

Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport

Tucker Center News

University of Minnesota

Spring 2005

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcome to the spring edition of the Tucker Center newsletter. We have a number of exciting things to share with you about the various ways we work to fulfill a central part of our mission—improving the lives of sportswomen through research, education and public service.

One part of our mission is to acknowledge and honor those who have made a significant contribution to women's sports throughout the state of Minnesota. In "Learning Our Legacy" we highlight an individual whose life-long commitment to creating equitable treatment for athletic females is unmatched—Chris Voelz, former Women's Athletic Director at the University of Minnesota. During her tenure, the women's athletic department became a national "model of excellence" both on and off the court.

Another important aspect of our mission is our ongoing research efforts. In "Research Updates" we outline a soon-to-be-published study in which I collaborated with Tucker Center affiliated scholar, Jo Ann Buysse. This study is the most recent installment of nationwide, longitudinal research begun in the early 1990s. We examined images of intercollegiate female and male athletes from the 2003-04 season as depicted on media guide covers from the most highly prestigious athletic conferences (e.g., Big 10, SEC) in the country.

Much to our (pleasant) surprise, we discovered that today's female athletes are portrayed in a manner that is virtually undistinguishable from their male counterparts, meaning as active, on-the-court competitors. This finding is in sharp contrast to images of sportswomen typically found in print and broadcast journalism. It is also in sharp contrast to Dr. Buysse's 1990 investigation in which female athletes were significantly more likely than male athletes to be portrayed off the court, out of uniform and in passive, "sexy" poses. Change, however slow, does indeed take place. See page 3 for more information about this study and the other research efforts we're undertaking.

One of our earliest initiatives was to establish a Distinguished Lecture Series as a way to share the best and the brightest from the world of women's sports. In the past, we've heard from the likes of Ann Bancroft, Donna Lopiano and Mariah Burton Nelson. This year is no exception. On Monday, April 11th, the Tucker Center

will host a panel featuring the "best and the brightest" head coaches from the U of M. Pam Borton, Laura Halldorson and Mike Hebert will share their insights into last year's remarkable season when the volleyball and basketball teams went to the Final Four, and the hockey team captured the National Championship. Please join us at Coffman Memorial Union and hear the behind-the-scenes story of an unprecedented moment in women's athletics at the University of Minnesota (see the enclosed flier for more details).



Mary Jo Kane

In our "Donor Profile" column we feature Minnesota native, Deb Noll. A professional fundraiser with the U of M's Foundation, Noll works with donors on all aspects of giving, from establishing scholarships to underwriting innovative research projects. Noll values the notion and practice of making financial contributions so that others may fulfill their dreams. With her own gift to the Tucker Center, Noll not only "practices what she preaches," but enables us to fulfill the dreams of others as well.

Finally, our "Staff Update" features a familiar face in an unfamiliar role. All of us are aware of basketball icon, Lindsay Whalen. But few know about Lindsay Whalen, undergraduate student, who has a particular interest in how research can open up possibilities, and break down barriers, for all those girls and women interested in participating in sports. Such an interest—and commitment—made for a good fit between Whalen and the Tucker Center.

We hope you enjoy learning about all of our efforts on behalf of sportswomen everywhere. Please remember that these efforts are only possible because of your ongoing and generous support. Happy spring!

DONOR PROFILE: DEB NOLL

As a professional fundraiser who spends her days advising current and future donors about how they can make gifts to the U, Deb Noll is more than familiar with what it means to fund an idea, a project or a mission. An important part of her work with the U of M's Foundation is to be knowledgeable about the University and its vast array of programs, from agronomy to zoology and every imaginable project in between. It should therefore come as no surprise that Noll is keenly aware of the needs specific to women's sports and the donors who are committed to fulfilling those needs. Because she keeps her fingers on the pulse of what is "happening at the U," Noll is also quite familiar with the mission of the Tucker Center: "The Tucker Center does an excellent job of taking important research on girls and women in sport and executes it into practice and community outreach."

