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## Local athletes reflect on Title IX

By Jon Kingdon



Kim Bachman at USF Photo provided

When longtime Miramonte girls' basketball coach and current Carondelet coach Kelly Sopak grew up in the state of Washington, graduating in 1987, he was a witness to the double standards at his high school. "We had separate boys' and girls' gyms," Sopak said. "The boys had the bigger gym and the girls the older, smaller gym. The girls' games were more of an afterthought and were never in prime time like the boys' games were."

His 11 years of coaching at Miramonte was a revelation for Sopak. "I can honestly say, and I mean this in a positive way, Title IX did not exist in Lamorinda," Sopak said. "There was never a situation where the school or district ever treated the girls differently from the boys in everything that we did. . That was what was awesome about being at Miramonte."

The equality that Sopak alluded to did not come easily. It was the outcome of efforts by players, coaches and parents, since before the inception of Title IX in 1972 which legislated that "No person in the United States shall, based on sex be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving aid."

It was people like Scott Brown, who was a longtime girls' basketball coach at Campolindo and is now an assistant basketball coach at Acalanes, who saw firsthand the walls that deterred and prevented girls from participating in sports and wanted to do something about it.

Kim Bachman

When Brown was coaching fifth- and sixth-grade boys' flag football, the parents of Kim Bachman asked if she

could play on the team. "I agreed to let her come out and she turned out to be the best player on the team," Brown said. "They then asked if she could play on my basketball teams in the 1970s and I never looked back. I thought I was the best coach ever because we never lost a game. However, when Kim left, I realized she had a lot to do with it."

Soon people began to realize that Title IX would be a valuable tool that could be used for sports. "The opportunities for girls were still limited," Brown said. "What turned out to be the key in getting the girls fully involved in sports was the work of the parents. When they were told that there were not enough girls to play on the school teams, the parents showed that there was. It was amazing how dogged the administrators were in putting up roadblocks to the girls that wanted to participate in sports."

Bachman's inclusion on the teams was not met with unanimous acceptance. "There was a big `to-do' about my playing on the boys' team, but I was not made aware of it until later," Bachman said. "My mom (De Etta) told me some of the parents weren't happy about my being on the team though my teammates were never a problem. My mom was huge in getting stuff going for girls. She got the Walnut Creek Youth Association to get the girls' sports programs started with flag football, softball, and basketball. Scott Brown was huge for me," Bachman said. "He was the first person that gave me a chance and was responsible for my basketball career."

De Etta was incessant in her effort to increase the access to sports for Bachman and the other girls at Las Lomas. "I camped out at the high school and was always told they were working on it," DeEtta said. "I told them that if they didn't do something, Kim was going to play on the boys' teams and you won't like that very much and when she started her freshman year in 1974, they had their first girls' basketball team."

"That's when I realized what Title IX came to mean," Kim said.

Bachman would go on to earn a basketball scholarship at the University of San Francisco and was on her way to making the U.S. Olympic team before a knee injury forced her to drop out of the tryouts. She would ultimately be inducted into the USF Sports Hall of Fame. In seeing the programs at high schools today, she couldn't help but be impressed. "I look now, and it is so amazing what they have now for girls," Bachman

said.

Carey Schuler

Carey Schuler, Campolindo class of 1993, grew up around baseball. Her father, Ron Schuler was a professional baseball player, coach, and general manager. Carey began playing on the boys' little league, pony league and travel teams. "I took my grief from people that did not want me to be a part of those leagues," Schuler said. "I wanted to play baseball for Campolindo and that was when I first learned about Title IX because we had to do a little bit of fighting to allow me to play on the team," Schuler said. "I was the beneficiary of Title IX and the hard work put in by generations of women before me. I was very lucky to grow up in a family where, not for one moment did I feel I was limited."

