Thirty years of sport media scholarship have shown that women’s sports receive about 6-8% of all media coverage. Given that nationwide, females represent approximately 40% of all sport participants, it is safe to argue that sportswomen are significantly under-represented throughout mainstream media. Those who challenge this lack of coverage hear a familiar and enduring refrain from the media: “We don’t participate in promotional journalism. We simply cover the sports people are interested in.”

This notion of interest is at the heart of the argument surrounding why women’s sports continue to be absent from the media radar screen. As the above quote suggests, writers and editors do not believe they have an obligation to serve a particular social agenda such as “promoting” women’s sports. Yet those on the other side of the argument—advocates of women’s sports—correctly position this by pointing out two important facts: 1) mainstream sport media routinely promote (hypen) men’s sporting events as a way to generate fan interest, and 2) in many cases, interest already exists in spite of the widespread media blackout surrounding women’s sports.

The two most prominent ways we display interest in sports is through participation and attendance at sporting events. In addition, one can display “interest” by watching sports on television, reading print or electronic media, blogging, and volunteering (e.g., joining booster clubs). Let’s look at actual participation rates in women’s sports. During the 2005-06 academic year nationwide, girls and women participated in interscholastic and intercollegiate sports in record numbers. For example, the National Federation of State High School Associations reported that approximately 3 million girls participated in high-school athletics, the top five sports females engaged in were basketball, track and field, volleyball, softball, and soccer. In 2006, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member schools offered an average of 845 women’s teams per institution, again a record number. The most popular collegiate women’s sports were basketball, volleyball, soccer, cross country, and softball.

Perhaps these significant increases in participation help explain parallel increases in the growing number of fans interested in women’s sports. Without question, spectator interest in women’s professional and collegiate sports has exploded over the past 25 years. As our guest columnist Nancy Lough points out on page 2, some prominent examples include the sold-out crowd of over 90,000 fans who watched the U.S. battle (and beat) China in the 1999 Women’s World Cup Soccer Championship. In the professional ranks, the WNBA recently celebrated its 10th anniversary and boasts an average of 7,200 fans per game. And for those who constantly (and negatively) compare such figures to men’s sports, it should be noted that the NBA took 18 years to reach a similar result.

Increasing fan interest in women’s sports is not confined to basketball and soccer. In professional tennis, women’s matches have drawn higher television ratings than men’s matches (CNN.com), while the sport has also witnessed an increase in attendance and a growing recognizability of superstars such as Maria Sharapova. In addition to tennis, the LPGA’s TV viewership...
As part of a ‘35-Year Progress Report’ to the Media & Sport Law Society at St. Thomas University Law School last November.

Jo Ann Byusse, Affiliated Scholar, gave a talk to the wellness and human performance students at Southwest Minnesota State University in February.

Diane Wiese-Bjornstal, Affiliated Scholar, was featured on the WCCO evening news last October discussing inappropriate behavior by parents whose children are involved in youth sports.

Nicole LaVoii visited Algeria in February as a part of a U.S. State Department delegation to deliver Unity Through Sport (USport) to youth basketball athletes and their coaches. The USport program utilizes collaborative resources to build mutual understanding, appreciation, and cooperation between the United States and the Muslim world.

Bonnie Reimann, School of Kinesiology graduate student and instructor of Health & Exercise Science at Gustavus Adolphus College, recently traveled to Namibia to study social justice issues. Reimann writes about her experiences and insights, including the impact of sport and physical education on the lives of girls, in her recent dissertation, A Physical Educator’s Perspective of Namibia, Africa. (www.tcm.edu/~reim0037/home.html)

Heather Maxwell, doctoral student in Sport Management, wrote a guest column—"Developing Sport Leagues Suffer from Media’s Choices"—for the October 9, 2006, issue of Sport & Exercise Science Business Journal.

Stay current on Tucker Center news and research initiatives and visit links to published studies by visiting www.tuckercenter.org.

## Research Updates

- **The Tucker Center** will participate in the upcoming “Girls & Women Book: Celebrating 35 Years of Sport and Title IX” conference in Cleveland in March 2007. Presentations include “Have You Seen Her? The Female Athlete as Contested Terrain” and “Coaching Girls: A Content Analysis of Popular Press Coaching Books.”

