Despite the explosion of female sport participants in the post-Title IX era, there has been a significant decline in the percentage of women who coach these athletes. The scarcity of female coaches at the professional, Olympic, intercollegiate, interscholastic, and youth levels is well documented. A brief summary of the “state of the playing field” is outlined below along with a number of reasons why the dramatic decline of female head coaches is of such concern.

With respect to Olympic sports, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) recognized the need for female representation at both the international and national level. In 2005, the IOC mandated that a minimum of 20% of all National Olympic Committee decision-making positions—including coaches—be held by women. Unfortunately, current data are not available to ascertain if the National Governing Bodies are in compliance with the IOC mandate.

We have better data at the intercollegiate level because for over three decades, Vivian Acosta and Linda Carpenter have documented the employment patterns of women in leadership positions. Their 2008 report indicates that nationwide, just 21% of all men’s and women’s teams are coached by females, and only 43% of head coaches for women’s teams are female. This latter figure reflects how dramatic the decline of female coaches has been. Prior to Title IX, over 90% of all head coaching positions in women’s sports were occupied by females.

Data from the Minnesota State High School Coaches Association 2007–08 season show similar trends at the interscholastic level—only 17% of all teams (boys’ and girls’) are coached by females. Broken down by gender, just 38% of all girls’ teams are coached by females and they are virtually absent as coaches of boys’ teams where they represent only 2.2% of all head coaching positions. Perhaps not surprisingly, the highest percentage of female head coaches represented in girls’ high school athletics was in sports historically deemed “appropriate” for girls: Synchronized swimming (100%), volleyball (70.1%), and gymnastics (69%).

Less is known about gendered patterns in coaches of youth sport. However, sport scholar Mike Messner, our Spring Distinguished Lecturer (see back panel for lecture details as well as Messner’s Guest Column on page 2), and Nicole LaVoi each completed separate studies examining youth soccer and discovered similar results. Messner’s data from a Southern California youth sport community revealed that a small but increasing number of female coaches were parents of girls (13%) served as head coaches in the American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO). LaVoi found a similar rate (15%) of female head coaches within the Minnesota Youth Soccer Association, although they were more likely to coach girls’ teams (24%) than boys’ (5%). LaVoi also found that as children mature and reach higher competitive levels—when sport “starts to get serious”—female coaches are less than 2.2% of all head coaching positions.

“Wanted!” continued on page 3
When we arrived at our six-year-old son's first soccer practice in 1995, I was delighted to learn that his coach was a woman. Coach Karen was tall, confident and athletic, and the kids responded well to her leadership. "Great, a woman coach!" I observed cheerily. "It's a new and different world than the one we grew up in." But over the next 12 years, as both of my sons played several seasons in the American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO), as well as Little League baseball, they never had another female head coach. It's not that women weren't contributing to the kids' teams. All of the "team parents" (often called "team moms") were women. I was fascinated, and studied this gendered division of labor for the next eight years. The numbers were stark: from 1999 to 2007, only 6% of 538 Little League Baseball and Softball teams in my Southern California community were managed by women. AYSO was better—13% of 1,280 teams had a female coach. As I started to observe things, I noticed that a male coach was referred to as "the coach." In contrast, a woman was usually called "the woman coach," thus linguistically marking her. But it was more than gendered language that barred women's entry into coaching and ultimately caused most of those who didn't venture into coaching to quit after a year or two. I then read very little about sexism or hostility toward these women, the stories about their experiences revealed informal—but very powerful—processes that marginalized or discouraged them. Feeling a constant sense of scrutiny from other adults—"is she really qualified to coach my kid?"—being made to feel like an outsider in the midst of the "old boys' network," having to contend with men's "insulting" loud voices on the playing fields. As one woman told me, "I just couldn't take that."

In spite of such challenges, some women do manage to survive and thrive as coaches. They develop strategies to contend with challenges they face as "the woman coach." "You gotta be tough," one told me. The women who survived by being more competitive than men ran head-on into the same sort of double-standard that women face in corporate and professional life. If you're not competitive and aggressive, you're not taken seriously; if you are overly so, you are labeled a bitch. Clearly, the most successful gender strategies are group ones. In AYSO, I found the beginnings of what one woman called (with an ironic chuckle) "an old girls' network" to recruit and support more female coaches. In Little League Baseball and Softball, the number of women is still too low for this kind of women's network to develop. Baseball (and by extension, softball) still "belongs" to men, leaving female coaches as isolated tokens. In sum, a successful strategy is one that results in a critical mass.