After recent discussions with Center director, Mary Jo Kane, Noll learned about a very specific project that needed funding and decided to step up to the plate to fulfill that need. Kane told Noll that the groundbreaking report the Center produced in partnership with the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports in the mid-1990s needed to be updated to reflect the most recent findings on how sport and physical activity impact the lives of adolescent girls. As Noll states: "I saw a need and decided to do what I advise donors to do every day. Make a pledge to accomplish something tangible, or give because something has meaning to you. My gift to the Tucker Center fulfills both desires."

Of all the programs across the U that needed to be funded, why did Noll choose the Tucker Center? For starters, she grew up in Glencoe, Minnesota, playing sports such as basketball, softball and volleyball. She considers herself a sports enthusiast and also knows the value of understanding how sport and physical activity influence our lives, particularly the lives of young children. After graduating from the U of M in 1985 with a degree in journalism, Noll began her professional career with 4H. It was there that she learned the value of developing community and business relationships as a way to create and support successful programs. She also learned something about herself: She had an important skill, which was the ability to raise much-needed funds to support programs. Others in her organization also noticed her



Deb Noll, Friend of the Tucker Center

skills at fundraising. Noll was soon promoted from a director's position at the local level, to a regional fundraising position where she continued her success throughout the state.

When asked what makes a good fundraiser, Noll suggests a mix of personal characteristics such as enjoying meeting new people, understanding a donor's interests, and having the ability to match those interests with a particular project. She also believes that success is a result of the passion you bring to

your job: "Although it's not a requirement in the business of fundraising, for me it is helpful, and even a bonus, to be really passionate about the programs for which I'm raising funds."

After 14 successful years with 4H, Noll decided to come back to the U. These days she can apply her passion not only throughout the state of Minnesota, but across the country as well. An added bonus is that her work is in service to her alma mater and to the issues she feels strongly about. Concentrating her fundraising efforts in Colorado and Arizona, Noll shares her vast knowledge with U of M alumni living in those two states. The success of so many projects depends on her success. Needless to say, this is quite a responsibility, but also an exciting challenge: "I get to spend time with some wonderful people who share fond memories of the University and whose interests are so varied. It's almost always interesting and certainly very rewarding."

Although a bit uncomfortable about being profiled in our newsletter—she is, after all, a Minnesotan!—Noll is also aware that the public "thank-yous" that come with giving serve an important need. As she points out, just as there is value in giving a gift, there is equal value in recognizing the gift giver: "If even one or two people say to themselves 'Look, if Deb has found a reason and a way to give then so can I,' well, then I can live with the publicity that goes with my gift." And we can live with giving our own "thanks" to Deb Noll for her generous gift to the Tucker Center. By practicing what she preaches, and allowing us to share that in a very public way, her efforts will make a difference to all those who care about furthering our understanding of women's sports.

RESEARCH UPDATE

This past year has been a particularly productive one with respect to the Tucker Center research agenda. Our efforts have culminated in amassing a large database related to our ongoing interests in the various (and troubling) ways athletic females are represented in the media. Toward that end, we (Kane & Buysse) produced a publication entitled “Intercollegiate Media Guides as Contested Terrain: A Longitudinal Analysis” which will appear in the prestigious *Sociology of Sport Journal*. This study asked two central questions: 1) If we compare the same sports (e.g., basketball and golf) in the same year, at the same school, using the same medium (i.e., media guide covers), will there be significant differences between how female and male athletes are portrayed?; and 2) will there be changes in these representations as a function of time?

To answer these questions, we analyzed data for the 2003-04 season from six major athletic conferences across the country and compared these results to two previous studies (1990 and 1997) conducted by Jo Ann Buysse. In the two earlier studies, Buysse found that female athletes were significantly less likely to be portrayed as active sport participants—and significantly more likely to be portrayed in traditionally feminine, sexually provocative poses—than were their male counterparts. We used media guide covers as our unit of analysis because they contain consciously constructed images about women’s and men’s sports that an athletic department, and by extension, a university, want to project to the local and national media, alumni groups and potential donors. Media guides are also used as recruiting tools for prospective athletes and their family members.