- **Associate Director Nicole LaVoii** received funding to conduct “Disparities in Youth Soccer: Unequal Opportunities, Unequal Outcomes,” one of only seven projects funded out of a pool of nearly 60 proposals submitted to President Bruininks’ Initiative on Children, Youth, and Families. LaVoii and her colleagues will work with the Minnesota Youth Soccer Association (MYSA) and community leaders to help increase the number of ethnic minority children playing youth soccer in Minnesota. They will conduct focus group conversations with families and their children to identify barriers to participation. Results will be used in policy recommendations.

- **Two members of the Tucker-Center Student Research Team** were awarded U of M Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) grants. Kim Reshke will examine motivation in intercollegiate women’s and men’s hockey game sport fans. Reshke will also work with doctoral student Heather Maxwell to help facilitate effective development of marketing plans. The second grant recipient, Katie Anderson, will work with graduate students Julie Hughes and Cheryl Wick to conduct an intervention using Dance Dance Revolution to improve the cardiovascular, bone health, and body composition of overweight Hispanic children.

- **Affiliated Scholar Dr. Mireta Petit** and her graduate students have begun two studies examining various components of bone health including the role of bone health and muscle fatigues on stress fractures in female athletes, and the role of hormones and physical activity on the bone and muscle health of females runners diagnosed with anorexia. Dr. Petit is the director of the School of Kinesiology’s Laboratory of Musculoskeletal Health.

- **Nicole LaVoii,** Affiliated Scholar Diane Wiese-Bjornstal, and **Doctoral Candidate Jens Omli** are launching a series of round-ground-breaking studies on the effects of “angry” sideline behaviors of adults on young athletes. Their data indicate angry behaviors emanating from adults on the sidelines occur with regular frequency, but no research has examined how such behaviors affect children and their families.

- **Wiese-Bjornstal, LaVoii, and Omli are also co-authoring a chapter on developmental issues for the International Olympic Committee Medical Commission Handbook of Sport Psychology.**

- **LaVoii** is interviewing former female collegiate athletes who currently have children participating in organized youth sports. Little is known about parent-coaches, particularly mother-coaches. This study will help shed light on the dynamic interplay of motivations and barriers mothers face and negotiate when choosing to coach, or not to coach, their own children.

- **Mary Jo Kane and graduate student Heather Maxwell** began collecting data for their study “Expanding the Boundaries of Sport Media Research: An Exploration of Consumer Responses to Representations of Women’s Sport.” The study is supported by a grant from the Women’s Sports Foundation.

### CUDOS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **The Tucker Center** received the Minnesota Coalition of Women in Athletic Leadership Special Merit Award for 2006. This award recognizes research, education, and outreach organizations that have shown exceptional contributions to promoting girls and women in sports.

The award was presented February 7 in the Minnesota State Capitol Rotunda during a celebration of National Girls and Women in Sports Day.

- **Mary Jo Kane** will be a panelist at the “Title IX Today, Title IX Tomorrow” conference sponsored by Stanford Law School at Stanford University in April 2007.

- **Professor Kane** presented “Title IX: A 35-year Progress Report” to the Media & Sport Law Society at St. Thomas University Law School last November.

- **Jo Ann Byusse,** Affiliated Scholar, gave a talk to the wellness and human performance students at Southwest Minnesota State University in February.

- **Diane Wiese-Bjornstal,** Affiliated Scholar, was featured on the WCCO evening news last October discussing inappropriate behavior by parents whose children are involved in youth sports.

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Their presence is visible and palpable in Williams Arena. Wearing old-school maroon and gold striped rugby shirts or Gopher gear from head-to-toe, this self-proclaimed “zealous” group of fans is known as the Fast Break Club (FBC). Technically, they are considered the Gopher Women’s Basketball “booster club,” but members quickly discover they are much, much more.

How did the FBC come into being? Terry McFarland and Sue Corbin, president and vice president of the FBC, respectively, passionately explain the club’s inception, steady growth, and overwhelming success. Early in the 2001-02 season, McFarland was watching Lindsay Whalen display her on-the-court magic during a TV broadcast. This experience created the following epiphany for McFarland: “More people have to see this kid play!”

The next day, McFarland called then-athletic director Chris Voel to see how he could turn his passion into a reality. Shortly thereafter, he was asked to become president of the newly forming FBC. “Previously, the booster club was comprised mostly of parents and relatives of the women on the team, so when their daughter graduated, they were done [being involved]... There was no continuity in the club’s leadership.” When McFarland’s efforts began there were 97 members in the FBC. Today, that number has grown to over 550 members strong!

