader in career goals scored. Rohbock scored 94 goals in 90 career games, including 35 goals in 23 games in her sophomore season. Rohbock's sporting success went beyond her time at BYU and as a soccer player. She won a silver medal in bobsledding at the 2006 Turin Winter Olympics.



BYU ATHLETICS

Tina Gunn's basketball program headshot.



BYU PHOTO/MARK PHILBRICK

BYU career goals leader Shauna Rohbock in action on the soccer field.

Erin Thorn

Erin Thorn posted one of the most prolific scoring careers in BYU women's basketball history and finished with the fourth most career points at BYU. She finished her career as the career-record holder in 3-pointers made and free-throw percentage.



DESERET NEWS/CHUCK WING

Erin Thorn goes up for a layup.

the first BYU player to play for the senior United States Women's National Team, making her debut in 2016 during her senior season. Since then, Hatch has gone on to win NWSL Rookie of the Year, NWSL Golden Boot and became a mainstay for the national team. "Ashley kind of broke the mold. She's playing with them now. She's worked really hard, it didn't come easy for her," said BYU women's soccer head coach Jennifer Rockwood.

Mary Lake

Mary Lake broke her way into the United States' women's volleyball team a couple of months before her senior year. Lake won gold at the Volleyball Nations league and helped the U.S. qualify in summer 2019 for the Tokyo Olympics. Lake went on to finish her stellar career at BYU with WCC First-Team honors and WCC Libero of the Year award.

BYU ATHLETICS

Mary Lake enjoys holding the Volleyball Nations League trophy.



Thorn went on to play for a decade in the WNBA.

Ashley Hatch

Ashley Hatch scored 45 goals in her career at BYU, but her impact for the soccer team goes beyond her time at South Field. In her post-BYU career, Hatch became

ELAINE MICHAELIS: The 'LaVell Edwards' of BYU women's athletics

By Austin Rustand

If you were asked to name the Brigham Young University coach that coached 51 All-Americans, won 23 conference championships, never suffered a losing season and retired as the second all-time winningest coach in their respective sport, who would you think of?

You may think of LaVell Edwards, who won 19 conference titles during his 29 years at the helm of the BYU football program. Or men's golf coach Karl Tucker who matched Edwards with 19 WAC Championships between 1962 and 1992 and brought the first team national championship to Provo in 1981.

If you are a basketball fan, Stan Watts — who won eight conference titles in 23 seasons before being inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame — could fit the bill. If it isn't Hall of Fame coaches LaVell, Karl or Stan, who could it be?

It could be current BYU Women's Soccer Coach Jennifer Rockwood. Since 1995, when Rockwood founded the women's soccer program, she has won 17 conference titles, taken her team to 23 NCAA tournaments and most recently made a run at the national championship game in 2021.

Although each of these renowned coaches had Hall of Fame-caliber careers, none of them can claim the accolades described above.

The one coach that fits that description: Elaine Michaelis.

It is impossible to discuss the success of women's athletics at Brigham Young University without Elaine Michaelis.

The beginning

Before Michaelis was coaching All-Americans and leading teams to championships, she found her love for athletics as a three-sport athlete at BYU.

As a student at BYU (1956-60), Michaelis played basketball, softball and volleyball, but women's athletics at that time looked a lot different than it does now.

"At that point in time, women's athletics was just extramural," Michaelis said. "The men were part of intercollegiate athletics governed by the NCAA, but when I came out of high school the women's programs were extramural. We would still compete against other schools, but nobody ever knew what we were doing or anything about it. It was simply the athletic opportunity for women at that time."

They did not have scheduled games because of finances, time and travel. Competition for women's sports during this period of time consisted sports days in which multiple colleges would meet at a common location to play multiple games a day over a



Women's Athletic Director Elaine Michaelis in 2002.

two-day stretch.

"It depended on the structure of the sports day and the number of teams, but we would normally play three or four games per day," said Michaelis. "Each of the universities would bring a team and we'd play for two days, so you played a lot of games."

During one of these sports days, Michaelis achieved two of the most impressive feats in sports, on the same day.

"I really was better at basketball, but in the last game I sprained my ankle really badly, but I still played with the softball team that season," she said. "When we went to Colorado for a softball tournament, our regular pitcher couldn't pitch and I had pitched in high school, so they had me pitch that day. Because I had a bad ankle, I would limp as I pitched which put a great curve on the ball every time I threw a pitch and that day no one could hit me."

In two games that day, not a single batter got a hit off Michaelis. She threw both a no-hitter and a perfect game in the same day.

At the time, the extramural program, which was comprised of mostly female athletes, was not funded by the university or the men's athletic department. They paid their own way for travel, lodging, food and even drove faculty cars to events.

"We just went and played," she said. "And we loved it."

Coaching start

Upon her graduation in 1961, Michaelis was given an opportunity that would later change the course of BYU women's athletics history. She was hired as a faculty member to oversee both the intramural and extramural programs.

The intramural program was for students at the university to compete against other students in athletic competitions. The extramural program fielded teams at BYU that competed at sports days with other schools from around the country.

Because of Michaelis' experiences as an athlete, one of her primary focuses as a young administrator was creating a positive environment and experience for the female athletes at BYU.

"As faculty members, we would cover the expenses as we traveled to games with no reimbursement, took the teams, coached them, took them to lunch and everything else. It was really a fun experience for the students."

For the first seven or eight years, Michaelis held about every title one could hold within an athletic team. She worked as the director of both intramural and extramural sports as well as the head coach and director of operations for the women's basketball, field hockey and volleyball teams.

"Gradually we added more faculty and staff to help out," Michaelis said. "We got an experienced person to take over field hockey, which I was just doing the best I could. Ann Valentine came in and took over the tennis program and did a great job. I kept basketball and volleyball as we evolved, got more help and the university decided that we needed some support and funding."

Michaelis coached women's field hockey from 1962-66 and 1967-69 and led the women's basketball program from 1961-77.

According to Lu Wallace's "100 Years of Women's Sports at Brigham Young University," there were no records kept for the first decade of her basketball coaching career (1961-71), however it is estimated that she accumulated over 40 wins during that time in addition to her official 48-28 basketball coaching record. Michaelis never suffered a losing season in 16 years at the helm.

Volleyball dynasty

Despite her impressive careers as a field hockey and basketball coach, most of what fills the record books falls between 1961 and 2002 when she led the women's volleyball program. Michaelis coached the squad for 44 years, the longest tenured coach in the history of BYU athletics.

In that time, she accumulated an overall record of 886-225-5 (.792), a conference record of 356-37 (.906), 23 conference titles, helped 18 players earn 51

All-American awards and six players earned major national player honors.

As the head coach she won the inaugural championship in each of the five volleyball leagues BYU competed in, qualified for 30 of 33 national tournaments, including 20 of 21 NCAA tournaments and went 73-44 (.624) in those tournaments.

Michaelis led the 1972-73 team to a runner-up finish in the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women National Tournament and took the 1993 team to the NCAA Tournament Final Four for the first time in program history. She also never suffered a losing season, finished her career with 28 consecutive 20-win seasons and retired as both the second all-time winningest coach in Division I women's volleyball and the all-time leader in victories among female coaches in collegiate volleyball at any level with 886 wins.

To say that Michaelis was a good coach would be a massive understatement. She is unquestionably, along with Edwards, Tucker and Watts, among the greatest coaches in the history of BYU athletics.

But there is more to her story.

More responsibility

Wallace, a close friend of Michaelis, was the athletic director of BYU women's athletics from 1972-95 and played a huge role in the formalization of women's athletics on campus.

