

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

*Tucker Center News*

*University of Minnesota*

*Fall 2001*

## **LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR**

Greetings! As summer winds down and fall begins anew, the Tucker Center is pleased to welcome back students, faculty and staff. This summer was a very exciting time for us. We celebrated another \$1 million gift from Dorothy Tucker. These new funds will be used for ongoing research and community outreach initiatives. We also participated in the Minnesota State Fair where we developed a quiz testing fair goers' knowledge about women's sports. And finally, we welcomed a new member to the Tucker Team—Diane Scovill. Diane, a faculty member on sabbatical from Minneapolis Community and Technical College, brings a great deal of knowledge, experience, and pizzazz to our efforts. Turn to page 3 where you can learn more about Diane and what she will be doing with us this year.

This fall we are coordinating the 14th lecture in our annual Distinguished Lecture Series. The focus of this year's lecture involves a very relevant (not to mention disturbing) issue in women's sports—disordered eating patterns among female athletes. In order to address the complexity of this serious issue, we will convene a panel of experts in the field, as well as an athlete and a coach, who have had first hand experience with eating disorders. Panel members include: Dr. Craig Johnson, Founder and Director of the Eating Disorders Program at Laureate Psychiatric Hospital in Tulsa, Oklahoma; Professor Scott Crow, Department of Psychiatry at the University of Minnesota and Director of the Eating Disorders Clinic at Fairview-Riverside; Vanessa Seljeskog, Associate Athletic Director and Head Coach of Women's Track & Field at Macalester College; and JoAnna Deeter, former track and field standout at Notre Dame who now works for Northwest Athletic Club.

The panel—and what we know will be a most informative discussion—takes place on Wednesday, October 24, from 7:00-9:00 PM in the Hubert Humphrey Center on the West Bank Campus. It is free and open to the public. For more information,

call the Tucker Center at 612-625-7327, send email to [info@tuckercenter.org](mailto:info@tuckercenter.org), or visit our website at [www.tuckercenter.org](http://www.tuckercenter.org).

This fall's "Learning Our Legacy" column features Donna Olson, former Senior Associate Athletic Director in the Department of Women's Athletics at the University of Minnesota. Until her recent retirement this past June, Olson had worked in women's intercollegiate athletics for 30 years. For the past 16 years she has been at the U of M where she was instrumental in adding three varsity sports, worked closely with the planning and building of seven new facilities, and helped host numerous national championships. To read more about Donna Olson and her many accomplishments turn to page 2.

The subject of this edition's donor profile is Mary Beth Barry, teacher and coach at De LaSalle High School and a big supporter of women's athletics. In addition to teaching and coaching, Mary Beth volunteers for the Minneapolis YWCA. Mary Beth's sense of civic responsibility also extends to the Tucker Center where we have benefited from her work ethic as well as her financial contributions. We can think of few other people who have done more to assist us in our efforts to make a difference in the lives of female athletes and all those who support them. The Donor Profile column appears on page 4.

As the new school year begins we look forward to providing educational opportunities, research initiatives, and innovative outreach programs for girls and women in sport. Don't forget that all of this is possible because of your ongoing support. Our combined



## LEARNING OUR LEGACY: A PROFILE OF DONNA OLSON

The Tucker Center salutes Donna Olson, a trailblazer in women's collegiate athletics and athletic administration. Last spring, Donna announced her retirement as Senior Associate Athletic Director in the Women's Athletic Department at the U of M. Her distinguished career spanned 30 years, the past 16 of which were spent in the Twin Cities community.

Donna Olson would not characterize herself as a trailblazer. Rather, she'd say: "I was only following my passion for sports." Olson was so focused in following her passion that she transformed the very nature of the sport experience for girls and women. Donna recounts her early days as an athlete playing for the field hockey team at the University of Idaho, where she received her undergraduate degree in Physical Education in 1967: "We had practice two times a week, and played three games a season, then we went to sectionals. That was it." She pursued her master's degree at Washington State and graduated in 1971, briefly teaching high-school physical education and coaching track & field in Reedsport, Oregon.

In 1971, Donna set her sights on teaching at the collegiate level and landed a position as an instructor, head field hockey coach, and assistant softball coach at Montclair State College in New Jersey. This was one year before Title IX, federal legislation designed to prohibit sex discrimination in educational settings, was passed. Donna had just jumped into the simmering soup that was beginning to bubble in women's intercollegiate athletics. In 1973, she moved into athletic administration and then she really began to cook. Although still coaching, Donna was now in charge of event management, operations, budget and scheduling, and she immediately set a national agenda. For example, Donna took a basketball team with several All-Americans (including all-time great Carol Blazejowski) and started scheduling games on the west coast—a radical departure from conference scheduling rules that at the time did not allow play west of the Mississippi. Donna charged her team's airline tickets to her own personal credit card explaining: "I chose to work the details out later." One outcome of her pioneering efforts was the appearance of Montclair State in the AIAW championship at UCLA's Pauley Pavilion in 1978—a location obviously west of the Mississippi River.

