

## What the Sports Community Can Do To Make a Difference

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- ◆ **Create peer mentoring programs.** Develop leadership roles for athletes committed to speaking out about violence against women and girls, and teach other athletes about the importance of ending violence against women and girls.
- ◆ **Promote healthy relationships.** Teach all athletes about healthy dating relationships and nonviolent conflict resolution.
- ◆ **Hire coaches committed to nonviolence.** Conduct background checks and obtain character references for coaches and trainers.
- ◆ **Strengthen the policies of school and recreational sports programs.** Develop or enhance policies that address the use of physical violence, sexual violence, and other abusive behaviors by coaches, athletes, parents, and spectators.
- ◆ **Train coaches in violence prevention.** Offer coaches the tools necessary to prevent and respond to violent behavior by both male and female athletes.
- ◆ **Schedule speaking engagements.** Invite amateur and professional athletes to speak to the public about preventing violence against women.
- ◆ **Conduct media campaigns.** Urge local media to air public service announcements during sporting events that stress the importance of ending violence against women.
- ◆ **Recognize nonviolent athletes.** Reinforce the importance of positive, nonviolent behavior on and off the field.
- ◆ **Expand girls' and women's sports programs.** Provide girls and women with equal access to the benefits afforded by participating in sports.
- ◆ **Promote good sports etiquette.** Teach athletes to respect others, have self-respect, and recognize the benefits of sports.

## Chapter 13

# Promoting Healthy, Nonviolent Attitudes and Behaviors Through Sports

**T**his nation's sports industry is a mixture of athletics and entertainment, with countless opportunities for participants and spectators to get involved. A young person's participation in athletics is a key formative experience because it teaches him or her about teamwork, practice, commitment, and competition. Ideally, boys and girls also are taught the value of sports etiquette, respect for one's own and others' bodies, and that winning is only one of many goals. Some sports experiences, however, leave young athletes with the impression that their athletic abilities make them superior and entitle them to overpower and mistreat others. The popularity of athletics among young people and the impact that sports can have on the development of values make it an ideal venue for promoting healthy relationships and for underscoring the importance of ending violence against women and girls.

The high visibility and popularity of sports in American culture is both an asset and a burden. Top athletes are increasingly likely to be viewed as role models; therefore, they must recognize that their behavior might influence youth. Although many high-profile athletes do not want to be role models, American society invests a significant amount of time and interest in their actions, both on and off the field. This level of attention makes it necessary for athletes to be aware that abusive or violent behavior against women and girls makes a powerful societal statement.

Those who take part in professional and amateur sports can help end violence against women.

Indeed, many in the industry have taken a strong public stand against violence. Individual athletes, coaches, and the sports industry have the capacity to communicate messages about nonviolence that will reach millions via positive, nonviolent behavior modeling or television air time.

### Engage the Sports Community

Professional and amateur sports communities can significantly contribute to ending violence against women and girls. School administrators not only hire athletic directors, coaches, and trainers but also bear responsibility for student discipline and have the power to set the tone for athletes and athletics within their communities. Similarly, professional team owners, team managers, coaches, and player unions can create workplaces that communicate an intolerance for violence against women in all its forms.

### Involve the Media

Public education efforts can also help eliminate violence against women and children. Individual athletes who want to lend their names and personal resources to local, regional, and national efforts to end violence against women should be sought and their efforts applauded. Each component of the media industry can help communicate that being a strong, competent male athlete worthy of admiration and emulation requires him to take a clear and visible stand against violence against women.

## Include Women and Girls

An increasing number of women and girls are athletes and spectators at athletic events. This trend is especially positive for girl athletes, who stand to gain from the physical activity, discipline, and other benefits offered by sports. In 1997, the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports released a report on physical activity and sports in the lives of girls that indicated that girls' involvement in sports can increase their self-esteem, leadership proficiency, ability to set goals, and strategy-building skills.<sup>1</sup> However, girls' involvement in athletics often depends on the attitudes of family, friends, and the community toward girls' sports and athletic achievement, the visibility of professional women's sports, and the degree to which opportunities exist for participation and skill development.

Outlined below are specific actions that members of the sports community can take to help end violence against women. Members of the sports community include professional and amateur athletes and coaches, school systems and campuses, athletic directors, trainers, team owners and managers, managers of athletic leagues, sports associations, player unions, parents, television and radio station owners and managers, network executives, editors and producers, sports reporters, advertising executives, marketing directors, victim advocates, and community leaders.