"Lu is the founder of intercollegiate athletics at BYU," said Michaelis in a 1995 BYU Magazine article, "She has led the program from the sports day era (when the women's sports season lasted all of one weekend) to the complex era of NCAA national championships."

Upon Wallace's retirement, Michaelis was still competing for and winning conference championships as the coach of the women's volleyball, but someone had to replace the "founder of women's athletics."

"I didn't have a desire to do this sort of thing," Michaelis said with a smile. "I purposefully stayed away from getting a doctoral degree because I wanted to stay away from administration and stay in coaching and teaching."

Despite her hesitancy, Michaelis was hired to replace her good friend as women's athletic director and took the reins of one of the most successful women's athletic programs in the country.

Beyond coaching

Although Michaelis would continue to coach until 2002, winning four conference crowns and never finishing worse than third, the last few years of her BYU career are important for what she did off the volleyball court.

During the 1995 season, there was still much to be done with regards to giving female athletes the representation, visibility and treatment they deserved, but BYU was moving in the right direction.

The BYU Magazine article noted, "BYU took a big step toward compliance by making soccer its 10th women's intercollegiate sport this fall. BYU now sponsors 12 men's sports, and the ratio of scholarships given male athletes to those given females has improved to 65-35."



Coach Elaine Michaelis talks with her team during a timeout in a BYU volleyball game.

Another goal Michaelis had was getting the female athletes the recognition and media attention they deserved.

Former women's sports information director Norma Collett Bertoch said, "In 1995 when I was hired, one of Elaine's goals was that she wanted to have our women's programs get more television exposure."

Bertoch explained that their goal was to have around 50 broadcasts of women's soccer, basketball, volleyball, gymnastics and softball per year.

"We had women's soccer, basketball, volleyball and gymnastics which were the four that Elaine wanted to make sure they had more coverage. So, we started getting a lot of our games on KBYU and then it just took off from there," Bertoch said. "Nowadays, pretty much every home soccer, softball, volleyball, basketball and gymnastics meets are on TV, something that we never even imagined could happen back in '95-'96."

Michaelis' addition of the women's soccer and softball programs, her accomplishments as a coach and her commitment to overall athletic excellence were key in helping BYU women's athletics get to where it is today. It is a big part of the legacy she leaves.

However, the bigger part of her legacy has nothing to do with trophies or accolades. It is a legacy of love, devotion and paving the way for the future generations of female athletes, coaches and administrators.

"The thing I loved most about Elaine was how much she cared about each and every girl," said Bertoch. "She wanted to make sure they had the very best of everything so they could keep winning and

building winning programs. That was it, she deeply cared about the experience these women had as female athletes at BYU."

Rockwood echoed many of those same thoughts.

"I looked to Elaine as a role model for me. She dedicated her whole life to the women's athletic department here at BYU. She started out as a young coach, who ultimately became one of the most successful coaches in the entire country. So, to have someone like her to help guide me through my young years was such a blessing."

A long time has passed since 2004 when Michaelis finished her time at BYU, but her legacy continues to live on and shape the BYU Athletic Department to this day.

"It is unfortunate that so much time has passed where my players don't know Elaine or Ann who recently passed away," Rockwood said. "But everything they did to build the women's athletic program here at BYU, to get where we are now, to have the facilities, the success and working toward that equal opportunity has been amazing."

Michaelis retired with a coaching record of 886-225-5 (.792), won 23 conference championships, coached 51 All-Americans, never suffered a losing season and retired as the second all-time winningest volleyball coach in NCAA history. As an administrator she left an unparalleled mark on female athletics at BYU and across the country.

Next time you talk about the greatest to ever be 'loyal strong and true,' don't forget mention legendary coach, administrator, mentor and pioneer — Elaine Michaelis.

JENNIFER ROCKWOOD

and the origins of the BYU women's soccer team

By Alex Dotson

One penalty kick. That's all it would take. One save, and for the first time in their history, the BYU women's soccer team would be one shot away from national champions.

The Cougars, led by All-American Mikayla Colohan All-WCC First Teamer Cameron Tucker, and after finishing 12-4-1 on the season with a share of the West Coast Conference crown, had taken the 2021 NCAA Tournament by storm. They beat top seeded Virginia in the third round and previous national champion Santa Clara in the semis. In the College Cup final the Cougars met the Florida State Seminoles, another number one seed, for the first time in their history. And they needed one kick to seal it.

After a back and forth match, which saw the Cougars outshoot the Seminoles 9-7, including a 4-3 advantage in shots on goals, both teams remained goalless for 90 minutes. This classic wasn't decided by a single goal. Instead, it required penalty kicks.

BYU and Florida State traded goals back and forth, with a few occasional misses sprinkled in. After Olivia Wade found the back of the net to tie the shootout at 3-3, FSU's Yujie Zhao, a senior midfielder from Shanghai, China, stood at the line with a simple conclusion: make it and you are a national champion, miss and give the Cougars a chance.

Head Coach Jennifer Rockwood, a coach known for focused determination on the sideline, and emotionally defensive of her players, leaned in anticipating the shot. On the outside she remained expressionless, but struggled to contain her nerves on the inside.

"Going into a PK is tough, because you can't practice those. I mean you can, but you really can't. And most of those girls who take them, haven't taken them since high school because our conference doesn't have a conference championship," Rockwood said.

Practice or not, it didn't matter to her or to her team; a national championship was within their grasp. In 27 years as the Cougar's head coach, Rockwood's resume included \: seven Coach of the Year awards, 13 total conference titles and 27 All-Americans. But none of these meant anything at the moment. When she became the head coach of a club-turned-NCAA-sanctioned team in 1995, nothing was ever promised. This moment, this chance, was the biggest in her coaching career. She knew it may never come again.

Entering the 1995 school year, the talk around BYU's campus could have been split between many different things. Some may have been talking about

Michael Jordan's recent "un-retirement" and his upcoming return to the powerhouse Chicago Bulls. Others may have had their radios cranked up, listening to Kiss from a Rose by Seal or Only Wanna Be With You by Hootie and the Blowfish. There were probably many talking about the upcoming football season for the Cougars and their excitement for a team led by quarterback Steve Sarkisian.

Few people were likely talking about the inaugural season for the women's soccer team. This new team was understaffed, with a limited number of fans due to lack of exposure and to lack of interest in women's sports as a whole. The team was expected to struggle out of the gate. But that would not last long.

"It was a slow process, we didn't get a bunch of fans," said Norma Bertoch, the first sports information director for the program. "People were just like, 'Women? Soccer? Uh, so how do we do that?'"

BYU, in part due to Title IX legislation, began its search to field another competitive women's team to add to its growing collection that already featured the likes of basketball, volleyball and gymnastics. The search didn't go on long.

Women's soccer was already played on campus but at the club level. It was coached by a former player, Jennifer Rockwood, and had seen some promising results. Rockwood led the club team to a 128-25-9 record, two Western National Collegiate Club Soccer Association titles, and second place in the NCCSA National Championship match. Having grown up in and around competitive soccer, which included teams with men on the field as well, Rockwood had overcome many obstacles to that point as a player and coach. But no amount of club soccer matches could prepare her for what was to come: coaching a fully sanctioned NCAA soccer team.

"My thought was I was going to get this club team to the point of where and if we do transition to an NCAA status that we will be ready and be prepared so that BYU isn't just starting at ground zero."

Gaining a following for soccer was extremely difficult for the women. Soccer as a sport was fighting for prominence in the United States—especially women's soccer. "We didn't know a lot about soccer, it was just getting started in the high schools, it wasn't a

big sport in the States," Rockwood said.