**GUEST COLUMN: MICHAEL A. MESSNER**

"You Gotta Be Tough": Challenges and Strategies of Female Coaches in Youth Sports

It is very important to increase the numbers of female coaches in youth sports. Why does it matter? Because what adults do in youth sports is linked to gender stereotypes and related to gendered socialization in other realms; an "unfinished feminist revolution" in work and family life is further reinforced by such a skewed male dominance in youth sports. It also matters because, as preparation for the world they will enter as adults, boys need to see and experience the full range of women's leadership skills and physical abilities. And it matters because women coaches can be an inspiration to today's girls, giving them a vision of what they can do when they become adults. As one coach told the girls on her softball team, "Somebody, most of you girls are going to be moms. You don't want just to look at Dad do all that stuff. Not when you've got this kind of experience. You want to do it too!"

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**FEMALE COLLEGIATE BASKETBALL COACHES GOT GAME!**

This February, University of Tennessee's Pat Summit became the first-ever collegiate basketball coach in Division I to accumulate 1,000 career victories. Summit also has eight national championships to her credit, and her teams have made appearances in every NCAA Tournament, reaching the Sweet 16 an amazing 27 times. Under Summit's leadership, the Lady Vols have gone to the Final Four on 18 different occasions. Summit is not the only woman's basketball coach with a host of wins. Joining Summit in the Top 5 of all-time Division I women's basketball coaches' win totals are Jody Conradt, Tara VanDerveer, Kim Mulkey and Brenda Frese. In AYSO, I found

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**Mike Messner and his son Sasho**
LEARNING OUR LEGACY

LINDA WELLS: LEGENDARY COACH

Linda Wells—pioneering women’s softball coach—is the epitome of a pre-Title IX athlete who made a career of her passion for sports. Wells is a visionary, the type of individual who creates immediate rapport with strangers and fills a room with her presence and wisdom. Over the course of her celebrated career, Wells has empowered countless girls and women through her willingness to put herself—and her career—on the line to fight for what is right. A self-described small-town kid from the town of Pacific, Missouri, Wells played five collegiate sports (volleyball, basketball, softball, field hockey, and tennis) at a Missouri State in the 1970s. But it was in the sport of softball where Wells enjoyed a long and successful career (over 37 years of organized teams) in the Amateur Softball Association and the Women's International Professional Softball League. Wells’ accomplishments earned her seven Hall of Fame inductions either at institutions where she played or with organizations which she helped develop (e.g., National Fastpitch Coaches Association).

While Wells’ career as an athlete is certainly impressive, her coaching and leadership accomplishments are even greater. In 1974, at the age of 21, she was named the first full-time head coach at the University of Minnesota in three women’s sports—basketball, softball, and volleyball. While her peers were still formulating their life plans, Wells was setting into an office next to a legend in her own right—Herb Brooks—while she battled to overcome the “playday” mentality which dominated the college experience for women. She was also going toe-to-toe with athletic directors and school presidents to get what she needed for her teams. After 15 successful years coaching the Gophers and earning a Master’s degree in Exercise Physiology from the U of M, Wells headed south to take over the softball program at Arizona State University. “I love Minnesota, and would have stayed forever, but I got tired of the winters,” she laughs.

Wells retired in 2005 after 30-plus years of collegiate coaching with an overall winning record of 884-653 (58%), numerous conference championships, All-America awards, an array of medals, national tournament berths, and no doubt countless memories. She has also coached at the international level overseeing both the Dutch (2008 Beijing) and Greek (2004 Athens) Olympic softball teams. If Wells wasn’t busy enough, in 1982, she founded her own business, Wells Sports Corporation, which is still going strong and specializes in coaching clinics, speaking engagements, and products and services for youth sports. According to Regina Sullivan, Senior Associate AD at the U of M, “Linda Wells is a true pioneer in Gopher athletic history. Her dedication and passion have helped to advance opportunities for girls and women in sport and she has become a national role model for many student-athletes, coaches, and colleagues over the last several decades.”

