



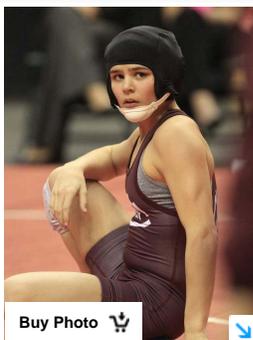
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Could high school sports be coed?



Dana Hunsinger Benbow, dana.benbow@indystar.com 5:28 p.m. EDT September 16, 2014



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(Photo: Mike Fender/Star 2012 file)

Ben Davis High School, 1976. Girls volleyball state championship game. South Bend Adams won the title.

But there was controversy and outrage — from fans, coaches, players.

The team took the victory with three boys on the roster.

And that was legal.

It didn't take long for all of that to change, not long at all.

Just a month later in December, the [Indiana High School Athletic Association](#) added a rule: No boys, under any circumstances, can play on a girls high school sports team. It's not fair to the girls to have to compete for a spot on a team against boys. It's not fair to the opposing team to battle a stronger, bigger, male opponent.

The exact wording of the rule is the same today: "It creates unfair competition through an overbalance of strength and ability of male contestants on teams designed for girls."

But the flip side of that rule in 1976 was quite different. Girls, said the IHSAA, were allowed to play on boys teams, in certain sports. Under the right circumstances.



INDIANAPOLIS STAR

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And now, nearly 40 years later, those rules are playing out daily in high schools across the state.

Which begs a new question: Should some sports and certain positions in high school athletics be coed?

"Is society ready for this? Probably," said Brian Culp, associate professor of kinesiology at IUPUI. "However, we still live in a climate that reflects generational values, diverse perspectives and assumptions about girls' ability and their physiological differences in comparison to boys."

Of course, we likely won't see an entire defensive line of girls suiting up for a football game. A female basketball center on a boys team would be a rarity. But a point guard? Sure. A wrestler, a swimmer, a cross-country runner, why not?

The topic of women edging into sports positions typically held by males is a hot one in athletics nationwide.



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There is Mo'ne Davis, a [pitcher who threw her 71-mph fastball by boys in the Little League World Series this summer](#). That's the equivalent of 93 mph from a Major League Baseball mound.

She became the first girl to throw a complete game shutout in the tournament and the first Little Leaguer to grace the cover of "Sports Illustrated."

There is Becky Hammon, who in August was [hired as an assistant coach for the San Antonio Spurs](#). The six-time WNBA All-Star, who played 16 years in the professional league, is the first full-time female assistant coach in the NBA.

In Indiana, of late, there have been two stark examples of girls competing and excelling in football.

Shelby Osborne, a senior at Jeffersonville High School, [signed in June with Campbellsville University in Kentucky to become college football's first female defensive back](#).

And then there is Samantha Dewey, who kicked a game-winning 23-yard field goal for Triton Central earlier this month with seconds left in the game.

"When I was little, I grew up playing with boys," Dewey said. "I would play with the guys, on their teams."

TRITON CENTRAL KICKER: [Samantha Dewey displays her athletic prowess in multiple sports](#)

She was asked if some high school sports should be made coed:

"I think that there are girls that could do it and probably be OK," Dewey said. "It just kind of depends on the physical barriers. I could never play linebacker in football, certainly."

Culp argues that what girls can truly succeed at in sports is unknown.

"It is assumed that girls are not physically able to play with boys, but if they do not get access to the same training, coaching and support, how do we know?" he said. "There will always be statistical outliers, and those girls should be allowed to compete on a playing field with others of the same skill level, irrespective of gender."

The IHSAA said it doesn't expect a coed rule implemented any time soon, adding that its rules on gender in sports have been successful.

"I don't foresee our membership approving true coed sports teams as the IHSAA bylaws speak to participation for both genders," said Jason Wille, IHSAA sports information director.



Vincennes baseball player Emily Montgomery smiles while hanging out with teammates before their Class A Championship game at Victory Field in Indianapolis on June 19, 2009. (Photo: Heather Charles/Star 2009 file)

In a nutshell, those bylaws allow girls to play on the boys baseball, basketball, football, soccer or wrestling teams in the regular season — if there is not a comparable girls program in that sport. (Baseball and softball are not considered comparable sports, in this case.)

Girls are not allowed on boys cross-country, golf, swimming and diving, tennis or track and field teams. Slightly different rules are in place for tournament series.

Public opinion seems to be trending the way of coed sports. In a recent polling on debate.org, 61 percent of Americans said "yes" to the question: "Should sports be coed?"

But not everyone agrees.

"Males and females are built differently," said Katie



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Conner, an avid adult volleyball player in Indianapolis. "Especially in high-impact team sports, injuries would skyrocket. Some coed sports would work, like volleyball. Others would be a disaster."

But there was a day when the world believed a female would never wrestle, never play football.

Today, more than 700 girls are playing high school football in the U.S., and they are not all kickers, according to data from the Women's Sports Foundation. They are quarterbacks, linebackers and ends.

Wrestling? Kayla Miracle of Culver Academies became the first girl to compete in the wrestling state finals in 2012.

Baseball? Emily Montgomery was an outfielder for Vincennes Rivet when it went to Indiana's Class A state championship game in 2009. If Rivet had had a softball team, Montgomery could have played baseball in the regular season but not the postseason.



Shelby Osborne, a senior at Jeffersonville High School, signed in June with Campbellsville University in Kentucky to become college football's first female defensive back. (Photo: Submitted photo)

And Osborne, that college football player headed to compete with the guys? It's about knowing your place in the sport, males and females alike, said Lonnie Oldham, her high school coach.

"She can get through the rigor of running and conditioning part of it," he said when she signed for college football. "I don't know how she'll do physically — like taking hits and stuff. But being a defensive back, it's kind of like Deion Sanders. You can choose to hit or not hit. She's got to make business decisions."

As for fitting in, most boys welcome the athletic prowess of a girl on their team. Dewey said she has been greeted with open arms and positive feedback.

"The guys make sure I don't get hit," she said. "And if I don't make a field goal, they just pick me up and carry me around."

Of course, the team has reason to be supportive, said Tigers coach Tim Able.

"She is a great all-around athlete," he said. "After two years, she is our career record holder of 38 consecutive (points after touchdowns)."

Call Star reporter Dana Hunsinger Benbow at (317) 444-6012. Follow her on Twitter: @danabenbow.

Playing by the rules

• Regular season

A girl can play on the boys baseball, basketball, football, soccer or wrestling teams if there is not a comparable girls program in that sport. (Baseball and softball are not considered comparable sports, in this case.)

Girls are not allowed to be on boys cross-country, golf, swimming and diving, tennis or track and field teams.

• During tournaments

A girl can play on a football or wrestling team.

If a school has a boys basketball or soccer team but not a girls program in that sport, a girl may be on the boys team.

If a school has a boys baseball team but not a softball team, a girl may be on the baseball team. (If a school has a softball team, a girl cannot play in baseball's postseason.)

In cross-country, golf, swimming and diving, tennis, and track and field, a girl may only attempt to qualify for and participate in the girls program.

- Boys may not participate on girls teams in any sport because "it creates unfair competition through an overbalance of strength and ability of male contestants on teams designed for girls."

Source: Indiana High School Athletic Association

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