This battle was not fought alone. Although the initial group of players, coaches, trainers and management in comparison to today's staff and roster were small to start, the voices that this small group carried were loud and supportive. One of the most loud and most supportive was that of Norma Bertoch.

Bertoch, a native of Chile, came to the US and went to school at BYU. She graduated with a degree in communications, and began her career working in broadcasting, including working for CNN and KBYU-TV. However, when she came back to Provo, an opportunity arose to



JAREN WILKEY/BYU PHOTO

Coach Jennifer Rockwood focused on her team during NCAA Semi-Final win over Santa Clara (2021)



MARK PHILBRICK/BYU PHOTO

The 1996 WAC Conference Champion BYU Cougars. The Cougars defeated San Diego State 3-1 in the WAC Title Game to finish the season 22-1.

work for BYU athletics when she took on the role of “women’s sports publicist,” taking over for Ellen Larsen. She could not believe the opportunity in front of her.

“I thought they were a good program,” Bertoch said of the program at the time, recounting how the club team had to charter their own buses and often slept when traveling in the homes of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Rockwood “started with a good group of girls, and then they only went up from there.”

Bertoch’s relationship with soccer began with her upbringing. As a child in Chile, she watched soccer every single day. To many in South America, soccer was akin to a religion. But generally speaking, it was also seen as a male sport. Bertoch fell in love with the game and now she had an opportunity to change her view on soccer forever, as something more than just a man’s sport.

“I loved it. I was super excited that we could get to do this. I saw the potential.”

Her first interaction with the soon-to-be head coach Rockwood was one of intrigue. Neither had coached or been part of a program at the NCAA level. Both loved the game, but neither had any prior experience in helping a soccer team adjust to a new, higher level of play. And while Bertoch has grown to love Coach Rockwood, neither knew what to expect at the time. “I thought she was young,” Bertoch said. “She knew the sport of soccer. I think she probably felt overwhelmed by what it all means.”

Other crucial figures came to help. Carolyn Billings and Robyn Smith-Bretzing both joined the program in 1995. Billings, hired on as an assistant athletic trainer, became the first ever trainer for the soccer team. Smith-Bretzing had played with Rockwood while she was on BYU’s club team and was one of her first assistant coaches.

Smith-Bretzing couldn’t help but laugh when she thought about those early years. “Jen is a very competitive person. To play on the club team was

fun because she’s very competitive like me, so we got along well, and at other times we didn’t because we’d be competing against each other.” This competitiveness motivated each of them to greatness, and Smith-Bretzing appreciated that about her friend and coach. “You could just tell that she loved soccer.”

Smith-Bretzing said that she also respected the process by which Coach Rockwood was able to lead the program when she became head coach. “To be able to be the assistant to her and to help her in those first few years, coaching players and developing the program, it was a great experience.”

Other members of the athletic department helped mentor the young coach. They included legendary former coaches Elaine Michaelis, Lu Wallace and Anne Valentine.

“I had some pretty strong, successful women coaches that were my administrators as we started the program. And again, they gave me a lot of freedom in doing what I did, cause I was learning a lot myself. But they weren’t soccer people, they didn’t know much about soccer. So it was good that I had room to build, and do what I did, and they kind of left me to my own,” said Rockwood.

And build is what Coach Rockwood did. While their initial season was not perfect, and there may have been some bumps along the way, including a season opening loss to Colorado Christian, the team finished with 11 wins and a winning record.

The team won 22 games the following season, losing only once, and won the Western Athletic Conference title. Unfortunately, due to BYU’s recent start as a NCAA sanctioned team, the relatively unknown WAC teams that BYU played against, and the limitation of only 48 teams that entered the tournament, the Cougars did not play in the NCAA tournament that year. But the word was out. BYU was a team on the rise.

“I remember thinking we had such great success those first few years, that the expectation got pretty high,” Rockwood said. “But I think for me

personally, I was like ‘maybe this is what I am supposed to be doing,’ because it doesn’t make sense that we are having all of this success.”

After the initial shock of having a team, being tabbed as head coach of a new program, and having to ride the difficulty of her first two NCAA seasons, the training wheels were off. Any doubts or questions of her being able to lead the team into a new era were gone. This was her program now.

To many outside of the program, this immediate success may have come as a surprise. However, to several of those inside of the program, including assistant coach Robyn Smith-Bretzing, it wasn’t a big shock. “I think we always felt the program would be successful, so we weren’t surprised. Like we knew that we had the athletes to compete at the collegiate level, we just needed to give it a shot.”

More success followed Rockwood. Over the next 25 years, her team won conference titles. She coached players into All-Americans. She helped turn a little known prospect into a top scorer in the National Women’s Soccer League in Ashley Hatch. She’s won multiple Coach of the Year awards, as the program transitioned from the WAC to the Mountain West to the West Coast Conference. Now it stands on the precipice of joining a Power 5 conference in the Big 12. But despite a new office filled with awards, she can’t help but feel grateful.

“It’s kind of weird, huh?” she said, noting all of the accomplishments over her wall, “But when you kinda think about it, we feel very blessed. We’ve had so many unbelievable kids that come through this program that just put their heart and soul into it for their time at BYU. And that’s led the way for younger players to come through and wanna reach the success.”

That success would reach an all new height if goalkeeper Cassidy Smith was somehow able to stop Florida State’s Zhao shot, and give the Cougars a shot to win the 2021 NCAA title.

Unfortunately, it was not to be. Zhao snuck the ball past Smith, and the Seminoles stormed the field, having clinched the national championship. The pain of being so close to winning it all must have hurt, but as she normally does, Coach Rockwood could only think about how much this meant to her players, especially to her two seniors Mikayla Colohan and Cameron Tucker, they were two more in a long line of All-Americans Rockwood helped produce.

“Phenomenal experience for all of us... some really special seniors. Both (Colohan and Tucker) were leaders and both were phenomenal players. Fun to see both Cam and Mikayla have their first days with their pro teams yesterday, first practice. So I texted them and asked how they were doing, and Kayla was like, ‘Coach, I miss college soccer already.’ But I’m really excited for them to take their skills and their passions on to the next level, and see how they are doing.”

If BYU women’s soccer fans have learned anything from Coach Rockwood, it is that success always follows this young program. With the Big 12 on the immediate horizon, don’t be surprised if success happens rather quickly.

NIL

By Lindsay Wyson

Tegan Graham and her teammates on the BYU women's basketball team waited anxiously to see it for themselves. They had heard rumors and seen pictures of the unthinkable joke the NCAA called the women's weight room, but they still weren't sure if they believed it. It was the NCAA national championship tournament, after all.

As they walked into the mostly beige room, it lacked as much character as it did amenities. The disparity between the tournament's treatment of men and women became very real to them. The entire

workout space included a single stack of dumbbells and a pile of yoga mats. In comparison, the men's weight room had full dumbbell sets, barbells, benches, and a plethora of other training machines. In the moment Tegan thought,

"I'm not shocked, but I should be shocked...because this is shocking."

Graham, who was a 5th-year athlete at the time, had just started the mass communications graduate program at BYU after graduating from Colgate University. She had been searching for a master's thesis topic and this, the gender disparity gap between male and female athletes in the NCAA, seemed like a perfect idea. "It kind of just clicked for me; it kind of made sense."

As part of her research on gender equity in NCAA sports, Graham found that women's basketball accounts for the second-highest grossing income from Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) deals across the nation—following only football.

When asked if that statistic surprised her, Tegan gave a cheeky grin and confidently

answered, "not at all, not at all."