Perhaps Wells’ biggest contribution is her vision of what participation and a career in sports should look like for females. Wells says most people think sports for females started with Title IX when in fact, “…women and girls have always played sports. They couldn’t be stopped,” she points out. “It seems pretty limited to only have one day that celebrates their participation” (referring to National Girls & Women Sport Day held annually in February), Wells points out. Former teammate, colleague, Hall of Famer, Title IX lawyer, and Tucker Center affiliate Rayla Allison said of Wells, “She is one of the most knowledgeable, recognizable, and intelligent people in softball. She has done more to advance softball around the world than any other person. But more importantly, she is capable of seeing broader issues and has fought tirelessly to advocate for all girls and women in sport … because of that, she is one of the bravest women I know.”

As Wells begins to enjoy full retirement in sunny Arizona by golfing, traveling, and enjoying time with friends and family, she often wonders who in the next generation will “pick up the ball” and continue to fight for equality for women’s sports. Those of us at the Tucker Center do our part to answer her question, always aware that it is a pioneer like Linda Wells who makes such work possible. We are proud to have her in the Gopher family and are grateful—not to mention indebted—for all she has done, and continues to do, for all of us.

KUDOS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Honors & Awards
- Affiliated Scholar Diane Wiese-Bjornstal has been appointed to the 2009 Science Board of the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.
- Affiliated Scholar Dalheia Barr-Anderson was awarded a 3-year, NIH Career Development Grant (Building Interdisciplinary Research Careers in Women’s Health) to examine environmental influences of physical activity and diet in young African-American adolescent girls.
- Co-Director Maureen Weiss and David Goodman (Simon Fraser University) received a 3-year, $90,000 grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Their project aims to reduce the incidence of concussions among youth hockey players by educating youth athletes, coaches, and parents.

Scholarly Activities
- Affiliated Scholar Lisa Kihl gave an invited keynote address at the University of Washington. Her presentation—Coping with Corruption’s Mass—was delivered at the Intercollegiate Athletics Leadership Executive Luncheon.
- Associate Director Nicole LaVoit and Chelsey Thul, Ph.D., student, presented their research, Reducing Physical Inactivity and Promoting Active Living: From the Voices of East African Girls at the 2009 Active Living Research Conference in San Diego, CA.
- Affiliated Scholar Jo Ann Bussy was invited to deliver Framing the Female Athlete: Media Constructions of Gender to the AAWU Northeast Branch and to students and faculty at The College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, MN.
- Co-director Mary Jo Kane will give an invited presentation titled Media Representations of Sportswomen in the 21st Century at the NCAA-sponsored Gender Equity & Issues Forum in San Diego, CA in April.
- Affiliated Scholar Doug Hartmann presented The 1968 African American Olympic Protest during our Roots, International Rehearsals at a conference on global movements of 1986 and will present Barack Obama, Michael Jordan, and the Complexities of Blackness in American Culture at the Torstenson Lecture in Sociology at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, MN this spring.

For more information, visit the Tucker Center news blog at www.tuckercenter.org or on Twitter at twitter.com/tuckercenter
About the Lecture: Over the past 30 years, girls’ increasing participation in youth sports has been nothing short of revolutionary. Yet during this same time period, few women have become head coaches in youth sports and when they do volunteer, they are often relegated to the position of “team mom.” To address this “leadership gap,” sport scholar Michael Messner examined a Southern California community’s youth soccer, baseball, and softball leagues. His research asks the following questions: What are the barriers preventing women from coaching youth sports? What challenges are faced by the few women who do coach? What strategies do these women develop to survive—and thrive—as youth sports coaches? And what can we learn from their particular strategies and insights? Messner explores these critical questions and outlines why recruiting and supporting female coaches is so important for our families, our communities, and our children.

About the Speaker: Michael A. Messner is Professor of Sociology & Gender Studies at the University of Southern California and currently serves as President-elect of the Pacific Sociological Association. He is a past President of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS), and a two-time winner of the NASSS book award. He has also served as a consultant to the California Women’s Law Center related to his work on Title IX. Professor Messner is author or editor of 11 books, including Taking the Field: Women, Men and Sports (2002) and Out of Play: Critical Essays on Gender and Sport (2007). His newest book, It’s All for the Kids: Gender, Families and Youth Sports (2009), conducted over the years that his sons were playing youth sports, provides provocative and important insights into the current culture of youth sports and will be the focus of his presentation on April 22.

To learn more about the event, go to our Web site at www.tuckercenter.org.