So what messages do schools want to send about their athletic programs? During the 2003-04 season, they sent remarkably similar and consistent ones in which athletic females achieved a strong measure of parity. In short, sportswomen were portrayed as serious athletes, meaning on the court, in uniform and in action. What is important about this finding is that today’s media guide covers offer representations of sportswomen that are in sharp contrast to the two previous studies, where female athletes and their accomplishments were trivialized. For more information about these results, as well as exemplars of the change-over-time images, go to our website at <http://www.tuckercenter.org/mediaguide.htm>.

An obvious follow-up to the current study is to examine those who were in charge of creating the images in the first place. In short, to collect and analyze data on the key decision-makers involved in choosing the content on the media guide covers. We are in the process of doing precisely that because we have also collected data on who made the decision—Athletic Director, Sports Information Director (SID), Head Coach, or Other (typically an outside public relations firm). We were also

interested in the sex of the decision maker to see if that has any effect on patterns of representation. Preliminary results indicate that in most cases, there were two decision-makers involved, the SID working in concert with the head coach. Interestingly, it appears that sex of decision-maker has little effect on which images appear on the covers, meaning that both female and male SIDs and head coaches routinely portrayed females as real or true athletes. These findings on decision-makers, as well as the results of the longitudinal analyses outlined above, offer strong evidence that institutions of higher education are ahead of the curve when it comes to reflecting accurate and positive images of highly competitive (and competent) sportswomen. For that, we can all be proud.

Finally, we have embarked on a long-overdue update of our 1997 collaboration with the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sport. Back then, we produced the groundbreaking report *Physical Activity & Sport in the Lives of Girls: Physical & Mental Health Dimensions from an Interdisciplinary Approach*. This report highlighted the numerous ways in which sport and physical activity have become essential aspects of girls’ lives. The report also outlined which types of environments enable young girls to develop and excel both on and off the playing field. The report also uncovered the barriers that prevent these same girls from reaching their full potential.

Since its publication, we have distributed (including web downloads) over 10,000 full reports and 15,000 executive summaries world-wide. The report has been used by a variety of interested parties from parents, teachers and administrators, to faculty, students and policy makers. Though we have received tremendous interest about the report, we have also received an increasing number of requests to update and distribute the material.

We are pleased to announce that because of our successful fundraising efforts, we can now make those requests a reality. Authors for the updated report include Professors Mary Jo Kane and Diane Wiese-Bjornstal (U of M), Barbara Ainsworth and Jean Nichols (San Diego State University), and Margaret Carlisle Duncan (University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee). The new report will feature an important extension from the original—a “Best Practices” chapter in which the authors bring their specific expertise and join together to create a “best practices” sports/physical activity program. Such a program would maximize the positive benefits of participation (e.g., how do we create sporting environments that ensure a healthy experience physically, mentally and socially?), and minimize the negative consequences (e.g., eliminate those experiences that associate sport and physical activity with failure and anxiety). Already on an accelerated timeline, we hope to launch the updated report in early January of next year.

LEARNING OUR LEGACY: A PROFILE OF CHRIS VOELZ

This column honors those who have made contributions to women's sports throughout the state of Minnesota and in so doing, have left a legacy, a gift to all of us. It is with great pleasure that we honor the legacy of someone who has made an unparalleled contribution—Chris Voelz, former Women's Athletic Director at the U of M from 1988-2002 and a life-long lover of sport and recreation.

When asked how she decided to choose a career path, Voelz says the answer is simple: "There really was no decision. Sport was my enjoyment and threaded through almost all of my growing-up experiences. The lessons I've lived and learned in sport have always been a part of me." Voelz has competed in sports for as long as she can remember. A self-described "tomboy," Voelz grew up in Louisiana and Illinois playing "horse" against her brother. At this stage of her life she was known as "Christie" and even back then, she was keenly aware of how girls were treated differently than boys. One example tells it all. Before Christie tried out for an all-boys' baseball team, she adopted the name "Chris," easily made the team, and played in a number of games until it was discovered that she was a girl. Such an experience opened her eyes about gender discrimination. It also started a chain of personal and professional decisions that would culminate in a life-long pursuit of ensuring equal opportunities for women in sport.