Before July 1, 2021, NCAA rules stated that collegiate athletes could not receive monetary gain for their participation in university athletics. While any other student on campus had the freedom to build a social media following, make deals with brands, and receive compensation for it, NCAA athletes could not. The Supreme Court ruled in 2021 against the NCAA which basically cornered them into flipping that policy on its back.

Many worried that allowing student-athletes to profit off of their name, image and likeness would only benefit a few athletes. Some argued women would largely be left behind. These, among critics' other complaints, were wrong.

Examples found in BYU case studies. The most talked-about NIL deal across campus—and debatably the most discussed team deal in the nation—is with Built, a protein bar company with headquarters in Spanish Fork. BYU alumnus and CEO of Built Nick Greer met with the football team on Aug. 12 to announce that each walk-on (non-scholarship) player would have their tuition covered by the company. The players erupted in cheers for their non-scholarship teammates. Yet, aside from the football deal with Built, many would argue that BYU's female athletes have had bigger NIL success than the male athletes.

A large portion of that success comes from the Smarty deal.

Smarty—formerly Smarty Streets—is a tech company responsible for all online address verification. The company was founded by Jonathan Oliver, BYU alumnus and father of one son and four daughters. As a proud girl dad, when Oliver heard about the Built deal he was inspired and knew there was more to be done. He told KSL, "I quickly realized somebody should do something for the women athletes on campus, and then it hit me: It's going to be me; I'm going to do it."

Oliver said there were two qualifications to make any type of NIL deal. First, it had to be the right thing to do. "That was immediately obvious, like, are women athletes less valuable? No! They are just as capable, hardworking, and dedicated as their male counterparts." Second, the deal had to be a good financial decision. As a tech company, the female athletes couldn't really help sell the Smarty



THRIFTHOOD

Shaylee Gonzales poses for Thrifthood

Leveling the playing field for female athletes

product as easily as the football team could help Built sell protein bars, because there is no physical product at Smarty. Oliver figured out a way for the deal to be symbiotic. Athletes were required to periodically post about the company on their social media. He told the Daily Universe, “All of the links and exposure we get actually increases our search engine rankings, so that draws traffic to our website even if they don’t come directly through the post.”

The Smarty deal is groundbreaking for several reasons. First, it quickly proved that female athletes have a place in the NIL space, and that their value was significant. The Smarty deal offers \$6,000 to each female athlete at BYU for social media promotions and attending events. For over 300 female athletes on campus, the deal totals nearly \$2 million. Oliver included every female athlete in the deal—from basketball players to the Cougarettes. Gary Verón, BYU associate athletic director for student-athlete experience and the Built4Life program, states, “overwhelmingly [the Smarty deal has] been extremely positive. I haven’t heard one negative thing about it, and I think it’s well-deserved.”

Due to federal policy, international athletes are unable to participate in a typical way with NIL agreements. However, Oliver managed to include international athletes in the Smarty deal by donating \$6,000 per international athlete to the athletic department specifically to be used to support them—entertainment, resources for school, and more. Oliver joined Graham on her podcast on gender inequity in NCAA sports and said he believes “women’s athletics...may be less visible, but I don’t think it’s any less important.”

The current NCAA policy on NIL is that each state may create their own law to prohibit or set guidelines for what NIL agreements can look like. Utah does not have any legislation addressing NIL, so the limit of possibilities only falls to the university’s policy. Verón explains that with the Smarty deal, BYU only offered guidance to Oliver. “We didn’t establish any of the terms or conditions—we helped educate Jonathan and his company as to what was permissible within NCAA and BYU policy, and then we fine-tuned a few of the details for him.” The fact that most NIL deals do not need to go through the universities has been key in giving female athletes a way to find success around the power structures within the NCAA.

BYU women’s soccer coach Jennifer Rockwood believes the Smarty deal gives her players more financial freedom. “Soccer is not a full

scholarship—my girls aren’t on full rides—that’s the way the NCAA has set it up. So, I get a certain amount of scholarships and I can divide it up... so the opportunity they have through NILs to earn money...that goes a long way,” said Rockwood.

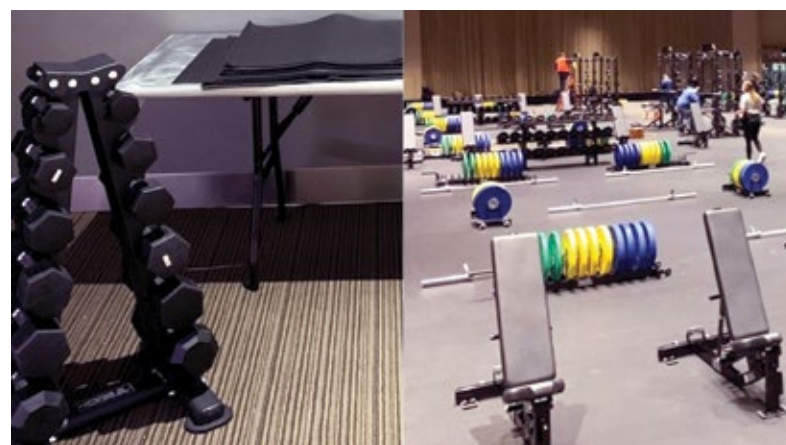
The reality is female athletes are cashing in since NIL passed. National brands swiftly entered into NIL agreements with female athletes across the nation. Nike signed UCLA women’s soccer player Reilyn Turner in 2021 to their first NIL deal. StockX, an online marketplace for streetwear and sneakers, entered into an NIL deal with Paige Bueckers of the UCONN women’s basketball team. Bueckers also entered into a deal with a small company named Gatorade.

“There’s a reason why Nike signed a female student athlete before a male student athlete,” said Graham. “It’s not because it’s a charitable organization—it’s because it’s a smart move. It’s a financially really smart move.” Women’s sports hold two of the top four spots on the list of NIL compensation according to a 2022 report released by Opendorse. The highest average compensation for a single social media post is held by women’s basketball. The average TikTok post by a female basketball player is worth \$2,805.

Why are posts from female athletes worth so much?

Consider a recent deal between Thrifthood and BYU women’s basketball player Shaylee Gonzales. Thrifthood is a Provo-based vintage clothing and lifestyle company. The Gonzales deal was a first for Thrifthood. Co-founder and CEO Albee Bostrom explained that Shaylee’s success on the basketball court along with strong social media following attracted them to her. When Thrifthood became aware of NIL, they knew they wanted to get involved. Store manager Warren McDade said that male athletes weren’t even on their radar. “From the beginning, we were all like, ‘we want it to be a female [athlete] no matter what.’” Gonzales was their top choice because of the relationship they had already created with her, since she had been a customer long before NIL existed for NCAA athletes.

But before she had signed with any brand, Gonzales mentioned to Graham on her podcast that she was flooded with interest from countless companies, “I’ve been getting lots of DMs from companies and just feeling so overwhelmed with that.” Her



BARBEND.COM

2021 March Madness weight room disparity

choice to sign with Thrifthood was a mindful one.

The deal between Thrifthood and Gonzales includes game-day outfits, photoshoots, and more. In return, Gonzales promotes Thrifthood on her widely successful social media platforms. With 211k followers on TikTok, 130k subscribers on YouTube, and 80k followers on Instagram, the reach of Gonzales’ posts is remarkable. Graham comments that, “social media allows athletes to control the narrative and to control their narrative...which is super, super important especially for female athletes who don’t get the media coverage they deserve.” The value of social media under the NIL umbrella is unmatched. McDade remembers a visit from a customer who was the parent of an athlete on the opposing team playing BYU that week. The woman was on Facetime with her younger daughter at home who was audibly sad to miss out on going to “the store that Shaylee is with!”

