



The NFHS Voice



50th Anniversary of Title IX – A Time to Celebrate Opportunities for Girls in High School Sports

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Tomorrow is a very special day as we celebrate one of the most important events in our nation's history. Certainly, in the 100-plus years of high school sports in the United States, there is perhaps nothing more significant and transformative than the passage of Title IX of the Educational Amendments.

Fifty years ago on June 23, 1972, President Richard Nixon signed the landmark legislation that, while not mentioning high school sports whatsoever, began to pave the way for girls to have the same opportunities to compete in sports as the boys.

“No person in the United States shall on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

These 37 words served as the groundwork to open the door of opportunity for girls in high school sports, and thousands upon thousands – and eventually millions – of girls seized that chance that had not been available previously.

Except in isolated cases, such as in Iowa with its highly popular six-on-six basketball in place well before 1972, girls did not have the same opportunities as boys. The scene began to change dramatically in the years that followed, and, 50 years later, we have much to celebrate.

Think for a second about the millions of girls who have been able to play sports in education-based programs the past 50 years. Certainly, the majority used life lessons learned through high school sports to assist them in becoming successful in their lives, whether in a profession, leaders in communities or as mothers raising children who, in turn, learn the importance of competing in high school sports and activity programs.

In addition, some girls were able to use their high school sports opportunity as a springboard to future athletic success. Imagine for a moment sports history the past 50 years without some of these individuals who got their start in high school sports thanks to the passage of Title IX.

- **Cheryl Miller**, Riverside (California) Polytechnic High School. She was the first player – male or female – to be named All-American by Parade Magazine four times. She once scored 100 points in a game and in 1986, Sports Illustrated named Miller the best player in college basketball, regardless of sex. She was inducted into the NFHS National High School Hall of Fame in 1990.

- **Jackie Joyner-Kersey**, Lincoln High School, East St. Louis, Illinois. A basketball, volleyball and track and field star in high school who won four state team titles – one in basketball and three in track and field. She won gold medals in the heptathlon and long jump at the 1988 Olympics. Regarded as the one of

the greatest female athletes of the 20th Century, Joyner-Kersey will speak at the NFHS Summer Meeting June 29 in San Antonio, Texas.

- **Dawn Staley**, Murrell Dobbins Tech High School, North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was national player of the year as a senior and led the University of Virginia to three NCAA Final Fours. She won three Olympic gold medals as a player and one as coach of the U.S. team, and has led the University of South Carolina to two NCAA women's basketball championships.

The list continues, including numerous others in the NFHS National High School Hall of Fame – all because of that opportunity 50 years ago: Kim Mulkey, Lynette Woodard, Denise Curry, Chris Evert, Geri Grigsby, Ann Meyers-Drysdale, Jill Sterkel, Heather Farr, Natasha Kaiser-Brown, Janet Evans, Jackie Stiles, Missy West, Lisa Fernandez, Nicole Powell, Seimone Augustus, Maicel Malone and Michele Smith.

Several individuals who are a part of the 2022 class of the NFHS National High School Hall of Fame were involved with the administration – or were beneficiaries of – Title IX.

As head of the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union (IGHSAU) for 48 years, the late E. Wayne Cooley provided programs for girls in 10 sports before the implementation of Title IX in 1972, including the storied six-on-six girls basketball.

In his early years with the NFHS in the 1970s, Jack Roberts was involved with the implementation of Title IX at the local and state levels, particularly with the regulations in 1974 that placed competitive athletics under the purview of Title IX.

Becky Oakes was a pre-Title IX high school athlete but played vital roles throughout her career with the Missouri State High School Activities Association and the NFHS in making sure that girls had equal opportunities.

Sanya Richards-Ross, one of four athletes in the 2022 Hall of Fame class, was a beneficiary of Title IX as an outstanding track and field athlete at St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

“As a woman who has benefited so greatly from Title IX, I can’t imagine a world where female athletes aren’t given the same opportunity as males. My prayer is that women never forget and always appreciate the opportunity and that opportunities continue to be greater for women because the potential that women have is endless.”

One of the key individuals in making sure girls had these opportunities was Hawaii senator Patsy Takemoto Mink, who was a champion of women’s rights. Mink co-authored the Title IX Amendment of the Higher Education Act and introduced the Women’s Educational Equity Act of 1974.

Along with continuing to provide more opportunities for girls to compete in sports, efforts must intensify to keep high school female athletes engaged and involved in sports as coaches and administrators. We must support them as women – possibly looking at providing day care in some situations.

The celebration of the 50th anniversary of Title IX is not a conclusion or a culminating event. We must continue to tell the story of why it is important for girls to be involved in high school sports – and then to consider moving into positions as coaches and administrators. We must do a better job at helping women with a life-work balance.

The May issue of the NFHS’ national magazine, *High School Today*, contains many articles relating to the 50th anniversary of Title IX, including a feature by Peg Pennepacker on Bernice Sandler, whose willingness to fight against the discrimination she faced in 1969 led to the eventual Title IX legislation in 1972. Following is a link to the May issue of *High School Today*:

<https://www.nfhs.org/uploadedfiles/3dissue/HSToday/2022issues/may2022/index.html>

Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff is in her fourth year as chief executive officer of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) in Indianapolis, Indiana. She is the first female to head the national leadership organization for high school athletics and performing arts activities and the sixth full-time executive director of the NFHS. She previously was executive director of the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference for seven years.