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## Are girls still banned from CYO football?



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*(Photo: Photo provided by the Lucia family)*

Cece Lucia has moved on, for the most part.

She's ready to start her freshman year at Cathedral High School -- and ready to start summer practice with the football team next week.

She's ready to play for Cathedral coach Rick Streiff who says, unequivocally, he has "absolutely no problem" with having a girl on his team.

But Cece hasn't completely moved on. She sometimes thinks about last fall when, as an 8th grade kicker, she made national headlines after being ousted from the Indianapolis Catholic Youth Organization's football program.

Its 75-year-old policy said in no uncertain terms: girls are banned from CYO football. And it wouldn't budge for Cece.

So after a Sunday football game in October – where Cece went 2-for-2 kicking field goals for St. Simon Middle School – the CYO ultimatum came.

Kick Cece off the team or St. Simon would be forced to forfeit its games. A girl playing football is a violation of [CYO policy](#).



**INDIANAPOLIS STAR**

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"She would be interested in any changes out of the Jurassic period," said her dad, John Lucia, this week.

But there are no changes at CYO. Girls are still banned.

"Rule remains the same as past season," said CYO's executive director Ed Tinder.

"Without question, this isn't a stance we are taking for the end of time. We will constantly review this. Opinions change."

CYO sports programs run in Catholic schools through 8th grade, then offer intramural sports in high school. More than 13,000 kids participate each year.

Cathedral runs its own athletics, not through CYO, so IHSAA rules apply: Cece can participate in football because a comparable program isn't offered for girls.

Tinder vowed last fall, after a national outcry erupted over the Cece ban, that the organization would review its policy before the start of the 2015 season.

The CYO board and rules committee took input from more than 100 pastors, school principals, coaches and

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Cece Lucia, a St. Simon Middle School eighth grader, was banned from the football team last fall. Indianapolis CYO, which runs the school's sports, said it was — and still is — against its policy to have a girl playing football. (Photo: The Crimson Quarry)

parents.

"You can just imagine the gamut of positions people took," Tinder said. "I tell you, and it surprised me, the preponderance of people that felt that we should keep the sports we have as (single gender)."

There was no single overriding reason as to why the ban was kept in place, he said. Safety concerns for the girls were often brought up. Some people had concerns the gender mix would violate religious teachings. Others said if a girl were allowed to kick on the football team, where would the line be drawn for other positions?

The ban last fall prompted backlash inside and outside the Catholic community. Social media lit up in support of Cece. National news outlets, from FoxSports to NBC affiliates nationwide, reported the girl's football ban.

Archaic and discriminatory were just some of the words used to describe the CYO policy.

"This sexist policy needs to change," said Pamela Alvey, of Indianapolis, when she heard the Cece story. "Seventy-five years of discrimination is way too much."

Because CYO doesn't receive federal funding, the organization can't be forced to change rules, said Brian Culp, a sports researcher and associate professor of kinesiology at IUPUI.

"But they look a bit archaic," he said. "We seem to have here an opportunity for evolution that the CYO doesn't want to significantly consider."

Women in football are not an anomaly outside of professional sports. Indianapolis is home to the Indy Crash, a professional women's tackle football team.



Jen Welter is believed to be the first woman to appear in a men's pro football game in a non-kicking position. (Photo: USA Today Sports)

In February of 2014, Jen Welter became the first woman to play in a men's pro football league in a non-kicking position, taking the field as running back for the Indoor Football League's Texas Revolution.

"Let's say Cece or any other girl wanted to have an opportunity to play football down the road," Culp said. "How would she get that preparation to make a team if she's not involved earlier in a structured, supportive program?"

Of course, Cece wasn't the first to be blocked from a team.

In 2010, 12-year-old Lindsey Overstreet petitioned the CYO to play football for Our Lady of Greenwood and was denied.

Rae Anne Brizendine said her daughter was disappointed after starting on a CYO wrestling team in third grade, but not getting to finish.

"We were told girls could play on the boys' team until 6th grade," she said. "Lies. My daughter started with wrestling and was kicked off the team because CYO didn't allow girls."



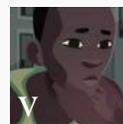
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For all the people who support allowing girls to play on boys teams, there are plenty who stand by CYO's policy, including Joe Lowder, who played football for Greenfield Central High School in the early 1990s.

"It's bad enough so many boys blow joints out every year playing football," he said. "Girls should not ever have to be hit by the biggest, strongest, fastest and most aggressive boys from any given school. The football field is not fit for females."

But what about as a kicker, as Cece was trying to do?

"The kicker gets hit sometimes," he said. "And when they do, they get carried off the field."

As for how Cece will do at Cathedral, Streiff said he'll know more after "she has been with us for a couple of weeks."

Tinder said he wishes her nothing but the best.

"I really hope it goes how she wants it to," he said. "I hope she has fun and great success."

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