Donna was also responsible for scheduling the first women's basketball games at Madison Square Garden in 1974, 1978 and 1979. Jean Freeman, University of Minnesota swimming and diving coach, says: "I don't think people understand how truly ground-breaking this feat was for that [pre-Title IX] era."

In 1985, Donna came to the U of M where a former coaching peer, Merrily Dean Baker, was the Athletic Director. "I have had the opportunity to work for and with two athletics directors [Baker and present Women's AD Chris Voelz], both national leaders who were absolutely the best persons for Minnesota." When Olson arrived at the U, she was shocked at the standard state of the women's athletic facilities, ranked last in the Big Ten. However, with her dedication and commitment—as well as her partnership with Voelz—she was able to build state-of-the-art facilities for women's track, swimming, soccer, basketball, hockey, tennis, and crew, and she was instrumental in the renovation of the Bierman Field and Athletic Building facilities. These long-lasting improvements are tributes to Olson's resilience. Chris Howell, who coached in the 1980s for the U, says: "It is very clear that Donna was a big factor in bringing the University into the new millennium."

Donna also served as Event Chair for six national championships at the U of M. "These events were so athlete-centered that each athlete had an outstanding experience," according to Jean Freeman. "The success of these events has set a model which has been used throughout the country and has become the standard for hosting national events."

In 1999, Olson was enshrined with special recognition into the Montclair State College Athletic Hall of Fame to honor her extraordinary achievements. In 2000, she was given a Special Merit Award at the State of Minnesota's National Girls and Women in



*(continued on page 5)*

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH & RESEARCH UPDATES

In the Spring of 2001 we completed a two year grant funded by the Otto Bremer Foundation. This grant allowed us to bring our *Image is Everything: Achieving Equitable Media Treatment for Females* workshop to 23 high schools in Minnesota and one in Wisconsin. *Image is Everything* highlights the various ways in which mainstream media stereotypes athletic females. Using an interactive slide presentation that features contemporary images of sportswomen, workshop participants learn specific strategies for counteracting any barriers that may result from such negative media portrayals. This project, which targeted close to 1,000 students, was an overwhelming success. As a result, we received several requests to create a workshop that targets middle-school-aged children. We are in the process of responding to such requests by submitting a proposal to the Otto Bremer Foundation that will enable us to revise and implement our workshop. It is our goal to bring the new workshop to local YWCA's and similar organizations within greater Minnesota.

We have also wrapped up our Tennis Plus program, which was held at the *Jerry Gamble Boys' and Girls' Club* in Minneapolis. The purpose of the program was to use the sport of tennis as a way to teach life skills such as goal-setting, teamwork, responsibility and respect to adolescent girls. We reached approximately 20 girls with this intensive, six-week program.

*New Initiatives:* In addition to our recent accomplishments, we have several new initiatives under development. We are collaborating with the Women's Sports

Foundation on a research project examining the number of women employed in the sports media industry. This study will gather longitudinal, nationwide data on occupational employment trends in both print and broadcast journalism. We want to determine if, over the last decade, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of sports journalists who are female. We will also examine if (and how many) women occupy significant leadership positions in the industry such as general manager, editor or corporate executive.

A second project involves an exciting new partnership with the Media Education Foundation (MEF) at the University of Massachusetts. The MEF is the largest nationwide distributor of videos which focus on the societal impact of mass media. The Tucker Center initiated this partnership because of our research on the media's stereotypic treatment of athletic females. Working together over the summer, MEF and the Tucker Center created the video *Playing (Un)Fair: Media Images of the Female Athlete*. This video uses compelling (and often disturbing) media images of women's sports while highlighting 20 years of sport media research. This research demonstrates that women are significantly underrepresented in overall media coverage, and that when sportswomen are represented, they are portrayed in ways that emphasize their femininity and physical attractiveness versus their accomplishments as highly skilled athletes. *Playing (Un)Fair* will be available for nationwide distribution in the summer of 2002.