The resistance Voelz experienced as a young girl was repeated many times throughout her life. In high school, she was very skilled in three sports—volleyball, basketball and softball. As graduation neared, she received a letter from a local college offering her an athletic scholarship. But because she was Christie, not Christopher, she couldn't accept the offer as there were no such scholarships for females in the pre-Title IX era. Years later, Voelz was a representative to an Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) National Task Force on Scholarships, which ruled that females should be awarded athletic scholarships. She was able to achieve for others what she herself had been denied.

In 1966, Voelz enrolled at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. She competed in volleyball, basketball, softball and golf while earning an undergraduate degree in physical education. She also found something she had not previously experienced—a pocket of support for women's athletes. For example, Dr. Laurie Mabry, the women's AD, was also the President of AIAW. For the first time, Voelz saw first-hand the critical role advocacy could play in creating environments where females could excel athletically.

When considering her post-college career path, Voelz thought about pursuing a degree in law or sport psychology. But she first sought advice from a close mentor and found a real nugget of wisdom regarding which direction she should take. The mentor pointed out that because Voelz was so committed to social justice, being involved in education and women's sports would give her the challenge she truly sought. As Voelz had already discovered: "The

full participation of girls and women in sport is disguised as social justice on a daily basis." Voelz decided the best way to pursue that justice was in an educational setting. She took a job at Maine South High School near Chicago where she coached girls' volleyball, basketball and softball, while pursuing a Master's degree at Northern Illinois University. This may seem like more than enough work for most people, but Voelz was just getting started. She wanted a new challenge, meaning taking on coaching and administrative duties in an intercollegiate environment.



In 1978, Voelz took the position of head coach of the women's volleyball team at the University of Oregon; she also served as the assistant AD and eventually became the senior associate AD. During her 10-year stint, she was most proud of the fact that her coaching peers elected her president of the American Volleyball Coaches Association. In spite of her success, she was once again ready for a new challenge. She got her wish in 1988 when she was offered the position of Athletic Director at the University of Rhode Island while also being recruited for the job at Minnesota. Although the job at Rhode Island would have included both men's and women's athletics, Voelz opted for the U of M and its separate women's program. Why? Because she believed she could do more for female athletes under a separate structure. She was also reassured during her interview at Minnesota that there was a strong commitment to women's sports. That was enough to tip the balance in favor of the U of M. Soon a legend, and a legacy of success, were born.

Over her 14-year career, some of her most notable achievements are:

- Student-athletes had a cumulative GPA of over 3.0 for 25 academic terms
- A national championship in ice hockey
- An increase in endowed scholarships from 1 to 25
- Adding three sports (soccer, hockey and rowing)
- Hosting seven NCAA championships
- Fundraising efforts culminating in building new athletic facilities for women's soccer, softball, hockey and tennis.

The last (and in many ways the most remarkable) achievement on that list may explain why Voelz says her sport heroes are individuals who have given generously to women's athletics. Individuals like John and Sage Cowles, Kathleen Ridder, Deb Olson and Peggy Lucas: "Whenever we asked for their assistance, they were ready and willing to work with us to develop the programs and facilities you see today for women at the U of M." A self-described "positively built kind of person," Voelz looks back on her career at the U concentrating on her overall record, not a few losses along the way: "Although there were days when it felt like I was the player rounding first base and the coach on first was signaling 'go to second,' and the third-base coach was signaling 'hold up,' overall, my experience at the University of Minnesota was tremendous and very fulfilling."

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Currently, Voelz is the Leadership Gifts Officer for the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) where she works side-by-side with some of her heroines in sport, including Billy Jean King. Calling upon the lessons she perfected at the U of M, her motto today is "Change the world, one gift at a time." At WSF she is a part of a great team of people who work hard every day to make a difference in the lives of girls and women everywhere around the globe.