Of course, Gonzales didn’t build that fanbase overnight. She has been building her personal brand for years. But she takes her role as an influencer seriously. “We are big influences for others, and we can be examples to others, and a lot of younger girls look up to us.” Bostrom describes their relationship with Shaylee as, “a perfect little family.” For McDade, the fact that women’s athletics are doing so well in the NIL space is not surprising. “I think from here on out, female [athletes] will continue to kill it.” He adds emphatically, “Female athletics just get slept on.” NIL possibilities could be changing the future of that “slept on” status.

The NCAA women’s basketball tournament begins in March. How will the NCAA respond this year to the gender disparity gap that has long existed? Will Graham be shocked this time around? If so, hopefully it’s because that gap is shrinking. The first year of NIL—if nothing else—has validated the worth of female athletes and proven that women’s sports are profitable.

RAISING THE POPE WOMEN

By Isabelle Zyhailo

Do you remember the iconic hype anthem “We are the Titans” in the movie “Remember the Titans”? Now take this spin on it:

“We are the Pope girls. The mighty mighty Pope girls”

This is BYU men’s basketball coach Mark Pope’s family anthem.

Welcome to the showcase of the Pope women



The Pope family consists of two adults, Mark and Lee Anne, and four daughters: Ella (21) who plays basketball at Ohio University, Avery (18) who plays tennis at BYU, Layla (16) who dances, and Shay (13) who plays volleyball.

This family of powerhouse women thrive on supporting one another and following their dreams.

Their father, Mark Pope played in the NBA from 1997 to 2004.

Their mother, Lee Anne Pope, has been around athletics her whole life. Her father was Lynn Archibald, who coached at multiple universities, including BYU.

She has memories

of moving as a child, and locking arm and arm with her two brothers walking into their new schools.

Family is everything and sports are important to the Pope family because of the many deep and close relationships they have made over the years.

Athletics also develops character and teaches life lessons, they said.

“It’s such a vehicle for hard work, for sacrifice, teamwork, discipline, overcoming challenges, persevering and ending up victorious, and sometimes not,” Lee Anne said. “Sometimes you

lose and it’s important that our focus has always been how hard they work and what they are willing to put into it.”

Lee Anne is the glue for the family and if they aren’t supporting each other enough,

“My girls have found confidence through their chosen sport,” Lee Anne said. I think it is important for women that they are getting their confidence and self-worth in something that they have control over.”

That confidence is there even on a bad day. They go to the gym and shoot, or go to the dance studio, and when they leave they feel better.

“She’s instilled this confidence in all of us

because she is a pretty confident person,” Avery, a freshman at BYU, said. “I think that is just important, especially being girls, is knowing who we are, knowing what we stand for and being proud of ourselves.”

Lee Anne exposed her daughters to as many sports and activities as possible when they were young. All four took dance lessons, played soccer, basketball and volleyball and three of them played tennis.

“One by one they kind of gravitated towards something they really loved,” she said.



“The beauty is that they gravitated towards something that they wanted to work hard on and so far that they have been willing to sacrifice for and they all have sacrificed for what they’ve done.”

They have all sacrificed time with friends, Friday nights and pushed that aside to accomplish their goals.

Ella and Avery play sports at Division I universities. Balancing sports, school and a social life is practically impossible for them, but they have accepted it if they want to be the best that they can.

“Our parents just taught us to find out what we love to do,” said Ella, a freshman at Ohio University. “You go full speed. You get to fit it all in to the best of your ability.”

The mentality of an athlete is someone who does not give up and finds a way to make things work and push through when adversity hits, which is something Lee Anne and Mark teach their daughters.

“Something that we have talked about as a family is, and in general with athletes, is that there are so many times we make excuses with things that they can’t control, which takes all the power away from your children,” Lee Anne said.

They take a different approach to excellence and take control where they can. That puts the ball in the Pope women’s court.

“If everyone’s blaming the coach for not playing them, it’s like what we tell our girls,” Lee Anne said. “It’s not your coach’s job to play you, it’s your job to get the coach to play you.’ I think that empowers your child



and I know it empowers our daughters—that they have control over their career. When you start blaming referees or politics, you take the power away from your child. We just don't see it that way."

Part tribe, part wolf pack – the family dynamic of love

Lee Anne and Coach Pope have cultivated this family of women to love, to be each other's cheerleaders and chase their dreams. They celebrate women in athletics.

"I never had sisters," Lee Anne said. "I only had brothers and to watch my girls' connection and support for each other, and anything to talk about from clothes to boys to their different activities. I think it is fantastic and when Ella was home this weekend, all four girls were home and we sat around in our kitchen till 2 a.m. every night. Mark and I couldn't get enough of it."

Being in a family of all women is fun and they love that they can relate with each other. The girls said if they had a brother it would ruin the whole thing.

"I would say my sisters are my best friends, hands down," Avery said. "Nobody comes closest."

Coach Pope often gets comments about how having all daughters would be hard and some people express their condolences to him thinking it is a disadvantage.

Avery: "I think something special for me and my sisters is that my dad has never let a comment like that slide."

Lee Anne: "Never. He is disgusted."

Avery: "He will always be like 'I am the luckiest man in the world to have all girls.'"

Family members naturally have busy schedules, and often find it hard to spend time with everyone, but they are in heaven when they do.

"I think we take advantage when we can be all together, especially on Sundays, and we just laugh," Layla said.

Going to each other's games or dance

performances is a priority and can be a sacrifice at times, but that is what they do for each other.

"It's all for one and one for all and we think that is super important," Lee Anne said. "We are super involved, and we share. We know what Avery has going on, we know that Shay is trying to compete for a spot, and we know what our family is accomplishing."

It is celebrating together that creates the memories and closeness. They have a strong love as they have each other's backs, stand up for each other and are there through thick and thin.

Layla had spinal surgery in April 2020. She said she was really nervous about it because she didn't know how mobile she would be afterwards.

"It was super scary because when she went into surgery we didn't know if she would be able to dance the way she had been dancing," Lee Anne said. "She's had to make adjustments but it has been awesome."

Layla was preparing for a competition in Las Vegas recently.

"There were so many tricks in it that none of us could do, except for Layla," Lee Anne said. "She began to say 'I don't think I can do this'. I thought it was going to be too challenging for her back, but when she was on the stage, she nailed every single one of them. It really was something that she didn't think she would be able to do."

The sisters said it's so fun being there for each other and when Layla nailed her dance recital they all jumped to cheer for her. "We are part tribe, part wolf pack," Ella said. "It's a little bit tighter than a normal family."

If someone were to take a peek inside their family dynamic, they would quickly recognize perfection is not the goal.

"They would see a group of imperfect people that really, really love each other," Ella said. "And are all trying to do the best they can and fail every day, but when someone fails, we all stop and pick each other up."

Sports are a big part of their lives,

but it would not matter what their daughter chose to focus on. Lee Anne and Mark have created this culture of love and strength in their family.

"My parents could not care less of what we chose to do with our lives," Ella said. "I think all my sisters will tell you that. They make that super clear again and again. They say 'We don't care what you do. We care that you love it and that you try as hard as you can.'"

Ella, Avery, Layla and Shay know that college might be the end of their sports careers. They choose to see each other for who they are, not for the sports they are in.

"It's our dream, not theirs," Avery said. "They lead us a lot by example. My dad has never told me to be on the court for more hours, but I have watched how hard my dad and mom work and that's how I learned how to work."

