

Girls and Boys on the Same Team

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There has been a considerable amount of publicity during the past several years regarding girls playing in boys' organized sports leagues. Many of the cases have been taken to court with specific league organizations being charged with discrimination under the Human Rights Code. Many of the situations that have been publicized have involved girls, eleven years of age and under, who came from small towns with relatively few sports programs available to the young. This article will study the responsibility of the municipalities regarding girls wanting to participate in boys' organized sports.

There have been a few cases in the past four years that have become widely known due to the publicity. A young girl in Huntsville was unable to play on the Atom League so her family took the Ontario Minor Hockey Association to court. Two other cases involved families who took the respective Minor Softball Associations to court for not allowing girls to play on the teams.

As stated previously the conflicts have often occurred in smaller towns which do not have the programs to meet the needs of everyone. In many cases organizations such as the Ontario Minor Hockey and Softball Associations have the authority to decide who may join and who may not. To date they have ruled against girls' participation. If a young girl cannot join the boys' league there are a number of alternatives a municipality can take to help solve the conflict. It may be feasible for the municipality to put pressure on the minor sports organizations to take a more realistic view of the situation.

The facilities are usually provided by the municipality and paid for by the participants' parents through fees. This should allow the community and the participants to have some power in making the decision of whether or not girls can play on the boys' organized teams. If the community cannot offer a program for girls such as hockey or softball due to the lack of participants, the interested girls should have the chance to try out for the boys' teams.

In some situations an alternative to playing on the boys' team may be found. Some areas provide organized teams for girls but have an age restriction. For instance if a girl, ten years old, would like to play hockey but the team in her area is restricted to twelve to fifteen year olds (and no other team is available) and the young girl has the skills to play with older girls then the municipality could use other criteria for developing their league teams. Other methods should be assessed such as tryouts in which ability and skill, not age, are the criteria. This could be especially beneficial in smaller towns where there is a limited number of interested individuals.

This still leaves open the problem of the young girl who really wants to play, yet is not advanced enough in her athletic skills to be accepted on the competitive girls' team. It may be very difficult for an eight year old to compete for a place on a team which consists mainly of thirteen year olds. In such a case it seems the municipality could ease the problem by allowing girls in this age bracket to play with the boys' team of the same age.

Another alternative open to municipalities is to develop co-ed inhouse teams that include both girls and boys who have approximately the same abilities. These teams could provide everyone with the opportunity to play until they have the chance to join the competitive leagues.

One of the publicized 'girls on boys' team conflicts' brought into the open many of the Ontario Minor Hockey Association's opinions about girls participating on their teams. At one point in the court hearings the Ontario Minor Hockey Association stated that 'having boys and girls play hockey together would not be suitable because of the moral and social implications. The harm to boys from losing to girls, the danger to future family stability if boys learned in hockey to rough-house with girls . . . and the physiological differences between boys and girls were so marked that playing hockey together would eliminate real opportunities for enjoyable and effective competition' (Steed, 1978, p.6).

Such a statement raises quite a few points regarding the question of whether or not a girl should play on a boys' team. The first point to consider is the statement of the physiological differences between boys and girls around the age of ten. This argument is used to show that young girls are somehow handicapped because of an innate frailty. This is blatantly untrue. Girls are usually more physically developed than boys between the ages of nine to thirteen and can compete equally at all levels of sport. The municipalities cannot use this characteristic as a reason for eliminating girls from the boys' teams.

The second point discussed by the Ontario Minor Hockey Association is the idea about 'effective competition'. It is true that when the players are ten years old competitive aspects should be expected. But surely the emphasis should not be totally on competition? Rather it should be on enjoyment, team work and cooperation. 'Children at this age are not miniature adults, they are boys and girls in the process of maturation into adults', (Orlick, 1975, p. 168). And girls and boys playing together can learn the skills of the sports, have fun, compete, learn to win and lose, without feeling bombarded by the adult world's concepts of *win at all costs*.

The view that the home situation will be 'less stable' if girls play with boys on a team is a loaded statement with little supportive evidence. In fact a totally opposite viewpoint seems the most obvious. If we eliminate some of the role-playing from our sports perhaps future relationships between men and women will be more positive and family life can begin to be based on the concept of equals sharing a common bond in all areas of their relationships, intellectual, emotional, physical and psychological. Sports are very much in the public eye. Sports heroes are idolized and many young people try to identify with them in some way. What a challenge for the municipalities to seize on this opportunity and introduce a different concept of sports at a very early level. If they answer the challenge we could see role-playing between the sexes diminishing and finally being eradicated and if this could happen on the playing fields it would carry over into other areas of life.

The final point to be made from the statement by the Ontario Minor Hockey Association is that boys' egos will be harmed if they lose a game to the girls. At the ages of nine to thirteen I feel it is the parents who are perhaps instilling the idea of

having to win into the boys' minds. What difference does it make if a boy loses to a girl or a girl to a boy? Surely it is the authorities of the organizations — the adults — who feel that egos will be bruised. So often I hear from the young girls involved that the boys on the teams 'don't mind if I play'. It's the people who were running the organization that are opposed to the idea. In his book *Every Kid Can Win* Orlick quoted Marie Pepe as saying; 'It isn't the boys who don't want me to play and little league is for kids. It is only the grown-ups who made the mess' (Orlick, 1975, pp. 122). It is the parents who take the cases into the court room situation (though this may be the only recourse they have), and the head advisory boards or organizational groups who put the restrictions on activities such as minor league baseball and hockey. All the kids want to do is play, learn and have fun!

Keeping these points in mind the municipality can react in a number of ways. If there is a sufficient number of girls and boys to create two different leagues OK — but at the ages of nine through thirteen learning and enjoyment should be the main objectives. Alternatively the age limits may have to be lifted in the girls' leagues allowing all those with relatively the same ability to play together. If this suggestion doesn't solve the problem (because of the under-developed skills of the young girl) then other alternatives must be considered. Either co-ed inhouse leagues must be formed or the girls should be able to play with the boys. WHY NOT? The children do enjoy playing with each other and in fact can be seen as the authors of their own destiny. They could be the catalyst we're waiting for. They could touch off the breakdown of structural roles in society at large — a much bigger game than even hockey — and much deadlier. And who knows the city fathers might even save some money and reduce scheduling conflicts — something that the city mothers have long known how to do.

Bibliography

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Child Eating an Egg

Don't watch, I said
if it bothers you

if it takes her a day, a year
let her pick with a fingernail, the moon's crust
smith with a spoon, the crackling bald white shell
to alabaster dust,
Ringed green sulphur golfball
aeons of light
incubating baby chicks and spacemen

But he took the egg, adult fashion
peeled it, cut it wedgewise
precisely

Maara Haas