

Chapter 11

The Emergence, Experiences, and Empowerment of Women Administrators, Coaches, and Athletes

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this chapter is to provide a more thorough understanding of the current United States intercollegiate athletics model that includes competitive sport opportunities within its system of higher education, the history and emergence of women in sport within higher education, the experiences of women leaders within intercollegiate sport, and future women sport participant and leader empowerment initiatives within higher education. While women were provided opportunities to compete in sport competitively within higher education at a much later date than their men counterparts, the significant impact of athletic participation for women and girls at this level has been established within the previous research. Most notably, women and girls with past sport participation experience at the college level have been found to represent a high proportion of women in leadership roles across a variety of industry segments. These insights provide significant evidence of the importance of equitable access to sport participation within the higher education model.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the United States is largely alone in its present model of including competitive athletic opportunities within the higher education structure for both men and women. While women were provided these opportunities to compete competitively within higher education at a much later date than their men

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counterparts, the positive impacts of athletic participation for women at this level has been established within the previous research. Most notably, women and girls with past sport participation experience at the college level have been found to represent a high proportion of women in leadership roles across a variety of industry segments (ESPNW, 2014). Beyond that, research has further indicated that women sport administrator and coach role models are important components of driving higher rates of women participants and sport employees throughout the industry (Hancock & Hums, 2016). These insights provide significant evidence of the importance of equitable access to sport participation within the higher education model and the sustained empowerment of women and girls within this space.

While women and girls are now more highly represented as athletic participants in higher education, women athletic administrators and coaches are underrepresented in this same environment. Participation levels of girls and women in sport after the passage of Title IX in 1972 (a United States federal policy prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex within activities hosted by federally funded institutions) skyrocketed by roughly 1000%, while the proportion of women coaches at the college level fell to 43% and has since remained stagnant (Lapchick, 2018). Women sport administrators at the intercollegiate level are also highly underrepresented. These proportions are largely due to the shift in governance of women sport programs during the early 1980's. While the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (established in 1906) currently stands as the major governing body of intercollegiate sport for women, women were not provided an opportunity to compete within this organization until 1982. Prior to the NCAA inclusion of women teams, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) provided governance and championship sponsorship for women programs. The NCAA takeover of the AIAW proved to be detrimental to the representation of women sport leaders throughout higher education, as the proportion of women administrators and coaches decreased following this governance change. As such, the experiences and future empowerment of women sport employees throughout United States higher education environments are important considerations. This chapter will detail the barriers faced by women sport employees and participants throughout higher education, while providing insight into the future trends that may assist in generating equitable access, opportunity, representation, and future empowerment.

THE UNITED STATES INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS MODEL

The Intercollegiate Athletics model in the United States has evolved over the past century from a male only, student-run approach, into a coed, multi-billion-dollar industry. In the mid 19th century, male undergraduate students began teams and organized competitions against other institutions. As competition and rivalries intensified, these schools began to see value in the visibility that successful teams could bring to their school, and subsequently increase the academic prestige of their institutions (Washington & Ventresca, 2004). American football quickly became the premier sport for intercollegiate competition and it played a critical role in the foundation of the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) in 1906.

While the NCAA has become the largest governing body of higher education athletic endeavors in the United States, with roughly 500,000 student-athletes, additional governing bodies exist within the intercollegiate athletics system. The second largest governing body, The National Junior College Athletics Association (NJCAA) was formed in 1938 by 13 two-year institutions after the NCAA rejected their petition to compete in the NCAA Track & Field National Championships. The NJCAA has since

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