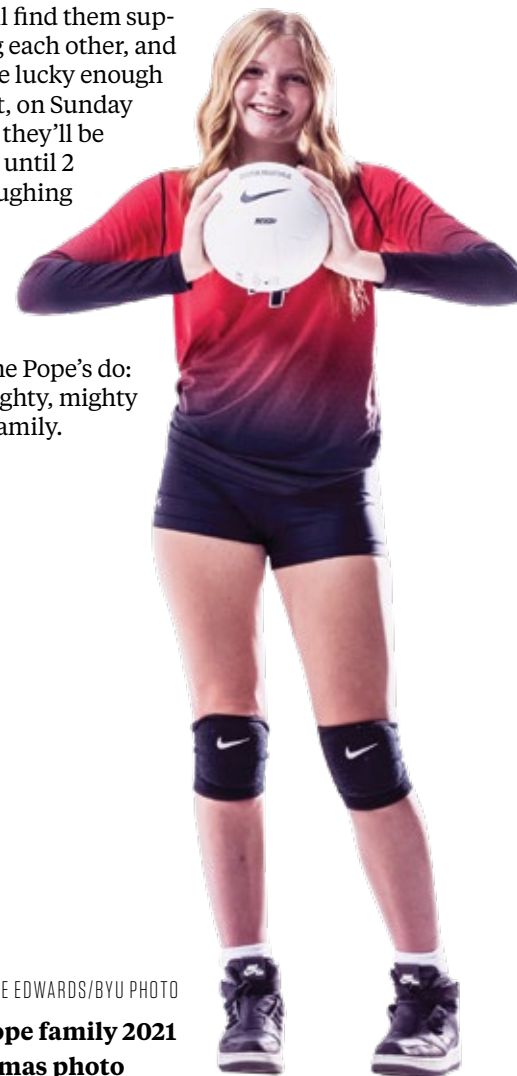
She said the independence her mom has given her was the best gift.

"It got to a point with Avery where I said that it should be more important to you than it is to me," Lee Ann said.

That is what the Pope family is all about.

"We have all fallen into the thing we love doing," Ella said. "It's not doing sports that is important as much as it's important to find what you love and to chase what you love. I think that's important to our family."

You'll find them supporting each other, and if you're lucky enough to see it, on Sunday nights, they'll be talking until 2 a.m. laughing to who knows what. That's just what the Pope's do: The mighty, mighty Pope Family.



NATE EDWARDS/BYU PHOTO

The Pope family 2021 Christmas photo

MODEL ATHLETES



TOGETHXR

The founders of TOGETHXR.com used these photos for the launch of their company as a “diverse and inclusive community of game changers.”

By Bryn Turner

Picture a basketball player.

How do they look? Are they tall, muscular, or fast? Imagine the athlete’s photo in a magazine. Are they dunking the game-winning shot? Maybe they pose facing you, arms crossed, with an intimidating grin on their face. Either way, you get the feeling that a basketball player is a force to be reckoned with.

Is the basketball player a man?

Now picture a female basketball player. How is she posed? What kinds of words describe her?

Can you tell she is an athlete by the pictures in

the magazine? Is the story about her record-setting free-throws in the game or about staying in shape? Can you imagine an article about a women’s basketball player at all?

While these questions may seem trivial, those images in your head mean more than you might think.

Women of all ages play sports more now than ever before, according to a report by Professor Cheryl Cooky at Purdue University. Yet, women’s sports receive about as much broadcast airtime now as they did in the 1980s. Men’s sports have consistently been broadcast more than women’s since broadcast transmission of sports was

possible. Cooky found that from 1989 to 2019, television coverage of women’s athletics increased 0.5%, with only 5.4% of women’s athletics represented over all airtime.

According to Deloitte Insights, interest increased exponentially for women’s athletics during the pandemic; the National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL), Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA), and the Women’s World Cup were among the most popular groups to receive increased viewership. Social media accounts of female athletes and women’s teams have produced increased interest in not only what the women can do athletically, but also who



ESPN magazine covers demonstrate how men are photographed in their sport while women are shown in less athletic settings.

they are as people.

Jennifer Rockwood, head coach of the BYU Women's Soccer team, wants her athletes to get the recognition they deserve on and off the field.

"Because they're unbelievable, unbelievable young women. Not just athletically on the field, which they're playing their sport at the very highest level. We want to see our athletes that accomplish those things get the recognition they deserve. Any type of recognition that they get is ... recognition for all of us."

Though the coverage is meager, major media platforms that do cover women's athletics often tend to depict female athletes through a lens of traditional feminine values, like beauty, grace and motherhood.

A 2019 Body Image article published a 2018 study documenting that female Olympic athletes featured in Sports Illustrated issues are most often posed in ways unrelated to their sport (i.e. posed, facing the camera, smiling, tight clothing). By contrast, the magazine portrayed male athletes predominantly in action with their sport or training, highlighting their endurance and strength. A review of sports images of women published in Sex Roles found female athletes were often photographed in "passive" poses, compared to the "active" poses of male athletes.

Graduate student Tegan Graham of the BYU Women's Basketball team has dedicated her master's thesis to researching gender equity in sports. As both a consumer of athletic media and often in the limelight herself, she denies the notion that tight clothes and provocative posing is the key to more media representation.

"There's this myth in the world of sports media- in the media in general- that sex sells women's sports. And sex doesn't sell women's sports. Sex sells sex."

Though the idea may persist that viewership comes only after a female athlete puts out, Graham and her teammates believe that women's athletics are exciting and deserve more expansive coverage.

A review of images of sports women found that "the overt sexualisation of athletes has implications for audience perceptions which flow on to broader perceptions about the value of women's sport."

Graham, as an athlete and advocate for equity

in women's sports, insists that women's athletics have value even without objectified marketing.

"I think when big corporations tell a female athlete that this is the way you're going to get attention and brands and money, they're lying to them, right? Because the sexualization of female athletes does not promote their athleticism, it does not promote their talents and their skills."

In a 2019 analysis of 1,587 Instagram images from the primary media accounts of NBC, ESPN, FOX Sports, and CBS Sports, researchers found that in the overwhelmingly small percentage of female athletes covered, almost half appear in a passive state and outside of their field of play. Male athletes, however, were showcased in athletic positions in 80% of their pictures.

Graham argues that the lack of conversation around gender equality in media representation is that women's sports are too often thrown under the rug.

"There's such a small percentage of coverage in general that I think the conversation surrounding (objectification of female athletes) gets less attention because there's (already) less attention, if that makes sense. I think the main key point to promotion of women's sports and of female athletes is that there's not enough," Graham said.

The same study on Olympians found that the amount of muscularization depicted in stories surrounding Olympic athletes had increased over time. This amount of muscularization is not achievable for most people. Due to the well-known correlation between unrealistic body standards in media and unhealthy performance enhancement that follows, this kind of constant athletic portrayal is potentially dangerous to consumers.

"Female body image and female sports is a really complex topic, mainly because of the fact that you kind of have to balance this fine line of highlighting someone's athleticism while also not trying to make it seem like they are the standard for what that should be," said BYU graduate Kenz McGuire.

This year, McGuire joined a start-up media company as the ninth employee out of nine. The other eight coworkers? World-class female athletes, including Alex Morgan, Chloe Kim, Sue Bird and Simone Manuel. The women founded TOGETHXR as a media company with a mission

to bring a culture of adequate representation to all groups of people, especially in women's athletics.

Per the brand's own words found on TOGETHXR's website:

"TOGETHXR is where culture, activism, life-style, and sports converge. We shatter the often narrow depictions of women in the media with content featuring a diverse and inclusive community of game-changers, culture-shapers, thought leaders, and barrier breakers."

For McGuire, as a producer of sports content, the work of representation is about showing off dedication, hard work, and the mental stamina that goes into a female athlete's success.