## Role of the Sports Community in Ending Violence Against Women

**1. Develop and support models of leadership in athletics that reflect a clear and visible stand against violence against women and girls.**

- ◆ Create peer mentoring programs to develop leadership roles for male and female athletes committed to ending violence against women and girls. Develop these leaders at all levels, including college mentors for high school

athletes and middle school mentors for elementary school players.

- ◆ Recognize positive, nonviolent athlete behavior on and off the field that supports the values and beliefs necessary to end violence against women.
- ◆ Schedule events that allow students and coaches to talk to amateur and professional athletes about ending violence against women and girls.
- ◆ Provide coaches with tools to teach male and female athletes about healthy dating relationships, nonviolent conflict resolution, substance abuse prevention, and the existing sanctions for acts of violence and abuse against women and girls.
- ◆ Prohibit athletes from using language that demeans women and girls or that equates manliness with violence.
- ◆ Comply with the Campus Security Act to ensure that data on violent acts are collected and reported and that all school personnel and students, including coaches and team members, receive mandatory violence education and training.<sup>2</sup>

**2. Monitor and enforce hiring practices, training requirements, and standards of conduct throughout the sports community that are consistent with efforts to end violence against women.**

- ◆ Conduct background checks and obtain character references as part of a school's hiring process. Check sex offender lists and other criminal records that would indicate whether a coach has a record of assault or abuse against women or children.
- ◆ Require that all coaches who work with youth in school or community settings be trained in responding to and preventing violence against women and girls. Design statewide or national coaching certification training courses.
- ◆ Create a code of conduct for all student athletes that directly and clearly penalizes those who commit abusive acts, including acts of violence against women and girls.
- ◆ Develop or expand policies and training programs that teach professional coaches, managers, league owners, player unions,

commissioners, and all other sports entities responsible for the discipline of players how to respond to and prevent violence against women.

- ◆ Design and follow protocols for responding to incidents of sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking that involve athletes.
- ◆ Develop, enhance, and implement policies and contracts that require male and female athletes to take classes on the dynamics and impact of violence against women. Include specific information on sanctions for criminal or inappropriate behavior related to sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking.
- ◆ Adopt a zero-tolerance policy for violence against women in both contractual agreements and codes of conduct for professional and amateur athletes. Notify athletes that any violations will be met with sanctions commensurate with the seriousness of the offense, such as fines, suspension, or termination of an athlete's contract or athletic scholarship.

## **Involve the Media**

**3. Use the media, sporting events, and promotions to communicate public education messages about the importance of ending violence against women and girls.**

- ◆ Sponsor public education campaigns on sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking, and broadcast related public service announcements during halftime shows.
- ◆ Eliminate sports advertisements that denigrate women or use violent images to sell products.
- ◆ Educate the media about the prevalence, impact, and dynamics of sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking in the sports community, and encourage them to seek commentary from experts on violence against women when reporting on incidents involving athletes.
- ◆ Separate the athlete's public persona from his real-life behavior when reporting on an athlete's use of violence against women.

- ◆ Use media coverage to highlight athletes who demonstrate respectful and nonviolent attitudes and behavior toward women and girls.
- ◆ Promote equality for female athletes by highlighting their value and skills. Increase the visibility of female athletes in product and event endorsements that promote and reinforce images of women and girls as strong, resourceful, and independent individuals.

## **Include Women and Girls**

**4. Enlist schools, recreational programs, and community organizations to promote and support participation of women and girls in sports.**

- ◆ Design, coordinate, and secure funding for afterschool, intramural, and coeducational sports programs for young girls.
- ◆ Implement public education activities that highlight the benefits sports can offer girls and women in their academic, professional, and personal lives.
- ◆ Recruit women to serve as players, coaches, and managers of youth and school athletics to increase the visibility of strong, confident, and athletic female role models for both girls and boys.
- ◆ Diversify athletic staff, and partner with groups that represent women of color to provide athlete role models for all girls.
- ◆ Encourage professional female athletes to discuss their childhood athletic experiences and the positive impact sports has had on their lives and to promote girls' involvement in athletics.