As someone who has spent a lifetime working to ensure equitable treatment for female athletes, Voelz has seen women's opportunities increase dramatically. She has also seen the increasing pressures coaches (not to

mention players) feel to maintain the appropriate balance between academic and athletic excellence. Perhaps most important of all, Voelz believes in the value of an educational framework as an essential part of any female athlete's sport experience: "The way I envision women's sports is to think about weaving new threads into the fabric of sport culture, not to eliminate the old fabric, but to create a newer, stronger fabric with the best aspects of the current threads and the new ones." This vision of sport is a far cry from the days when "Christie" was told "no girls allowed!" One reason we have come that far is because of the tireless efforts of master weaver Chris Voelz.

KUDOS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Last October, Ph.D. student Anne Barry met with a group of senior girls from Johnson High School in St. Paul. The young women were studying Women in Society as part of their coursework. Barry led a discussion of Title IX and images of female athletes using the Tucker Center's video, *Throw Like a Girl*.
- Barry also met with members of the Minnesota Women's Consortium in December and presented information on the Tucker Center's current research activity.
- In April, 2005, Barry will do a series of presentations to the entire student body of Sherburne High School (Sherburne, MN). Barry will use the Tucker Center's educational program, *Image is Everything*, while conducting workshops on issues related to body image among high-school athletes.
- Mary Jo Kane delivered an invited presentation, *The Federal Law Known as Title IX: What's Fact vs. Fiction Got To Do With It?* at a Women in Sport Symposium, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH, February, 2005.
- Kane also presented an invited keynote address, *Women's Sports 30 Years and Counting in the Wake of Title IX* for Women's History Month, sponsored by the Women's Studies Department, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, March, 2005.
- Kane co-published with Jo Ann Buysse "Intercollegiate Media Guides as Contested Terrain: A Longitudinal Analysis" in *Sociology of Sport Journal*, March, 2005.
- Jo Ann Buysse was a visiting scholar at Växjö University in Växjö, Sweden in October, 2004. Buysse met with faculty and students and discussed learning abroad opportunities for students in sport studies, as well as future collaborative efforts in sport management.

STAFF UPDATES

Lindsay Whalen, famed point guard for the U of M who is now enjoying similar fame with the WNBA's Connecticut Sun, does more than just play basketball. She is also an inquisitive student. While earning her undergrad degree in the School of Kinesiology, Whalen needed to complete an internship. Last fall, she fulfilled part of that requirement as an intern with the Tucker Center. Being a Minnesota native from Hutchinson made her decision to come to the U and pursue her athletic dreams relatively easy. But as a student, she had another decision to make, one about her undergraduate major. This too was an easy decision: "I decided on sport management because after my playing days, I want to stay involved in sports as much as I can." She envisions staying involved as a coach, an athletic director, or working in sport marketing.

Whalen wanted to do an internship with the Tucker Center because of our reputation and because of Pam Borton's recommendation. Coach Borton knew Tucker Center Director, Mary Jo Kane, when she (Borton) was a graduate student at Bowling Green State University. Borton was also familiar with the work we do on behalf of women's sports. Whalen was especially eager to work in the Tucker Center because of her interest in how research

is conducted, and how that research may, in turn, increase sport opportunities for girls and women. During her internship, Whalen gathered research materials from scholarly journals and on-line searches. She also scanned pictures of female athletes found in magazines such as *Sports Illustrated* into digital images which were then used in Professor Kane's presentations about the media's treatment of sportswomen. One final task was to collect statistics for various research projects. As for the literature reviews, Whalen says: "I never felt I did it correctly until I worked with the Tucker Team." Now she says she understands how a research environment works, and knows what it takes to interpret the data we collect. Though she has a long career ahead of her in professional basketball, Whalen is strongly considering graduate school. After witnessing her work in the Tucker Center we're confident she'll make the same kind of contribution in her academic efforts as she makes on the basketball court.





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