"You're not getting someone in an interview to talk about, I don't know, why their stomach looks bigger in one picture than in another. You want to know what it is about their actual core strength. You're wanting to know what kind of exercises a person does to get that fast. You don't want it to be the focus that they just naturally have those 'runner legs' or something like that."

BYU Associate Athletic Director for communications and media strategy Jon McBride says the athletic communication department strives to give men's and women's sports the same amount and quality of coverage.

"For us in athletic communication, what we're trying to do is make sure we're providing the same amount of communication resources and talent personnel to be able to cover women's sports here effectively."

Coach Rockwood explained that the importance of the empowering portrayal of her soccer players has the power to inspire future generations.

"Again, it goes back to inspiring younger athletes that might someday want to come and be a Mikayla Colohan or an Ashley Hatch. I guarantee you Ashley had posters of BYU soccer players in her bedroom before she came to BYU."

For women of every age, seeing athletes who look like them in the media can be what pushes them to accomplish incredible athletic achievements. Seeing images and hearing comments in media that shows respect for the strength and grit of female athletes could push little girls to become record-setting athletes. Maybe when that little girl learns about women who are brave, fast, and capable, she'll picture a basketball player.

#WOMENINSPORTS

By Chasia Webb



MacKenzie McGuire celebrating at the conclusion of a BYU Football game.

MACKENZIE MCGUIRE

“Shooters, shoot. DM us.” Those were the words glowing off the screen MacKenzie McGuire read as she stared in disbelief after she commented on a video from TOGETHXR, a lifestyle, culture and sports account created by women for women. What prompted this moment for her? Years of loving sports, understanding how to use social media, and a little bit of luck. “I’ve been involved with sports all throughout my life and found myself getting involved with all sorts of sports accounts,” McGuire said. “I’ve always been interested in pursuing (sports) professionally because I think there is nothing more connecting than humanizing athletes and seeing how they’re just like you.”

Social media has created a space in which people are able to see athletes in ways that were never thought possible. It has opened the door for many young female professionals to enter a field they always dreamed of being involved in but have historically struggled to enter. Social media has created a gateway for not only jobs in sports but also a community center and support group for women in a field typically dominated by men.

Women. In. Sports.

February 2. Why is this day important? It is Groundhog’s Day, Shakira’s birthday, and most of all it’s National Girls and Women in Sports Day. This day has become a beacon of hope for females, especially when they are often overlooked by their male peers. Women often go unnoticed because sports have traditionally been viewed as a male-dominated area of interest. Outlets and broadcasts overwhelmingly feature male athletes and their events. Studio programming is generally hosted by men. The language used in these broadcasts frequently has a male undertone and women are often not discussed when creating content for audiences. Women have been an untapped demographic that is still undervalued today. “You can’t just be casual about (watching sports), you can’t just leisurely enjoy it,” McGuire said. In a study published by Statista research expert Christina Gough in June 2021, 61%

of women identified as being a fan of a sports team with 12% describing themselves as avid fans. While these numbers may not be as high as men’s, over 50% of women enjoy watching and participating in sporting events.

National Girls and Women in Sports Day was established in 1987 as a way to acknowledge the accomplishments of female athletes, recognize the influence of sports participation for women and girls, and honor the progress and continuing struggle for equality for women in sports. Knowledge of this day has spread with the rise in social media and women from all over the world are sharing their experiences in sports and how it has impacted them. Millions of posts were shared with pictures and videos filled with thanks and gratitude for all those who inspired them. One tweet from the KC Current, an National Women’s Soccer League team, official account read, “Invest in women. Support women. For us, every day is National Girls and Women in Sports Day. Remember, you all, we all, belong in this space. Happy #NGWSD!” Growing support for this community has only increased with the growth of social media, “People are wanting women in sports,” McGuire said. “Women have a voice and have power.” Social media has not only allowed for women to share their personal voices, but it has also opened avenues for sports brands and team accounts to be heard and run by women.

Social media

Social media is changing the way fans watch and interact with professional sports. Fans don’t need to attend games to engage with their favorite teams and players. Social media has opened up new lines of communication. Audiences are now not only watching games live, but they are also following live commentary with others all around the world in a space that was created for open communication. Social media has also allowed for more diversity among fans. People from all corners of the world in varying walks of life are able to share their thoughts and ideas with others who are following the same



INSTAGRAM/TOGETHXR

MacKenzie McGuire commented on this Instagram post from TOGETHXR. From her comment, TOGETHXR reached out and McGuire now works at TOGETHXR.

people, teams and events, creating communities.

Team accounts have exploded on social media, which connect their audiences across multiple platforms. Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok along with apps like ESPN and Bleacher Report allow for fans to interact with not only each other but their favorite teams. They have access to content that was previously unavailable that forms a stronger bond and allegiance to these teams.

"You can be connected to anybody on social media, including athletes and teams," McGuire said. However, those bonds do not come out of thin air or happen overnight. Time, patience, and strategy go into every post that is curated. The creators behind the accounts are nameless and faceless and, most often, are women. Women have taken advantage of the rise in team-branded social media use. In 2018, over 40% of NFL teams' social media accounts were run by women according to a Verge article by Britni de la Cretaz.

As a result, social media management and content creation have gained a reputation as a "pink collar" job, which translates to work traditionally associated with women. In an article published in The Wire, Jessi Hempel, senior writer at Wired, suggested the reason for this is the feminized nature of social media employment. Unfortunately, these new roles are too often connected to its 'characteristic invisibility, lower pay, and marginal status' within the tech industry." This emphasizes the gender disparity and pay gap that exists in most areas of employment, including sports. "It's fascinating ... because, in one sense, (these women) have

access to the field where they want to work, but they're essentially working in a role where they get (no) credit," said Erin Duffy, assistant professor of communications at Cornell University. "The whole virtue of social media, to do it well, (means) the role of the content creator is to be invisible."

Although the invisibility of working in social media is problematic,

it has provided some protection against harassment. Men automatically assume that the voice of their favorite teams and sports accounts are men. "For men's professional sports teams, it can be easy to assume that the person behind the keyboard shares certain characteristics with the players they're tasked with representing — namely, their gender," said Hempel.

Women who work on the social media side are hidden from the misogynistic vitriol that is thrown at the visible women in sports. The snide internet comments and backhanded compliments that women in sports constantly receive are more easily avoided.

Social media community

Social media has not only created communities for teams and fans but has also provided safe spaces for women in sports. The ability to support and uplift other women has opened the doors for more women to enter the sports media field. "There are no more individuals when it comes to women's sports because everyone is looking to uplift each other and motivate each other," McGuire said. Whether you are an athlete, former athlete, fan, or employed in the field, this growing community spans far and wide across the digital sphere.

One such niche community is the women in sports on TikTok. TikTok has been targeted towards millennials and Gen Z as an app to share funny videos, tips and tricks. Users can track hashtags such as #womeninsports or



TWITTER

Fox 17 Nashville reporters Stacy Case and Jill Jelnick highlighted and tweeted their support for on National Girls and Women in Sports Day.

#womeninsportsmedia. If a user "likes" a video then the app's algorithm places new videos from the community into the user's feed. From girls just interested in seeing their favorite female athletes' highlights to professionals sharing how to apply for jobs, the support for women in sports is endless. Users have been able to follow popular creators, "meet" others through commenting on similar posts and build their network and support. Many have found jobs, attended conferences and discovered college programs as a result of these communities.

These communities aren't just related to social networks. They have evolved to include accounts from female-run businesses that consider what women want and how they consume media. The GIST is a content and community for sports specifically from the perspective of women. ESPN, Bleacher Report, Sports Illustrated and others provide useful and informative information that can be consumed, however, the content is typically geared toward men. Sites like The GIST create more lanes for women to enter the conversation and be in control of it. The women in the sports community also includes popular podcasts that focus on how to get into sports media and build a personal brand.

