

Title IX Era at Michigan State University: Main Transformations

By Katelyn Farrell

Even though there were some significant transformations that took place in women's athletics at Michigan State following the passing of Title IX there are still serious issues to overcome for the law to achieve equality in athletics. Title IX was passed in 1972 with the guiding purpose to bring equality to all students in colleges and universities across the country. This law stated that, "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 education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."¹ Even though the law made clear statements about what it expected major universities to implement in order to achieve equality, achieving this equality would only come with compromising other programs. One of the departments of Michigan State University and other schools that had a difficult time sharing its benefits and funding was the Athletic Department. Men's sports at Michigan State were beginning to flourish in the mid to late 1970s and they felt that the profits they made could never be matched by women's athletic teams and because of this women's sports should not receive the same funding and support.² The Federal government did not agree and set a date, July 21, 1976, for Federally funded universities to have self-evaluations

¹ Title IX Audit, Michigan State University Archives, Collection 2.1.15, Box 914, Folder 3. 1976

² Title IX Audit, Michigan State University Archives, Collection 2.1.15, Box 914, Folder 3. 1976

done to assess their progress in implementing equal benefits and programs for athletics, and other areas outlined in the law.

The Title IX changes were suppose to be implemented within the three year period, however, after this date many of Michigan State's women's teams were still receiving unequal benefits in comparison to those of the men's programs. In 1977-78 the amount of funds allocated for the men's Supplies and Services budget was 776,983, while the women were allocated only 84,991. The Hockey team had just had a new arena built; the Men's Basketball team was receiving significant scholarships, tutoring, optimal gym time and much more. In an effort to make changes there was an establishment of an Athletic Department Affirmative action Committee in 1978 to address the issue of Title IX and to determine whether or not this department had made progress towards compliance with that federal regulations.³ Women were just not receiving the same funding. Figures for the time period show that the spending was less than half of what was spent on men's sports. After gathering strength one Michigan State women's team decided to force the University to implement changes that would make their team equal to the men's team. The women's Basketball team filed suite against Michigan State in 1978 claiming that the university was not equally providing their team with the same support as the men's program. The 1978-79 team first filed an informal complaint with the university in an effort to receive information about the financial figures for the men's team.⁴ After gathering a significant amount of evidence concerning funds provided for scholarship, equipment, facilities, travel expenses, recruiting and season length and

³ Michigan State University, Harden Papers, Collection Number 2.1.15, Box 914

⁴ Bindo, Anne Marie. Title IX Article. State News, East Lansing, MI. April 24, 1978

schedule they were able to formulate a complaint that held twelve major areas in which the university was failing to provide equality for the team.

This lawsuit brought about a huge transformation in the support for female athletics on Michigan State's campus. During the lawsuit the State News was flooded with editorials and articles from students expressing their desire for Michigan State's administration to provide equal opportunity to the female athletes. The combination of the pressure from students, athletes, staff and finally the State court finally made Michigan State's administration begin to implement changes in the provisions for women's athletic teams. Women's facilities were cleaned up and new glass backboards were installed, they received laundry service and were even given their own locker rooms, office spaces for coaches, along with updated equipment for competition.⁵ Unfortunately, these victories were small and others were completely overlooked. Even after the restraining order was filed and university was ordered to provide more money for travel expenses the teams were still sleeping four to a room and receiving eleven dollars compared to the sixteen provided for men for meals, which was ordered by the judge to be matched.⁶

Throughout the 1980s the battle over funding for women's athletics across the country raged on, but it was not until the early 1990s that the topic was heavily reintroduced at Michigan State for concern. The same words that were created to bring equality were used to enforce less funding for women's athletics. Many Universities claimed that the Federal government made the law and so the only funds that should be subject to these rules concerning women should be the Federal funds. Another very

⁵ Michigan State Archives, Title IX Folder, 2008

⁶ Hutchins v. MSU verdict, Michigan State Archives, Title IX Folder, 2008

important development shortly after that which impacted Michigan State University's implementation of Title was a law passed by the Federal Government in 1994 called The Equality in Athletics Disclosure Act.⁷ This law stated that all coeducational institutions of higher education that participate in any Federal student financial aid programs and have intercollegiate athletics programs must provide information concerning their intercollegiate athletics program. This law had a huge impact on the cleaning up of athletic programs across the country. Athletic programs could no longer hide their spending. Michigan State's women's softball coach spoke out about her excitement for the implementation of this law. In an article Joseph commented on the upcoming Sunshine Law,

It already having an impact because universities have been forced to clean up their books in preparation for the law to go into effect. She believed that although there was much bickering that both men's and women's athletics would benefit from the equality. She thinks that athletic departments will continue to experience growth of mutual respect among males and female athletics, leading to a healthier atmosphere for all involved. The reason that this is so necessary, according to Joseph, is to ensure that the student athletes have positive experiences, both academically, with one another and on the playing field. This has been difficult to accomplish says Joseph, "because people with power never willingly give it up. And there is a lot of power in athletics."⁸

⁷ USA Today 1996, Michigan State Archive, Title IX Folder, 2008

⁸ USA Today 1996, Michigan State Archive, Title IX Folder, 2008

While Michigan State University female athletes have come a long way in the struggle for equal treatment, funding, and facilities there are still many statistics that show a disparity in equality today. Women are not the only party in recent years that has struggled with the rules of Title IX. Several universities including Michigan State have had to cut men's athletic teams in an effort to keep their programs in compliance with Title IX. In the winter of 2001 MSU's the Varsity Men's gymnastics team was cut due to proportion population problems. The men were sent into a fury but the university said there was nothing they could do but to comply.⁹ Much controversy surrounded the dropping of the team, because the men's team was one of twenty-one teams left in the country and it was not a big revenue maker for the university but they were nationally ranked. This caused several other low revenue men's sports at Michigan State to fear their futures, because if the proportions are off again they are afraid that the university administration will also drop their program without warning.

While men's teams are facing these transformations and challenges women's teams are still feeling the financial inequality, and while more money has been given to them then ever before it seems that the transformation into full equality has still not been reached. In the 2001 Athletic spending records it is revealed that men's operating expenses were 2,621,245 while women's programs expenses were 1,301,704. Included in these expenses are funds to pay coaches. At Michigan State there is still a huge pay disparity between men's and women's coaching staff. Even though it is ordered that men and women receive the same amount in grant awards men were awarded 3,162,176 to

⁹ Latham, Krista. Law's influence could hinge on panel's recommendation. The State News. East Lansing, MI. October 21, 2002

2,779,377, which amounts to around 53 percent to 46 percent.¹⁰ Another serious transformation is the dedication Michigan State has to acknowledging women's athletics. In 2002 a banquet was held for female athletes. This shows an effort to both recognize the importance of female athletes at Michigan State and their contribution to the enrichment of the schools programs and history. Female athletes still have a long way to go to reach an equal status to men's athletics but with their hard work and University and fans continued support there is a future for improving the programs.

Title IX has many supporters at Michigan State and it also has opponents who have been affected by the policies of this imperfect law. A final transformation that has recently taken place is the groups forming in the area and nationwide who are dedicated to improving the law. They believe that gender equality is very important in athletics but there needs to be constant revisions made to make sure that universities are not only looking out for their own profits but for the good of the student athlete population as a whole.

¹⁰ Equality in Athletics Disclosure Act. Michigan State Archives. 2001-02, 2008