Heather Petri

Heather Petri, Miramonte class of 1996, like so many in Lamorinda, learned to swim at an early age. Although there were no water polo teams, Petri did have some exposure to competition in the water. "Many of my swim team coaches at Major 5 had played water polo so I knew what it was," Petri said. "We would play a game in the water called jungle ball every Friday at our rec swim club where we would get thrown around. So, when I was introduced to water polo it was not as scary or foreign as it could have been. Prior to my sophomore year, the mother of a boy on the Miramonte water polo team encouraged me and Chris Grace to play with the boys in the fall of 1993."

Former Miramonte Athletic Director James Lathrop played with Petri on the JV team and had nothing but great memories of that team. "Coach Bill Brown was super supportive of the girls playing on the team and it was no big deal for the boys," Lathrop said. "The girls were hard working and helped everyone get better. Heather was not far behind us in terms of experience but in terms of ability she was right up there with us."

"I never experienced a single negative vibe from any of my teammates," Petri said. "I made it a point to thank the boys (who are now men) that I had played with many, many times because they had the opportunity to be awful. Bill Brown spearheaded the acceptance of myself and Grace. They really respected the fact that I was strong and capable of being there, so it was less about me being a girl and more about coaching and ultimately making me to be a better person and player."

The girls then took matters into their own hands in starting their own team at Miramonte. "After that first season, there were so many that heard what we were doing, we had a petition signed by fifty girls to start a girls' team," Petri said. "We had to go to the school board and present our petition and told them what we wanted to do. We had great support from our parents who came with us. The school board was very skeptical, giving us one season of exhibition to see how it would go and it grew from there."

Petri went on to play for UC Berkeley and participated in four Olympics (2000, 2004, 2008, 2012), earning a gold, two silvers and a bronze medal. In 2018, she was inducted into the U.S. Water Polo Hall of Fame and is currently a coach on the Cal women's water polo team.

For Petri, the timing was right and the opportunity was there: "I never saw myself as a crusader but if I reflect on how many times I was part of something brand new and how I was willing to be part of that journey," Petri said. "I know that it's part of my nature to accept and champion something that's unknown and I have done it time and time again - beginning with men's water polo, starting a women's program, being on the first Olympic water polo team and starting my own business after I finished my Olympic career. All those things took a bit of character in terms of accepting that unknown role and I embraced it."

Kim Everist

Kim Everist, the Campolindo girls' water polo coach, grew up in Minnesota where she played on the boys' basketball and hockey teams as there were no girls' teams. When her family moved to Florida, it wasn't much better. She played on the boys' water polo and basketball teams and played soccer on the only girls' team.

As with Petri, Everist had no issues with the boys on the teams. "My closest friends were my teammates," Everist said. "One time I had an opposing player grab me inappropriately and I came out swinging and before I knew it, my team was in the water physically defending me."

Everist went on to swim at Northeastern University, where she was an academic All-American and also became a member of the USA Junior National Women's Water Polo Team.

As a coach, Everist encountered more issues of gender inequity than she had as a player. "I've definitely faced inappropriate remarks and treatment," Everist said. "Prior to an NCS championship, I had a referee make a comment on my coaching style and other negative remarks just before the game and I then saw him go over and hug the other team's coach. I've seen a coach step into a women coach's space and scream at her in a way he would never have done to a male coach. With experiences like these, I learned not to be afraid of confrontation and developed into a GSD person - get sh-t done person."

The image which Everist presents to her players in these situations is what's most important to her: "That's true, 1,000%," Everist said. "These are conversations that we have regularly on multiple levels because it is my responsibility to make sure that the young women I coach are ready and prepared for some of these

things that they are going to face when they get out into the real world. Things have gotten better, but there are still gender elements and you're always going to run into people that still have traditional views of women's roles and what women are capable of. Whether you're a male or female coach, these are things that you have to address. The kids are always paying attention. They see it, they recognize it and they are certainly cognizant of it."

Patty Hung

Patty Hung, local marathoner extraordinaire, grew up in Boston and went to Notre Dame Academy, an all-girls parochial school, where basketball was the only team sport. Sport for Hung was a matter of learning how to skate on a pond or playing softball in her front yard.