Social media has provided women with opportunities to work in sports by opening doors that were too often closed to women. McGuire took a chance and inserted herself into the community, ultimately landing a job with TOGETHXR. Social media opened the door, all women have to do now is be willing to walk through the frame.

Shooters, shoot.

WOMEN ARE READY FOR THE BIG PITCH

An Opinion by Dathyl Larsen

Odicci Alexander, a pitcher for James Madison University's softball team, was a key player in during the 2021 Women's College World Series in 2021. JMU had never been to the college world series before the season. Recently, the team had performed better, going from a dismal record of 25-24 in 2002 to a stunning 41-4 run with an entrance to their first world series by the 2021 season. After their dazzling run in the tournament, JMU was searched on Google more than Kevin Durant, LeBron James and Devin Booker combined. Their numbers went through the roof with an average viewership income of \$1.2 million per game and this year's WCWS raked in the two largest ESPN audiences since the 2021 April NFL draft with an average of 2 million viewers in the first two games. To give a comparison of these impressive stats, the NCAA Men's College World Series averaged just 755,000 last year—the women's games received 60 percent more views than the men.

Despite the popularity of the WCWS it wasn't

a priority for primetime television executives. So why weren't the women give a better time slot and channel or at least given the same playing schedule as the men (they had one rest day for a week of play and some teams had to play doubleheaders while the men's teams got six rest days and four more days to play)? To put it bluntly, "Our analysis shows men's sports are the appetizer, the main course and the dessert, and if there's any mention of women's sports it comes across as begrudging 'eat your vegetables' without the kind of bells and whistles and excitement with which they describe men's sports and athletes," said Michael Messner, professor of sociology and gender studies at the University of Southern California Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences.

In the eyes of the television executives, women's sports aren't worth putting on air because decision makers believe women's sports won't generate sufficient revenue and won't draw enough viewers. However, the ratings clearly show that these female athletes are capable of bringing in revenue and

drawing large audiences.

Jennifer Rockwood, head coach of the BYU women's soccer team, believes, "the more exposure you get, the more people are familiar with your players and what they're doing and how they're trying to best represent. People are gonna be more invested in helping the athletics program and department in general. That's huge too, just that the exposure ... all that coverage benefits us and our program."

Rockwood believes that soccer coaches in general, and likely other coaches of female sports are "disappointed in the lack of coverage" that is being shown their athletes. Coaches, sports programs and broadcasters especially, know the power of prime-time exposure. But that's precisely why networks are stingy with their coverage. Tegan Graham, a prominent player on the BYU women's basketball team whose master's project explores the gender disparity in NCAA athletics, argues that men's teams generate significantly more money than women, but that no one really goes beneath the assumption and asks why. Graham believes a lot of it has to do with a

system that incentivizes investment in men's sports. The broadcasters over emphasize male athletes and their athletic achievement, at the expense of female athletes, which has historically put women on the backburner—but now things are changing and female athletes are tired of waiting in the shadows. They're ready for primetime.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, sports fans turned to women's sports in record numbers. The National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) and the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) experienced an increase in TV ratings during the pandemic and they were the only professional sports teams to have that happen. Not the NFL or the NBA or MLB—it was two women's sports that received more viewership because consumers across the United States and Canada tuned in to watch women compete in prime time at higher rates than ever before.

Prior to the pandemic, the U.S. Women's National Soccer team made it to the Women's World Cup in 2019, the match was watched by an average of 15.6 million viewers in the U.S. That's a 22% larger audience over the 2018 Men's World Cup Finals. Women's sports are gaining more and more fans and viewers — people who want to see them contend and are willing to seek out these sports and spend time watching them. Even though they're not on primetime, they are drawing higher numbers than male dominated sport teams, in some cases. If they're producing these large audiences, why are some of their sports still not given a primetime slot?

The women's national team was in the World Cup—a moment that all sports teams are competing for in their own respective events (Super Bowl, World Series, NBA Finals, etc.). It's a moment that showcases the best of the best and proves who the real champions are, for a country and the world. It's a moment of pride for the winning country. The U.S. Women's Soccer team outscored competitor after

competitor and proved to be the winning team. Even though they became world champions and deserved their moment in the spotlight, it wasn't given to them. Not only was the women's team competing with the Netherlands soccer team on the field, but off the field they were competing against the Men's CONCACAF Gold Cup Final and the Men's Copa America final for a spot on primetime TV.

Despite facing multiple competitors, this year and in the past, the women's games still raked in higher viewer numbers on Fox Sports and social media platforms and have reportedly brought in more revenue for the U.S. Soccer Federation (USSF) than the past three years of men's games. In the past three years of soccer, the women's team has brought in more money and revenue than the men's team. Additionally, the women's soccer jersey was the top-selling soccer jersey, men's or women's, ever sold in a single season on Nike.com. As head coach of Georgia Tech's women's basketball team Nell Fortner said in a press conference, "Instead of treating her (women's basketball) sport like a cost to minimize, the NCAA should see it the way so many others increasingly do: as an opportunity for growth."

Not only could women's basketball and soccer teams, at the professional and collegiate levels, grow the money business for broadcasters, but women's Olympic athletes could do the same. What is the most viewed Olympic sport on television? Is it a male or female dominated event? Would it be surprising to know that actually all the women's sports together? The USA women's teams "won 58.4% of the medals. ... They also set a record on television screens, taking up 59.1% of NBC's primetime coverage."

Interest in female athletics is soaring. Audiences are hungry for sports entertainment, specifically from women. NYU Associate Professors Bri Newland and Ted Haynuk reported "46% of women are 'interested' or 'very interested' in sport, with 41% interested in watching live sport events and 39% interested in watching sport on TV."

Sports fans want to watch these female athletes compete and are creating a fan base for them that wasn't there before. Since 2012, viewership numbers for female athletics have grown and continue to do so.

The growth of women's sports and their increasing popularity begs the question—if female sports are consistently attracting high numbers of viewers, why aren't they being given primetime slots along with, or instead of, men? The NCAA claims that women's teams lose more money than they bring in. But that's not entirely true.

An April 2021 Washington Post story by Ben Strauss and Molly Hensley-Clancy reported that "between 2016 and 2019, the women's championship game averaged almost 4 million viewers, nearly double that of the baseball and softball series, the next most-viewed championships in the package." And despite what the NCAA says, the women's tournament could make almost \$20 million each year for ESPN.

Female sports represent an untapped revenue stream. The athletes get to showcase their skills and talents that they've developed over the years, just like their male peers. They're able to perform on a primetime stage that's often unavailable for them. For the fans, especially the female fanbase, they can cheer on and support females as athletes and powerful women.

The notoriety of Odicci Alexander and her fellow Dukes during the Women's College World Series put them and James Madison University on stage, showcasing the power of femininity and sport. These athletes, along with countless other female athletes, have fought their way to the top of their own primetime without much help. Although many women's sporting teams still aren't given the primetime coverage they deserve, they still attract a growing fanbase. They've competed for years to get to the top of their game and look for their shot as a main attraction — to be the future female athletes of primetime television everywhere.



From left: Odicci Alexander, pitcher for James Madison University Softball; BYU guard Tegan Graham; Seattle Storm forward Breanna Stewart; Midfielder and winger Megan Rapinoe.

TWITTER/JAMES MADISON SOFTBALL, BYU PHOTO, NBAE/GETTY IMAGES, IRA L. BLACK, CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES

Housing Guide