## **Resources**

### **Athletes Helping Athletes, Inc.**

Adelphi University  
Levermore Hall, 3d Floor  
Garden City, NY 11050  
Phone: 516-877-4248  
Fax: 516-877-4473

Athletes Helping Athletes is a nonprofit organization that trains high school athletes in motivational speaking and group work dynamics. The purpose of such an effort is to mobilize these student athletes within their school districts and communities to address self-esteem, substance abuse, violence prevention, and academic success issues that young people face. Approximately 1,400 students in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and parts of Canada enter the program each year, attending periodic training sessions conducted at Adelphi University by professional and high-profile athletes.

#### **National Association for Girls and Women in Sport**

1900 Association Drive  
Reston, VA 20191-1599  
Phone: 703-476-3452

Web site: [www.aahperd.org/nagws/nagws\\_main.html](http://www.aahperd.org/nagws/nagws_main.html)

The National Association for Girls and Women in Sport (NAGWS) promotes equal funding, quality, and respect for women's sports programs. NAGWS coordinates leadership conferences, mentoring and coaching enhancement programs, and the annual National Girls and Women in Sports Day.

#### **National Collegiate Athletic Association**

Education Outreach  
P.O. Box 6222  
Indianapolis, IN 46206-6222  
Phone: 317-917-6222  
Fax: 317-917-6336  
Web site: [www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org)

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) members include institutions, conferences, organizations, and individuals who work together to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and the athlete as an integral part of the student body. NCAA works to promote female athletes and keep athletic programs available for all students. Education and outreach efforts include life skills, diversity, and leadership programs; scholarships and internships; a sports library; and a biweekly newspaper available online.

#### **National Coalition Against Violent Athletes**

P.O. Box 620453  
Littleton, CO 80162  
Phone: 720-963-0373  
Web site: [www.ncava.org](http://www.ncava.org)

The National Coalition Against Violent Athletes (NCAVA) educates the public on issues related to athletes and violent behavior and promotes positive athlete development through education, support, and accountability. The Web site includes statistics related to the violence committed by and against athletes, articles and other information resources, and information on prevention programs and NCAVA efforts.

#### **Mentors in Violence Prevention Program**

Center for the Study of Sport in Society  
Northeastern University  
716 Columbus Avenue, Suite 161 CP  
Boston, MA 02120  
Phone: 617-373-4025  
Fax: 617-373-4566  
Web site: [www.sportinsociety.org](http://www.sportinsociety.org)

The Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) Program is a violence prevention and outreach program that enlists high school, collegiate, and professional athletes in efforts to prevent violence against women. MVP participants develop leadership skills and learn to mentor and educate youth on these issues.

#### **Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport**

College of Education & Human Development  
University of Minnesota  
203 Cooke Hall  
1900 University Avenue SE.  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
Phone: 612-625-7327  
Fax: 612-626-7700  
Web site: [www.kls.umn.edu/crgws](http://www.kls.umn.edu/crgws)

The Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport leads research, mentoring, and public education efforts that focus on how sports and physical activity affect the lives of women and

girls. The center produces a biannual newsletter (available online at the Web site) that discusses research projects, community outreach programs, and related news.

### **Women's Sports Foundation**

Eisenhower Park  
East Meadow, NY 11554  
Phone: 516-542-4700  
Information line: 1-800-227-3988  
Fax: 516-542-4716  
Web site: [www.WomenSportsFoundation.org](http://www.WomenSportsFoundation.org)

The Women's Sports Foundation promotes female participation in sports and fitness activities and educates the public on gender equity in sport. The Web site offers online information about issues and research, education and leadership programs, careers and scholarships, and women's sports events.

## **Endnotes**

1. The Center on Girls & Women in Sport (1997). *The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Report: Physical Activity and Sport in*

*the Lives of Girls: Physical and Mental Health Dimensions From an Interdisciplinary Approach*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

2. In 1990, the U.S. Congress passed the Campus Security Act in response to concerns about crime and security at institutions of higher education. This federal law requires institutions of higher education to disclose information about campus safety policies and procedures to all students and employees annually, and to provide statistics concerning certain crimes that occur on campus and on property contiguous to the campus (Crime Prevention and Campus Security Act of 1990, Pub. L. No. 101-542, title II, 104 Stat. 2384 (*codified as 20 U.S.C. §§ 1092, 1092 note, 1094, 1232g*)).

## **Reference**

Bell, C.C. (1997). "Promotion of Mental Health Through Coaching of Competitive Sports." *Journal of the National Medical Association* 89(8): pp. 517-520.