The FBC is committed to building a fan base by exposing people, one by one, to the team and the game. Consider the example of current FBC member Pat Dix. McFarland invited Dix to her first women’s game hoping to spark some interest and enthusiasm because, “the FBC tries to convert people into lifelong fans! Once people see it, they’re hooked!” Dix was not only hooked, she also convinced 30 of her friends to become season ticket holders. Dix explains why she became so involved with the FBC by referring to her unofficial mantra, “If you bring them, they will come back.” Dix and her friends are fondly referred to as “The Dixie Chicks.”

Corbin and McFarland point out that the FBC is a “non-traditional booster club because we do so much more than just raise money.” FBC members don’t just join for the traditional reasons of access to the coach and team. “They are people who love the game and love the team. There are no casual FBC fans... Our mission is more than just raising money.” Despite their pride in being a “non-traditional” booster club, the FBC nevertheless raises impressive amounts of money for the team.

Corbin recounts a story involving a Janelle McCarville jersey raffle: “The winning bid came from a retired school teacher who wanted it for her elderly mother. The woman was so excited that she wrote out the check. It is stories like this that bring the passion and commitment of FBC members to life. Borton attributes those amazing numbers to one feature of the FBC: its involvement in the community. They help create excitement and energy in Minnesota. They fundraise for our program, they endow scholarships, and they help put people in the seats by working with our marketing department. The FBC has been so important to our program in so many ways.”

The Fast Break Club is a wonderful and commendable example of a grassroots group that makes a real difference in promoting women’s athletics. We thank all the members of the FBC for their important work and for providing a powerful example of how to promote women’s sports the right way— with passion, commitment, and tireless energy, all for the love of the game! For more information or to join the FBC, please visit their Web site at www.fastbreakclub.net.
Sex vs. Athletic Competence: Exploring Competing Narratives in Marketing and Promoting Women's Sports

Tuesday, April 17, 2007, 7:00-9:00pm
Cowles Auditorium
Hubert H. Humphrey Center
University of Minnesota
West Bank Campus

The Tucker Center’s spring Distinguished Lecture features a dynamic panel of experts with diverse professional, educational, and research-related backgrounds who share a common interest in women’s sports. Media scholars have repeatedly documented the unequal and marginalizing ways female athletes are portrayed, marketed, and promoted in all types of media. However, there is little empirical evidence regarding how marketing strategies for women’s sports are actually developed, how sport consumers perceive and interpret images of athletic females, and whether these interpretations influence consumer behavior such as watching or attending a sporting event. These high-profile panelists will examine differing philosophies and strategies surrounding the various ways in which collegiate and professional women’s sports are marketed and promoted, as well as the effectiveness of those strategies in light of innovative research being conducted by the Tucker Center.

Panelists include Kristin Bernert, Regina Sullivan, Mary Jo Kane, and Heather Maxwell. Bernert, Vice President of WNBA Team Development, held previous administrative positions with the Detroit Shock, the Cleveland Indians, and Division I intercollegiate athletics. Bernert will share her many insights into how to most effectively market and promote women’s sports, as well as discuss specific marketing strategies and philosophies the WNBA currently uses to promote women’s professional basketball.

Regina Sullivan is the Senior Associate Athletic Director at the University of Minnesota. Sullivan was profiled in our Fall 2006 newsletter and is a long-time leader, advocate, and pioneer in women’s intercollegiate athletics. Sullivan will provide information about the marketing philosophies, strategies, and techniques employed by the University of Minnesota to promote athletic excellence in and for women’s sports. She will also discuss how these strategies may or may not differ from those used to promote men’s sports and women’s professional sports.

Connecting current marketing techniques to 30 years of sport media scholarship, Professor Kane will examine research conducted in media representations of female athletes. Kane, an internationally known scholar at the U of M, will explore various cultural assumptions behind a “sex sells” narrative that assumes the best way to market and promote women’s sports is to portray athletic females as sexy and feminine rather than as accomplished athletes. She and coaching girls’ soccer enables her to provide valuable insights on several Tucker Center projects. For example, one exciting project involves a content analysis of popular books designed to coach girls’ teams. This research will be presented at the “Girls & Women Rock: Celebrating 35 Years of Sport & Title IX” conference in Cleveland in March.

Tucker Center research assistant, Heather Maxwell, will highlight their innovative study on media images and the impact of these images on fan behavior. Their research is being funded by a grant from the Women’s Sports Foundation.

Please join us for what promises to be an interesting discussion about the future of effective marketing and promotion of women’s sports!

This event is FREE and open to the public. Parking is available. For more information call the Tucker Center at (612) 625-7327, or visit the Tucker Center Web site at www.tuckercenter.org.