However, when she began running casually and then competitively in the 1980s, it became apparent that not only were women being shortchanged on the playing field they were an afterthought by the sporting goods companies. "When I started, they did not make women's running shoes, clothing, or sports bras. I had to run with shoes made for men which were too wide, so I ended up buying boys' shoes. Slowly the women's running clothing and shoes began to be available and it really helped women to run with comfort and faster times."

Participation in sports has provided valuable benefits to women that carry over into their professional lives. Heather Petri acknowledges sports in providing her with a lifelong education, leading her and a former teammate to start a small business selling bathing suits.: "We definitely learn a lot of things through sports and it's one of the things that I talk about when I speak to young kids in terms of life skills building character; putting you through things when you're in a supportive environment where you can fail every day in your sport and you still learn how to come back the next day."

As a coach, Kelly Sopak makes it a point to teach more than how to play the game of basketball to his players: "The first thing I taught them was leadership, leading a group and leading yourself. I wanted the players to have a voice for themselves and then the ability to communicate effectively. These are both keys in professional life as well."

For Carey Schuler, it was "learning how to handle defeat and victories in the right way and learning how to use time management, from having to fit in classes, practices, a social life and being a good teammate, sharing time and encouraging others. For some it was a struggle when their sport was out of season because they've gotten so used to a certain regiment and schedule."

"My wife (an all-American softball player at Cornell), works in commercial real estate, an extremely male dominated field and is still highly successful, becoming a partner at her firm," Schuler said. There's no doubt that the lessons she learned in sports led to the success she's had in her career. "There's just so many lessons learned that you take out in the world that makes you a much more well-rounded human being."

"Sports was my whole life," Kim Bachman said. "I learned how to work together on a team, finding discipline, and utilizing the adrenalin I got from competing. My whole life has been doing stuff in male-dominated fields, starting with playing sports. From 1987 to 1996, I worked for the California Highway Patrol and discovered that my experience in competing head-to-head with boys growing up facilitated the transition to working in law enforcement. I had to work twice as hard to be able to feel equal with my male peers and my playing sports helped me get through the police academy."

For those athletes who had to battle gender inequities, it is important that the next generation understand what their predecessors struggled to achieve. "Because I and many of my peers were in the thick of it, I share my stories with the athletes that I coach at Berkeley," Petri said. "It's important for young women to know the history behind the opportunities that are there for them now. I tell them my story and many of them can't understand how things were different than they are today. There is a lot of education that is needed but you start where you can and keep sharing."

For Everist, at times she has to remind herself how far women's sports have come. "I would say, honestly, even I have to review the history and see how things have changed and where they stand now. Today's female athletes have a general idea of what Title IX is, but they don't know enough about it."

Sopak wants his players to do more than just speaking up when they are witness to double standards. "With Lamorinda being so equal with the boys and girls, our players will sometimes see an inequality between the boys' and girls' sports outside of our area and see we have a long way to go," Sopak said. "I will point out these things to my team when they see those inequalities. It's how you make a difference about it and not just complain about it. There needs to be action behind it. Often, there doesn't seem to be a lot of thought in how things impact the women as far as the men."

Bachman's two daughters, both who swam and one who played lacrosse, did not seem to appreciate what their mother went through. "It's so far removed for them," Bachman said. "I don't know how much the kids know what it was like then and how much different it is now though they do know what I went through."

Schuler appreciates the access to so many sports that her daughter Grace will have as she grows up. "Grace (2 years old) will be able to play and do anything," Schuler said. "We're going to open up every opportunity to her and it's wonderful that we're in a time where she can pick and choose. She may not be an athlete, but she is not going to be limited by a lack of possibilities and she will have every option available to her,

which is amazing."

There is still room for greater opportunities, according to Scott Brown: "I think we're doing really well in communities where sports are important but there are still schools outside of Lamorinda where the girls are not getting their fair share; whether they don't have the time, or the facilities and I feel bad about that. I would love to see the state of California level the entire playing field."



USA Water Polo Women vs Italy at London Olympics Photo Cathryn Haynes//klcphotos.com



Heather Petri coaching at Cal last March. Photo Cathryn Haynes//klcphotos.com

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