## STAFF UPDATES

The Tucker Center would like to welcome Diane Marie Scovill into the ranks of those folks providing support to the Tucker Center. Diane hails from St. Paul and did her undergraduate work and graduate work at the U of M. As Diane puts it: "When they were putting the cornerstone in at Cooke Hall, I was standing in line to pay tuition." Diane is currently on sabbatical from Minneapolis Community and Technical College, where she has taught in the Department of Physical Education for the past 21 years. As a former athlete at the U of M, and a former coach at MCTC, Diane is well aware of the benefits of

sport participation. According to Diane: "I know how critical [sports] participation was for me. Part of my sabbatical plan includes working with the Tucker Center in order to expand my own knowledge and understanding [of sports for girls and women]. The other no less important aspect is to serve in any way I can to further the Center's mission. It is important to give back and we can all do that in a variety of ways." We are looking forward to working with Diane and if any of you can remember her as an athlete, you must also be able to remember the first time flared pants were in style!



## DONOR PROFILE: MARY BETH BARRY

Mary Beth Barry says that the Tucker Center “talks to the heart” of what she is trying to do in the world. And what Barry is doing in the world is quite a lot. She has volunteered with the Minneapolis community support organization “Sharing and Caring Hands” almost every week for the past 15 years, and has donated blood for the past 22 years. She’s also been one of only a few women soccer officials for both men’s and women’s soccer for the past 18 years and has refereed in the state high school tournament for 15 of those years—including in her very first year! Barry is active in her church and has been umpiring women’s softball games since she was 15. And on top of all this, she’s one of the best-loved teachers and a head coach at Minneapolis’s De LaSalle High School. Believe it or not, Barry actually laments that she’s not more active at school. It’s hard to imagine how she could possibly be any more active!



Barry found out about the Tucker Center in 1995 when she was taking a research methodology class taught by Tucker Center Director Mary Jo Kane. Somewhat chagrined, Barry explains: “Well, I was late for the first class—15 minutes! I was donating blood. I had just received something about the first DLS [Distinguished Lecture Series] with [sports psychologist] Maureen Weiss and I was very excited. Since then I’ve been to all the lectures but one, when I had teacher conferences.” Barry says she is committed to supporting organizations such as the Tucker Center because of the work they do. She says: “It makes a difference in the lives of everyone. Girls, boys, women ... It shows that they [female athletes] have gifts and talents to be celebrated which is often counter to what they hear in our culture. It also gives them the opportunity to say ‘I want the benefits of athletics!’ and they become stronger and happier.”

Barry says she chose to donate to the Tucker Center in particular because she’s always been interested in athletics and the benefits of athletics. Barry adds that things have changed since she began participating in sport, saying that it is now more acceptable for girls and women to be athletes and physically active: “15 years ago you couldn’t get girls in a weight room. Now it’s an expectation with even young girls bench pressing. Girls are more competitive, more assertive and much more apt to be involved in team sports with

a much greater sense of pride in their accomplishments.”

Interestingly, Barry is concerned that there may be some potential negative impact in the wake of Title IX legislation. “[Some] girls occasionally have a certain sense of entitlement out of proportion with what they deserve. Others have a desire for immediate gratification and are not as willing to put in the time or effort to perform well. One of the biggest problems is what I call ‘specialization’: A mother will come to me and say ‘My girl has to play year round and start as point guard in order to get a college scholarship’ and she expects, and her daughter expects, in spite of such progress, that this will happen automatically.”

Barry’s parents were big influences on her life. In her early years of officiating, her mother’s support and encouragement allowed her to stay involved: “I learned from my mother that officiating is about managing people not just enforcing rules.” Barry also credits her father, who died when she was just a junior in high school, as playing an important role in her career decisions: “My father was very positive and from him I learned that you have to appreciate the things you have and you have to support good things. To have a Center that says ‘Here’s what’s important about being female; here’s what you can derive; and here’s what you can and should do ...’ It’s both educational and inspirational. For instance, the *Throw Like A Girl* video that was on TV. My kids get to know about Title IX from the videotape and the TV spots; I get to improve my curriculum; everyone benefits. There aren’t many who stand up for what’s right and the Tucker Center is standing up for what’s right. I have to support that.”

Barry says she decided to contribute financially to the Tucker Center because: “It’s the right thing to do—you put your money where your values are. I’m confident the Tucker Center is doing the right thing. I don’t even think about it. Last time I donated [I targeted it] for [Tucker Center benefactor and Professor Emeritus] Eloise Jaeger. Here’s a woman who’s so willing to give back to the community in a concrete way and I also want to be the part of a process where I can pass it on and say to others ‘Come and be the part of the journey.’ Done deal!”

— Tara Cassidy and Jonathan Sweet

## LEARNING OUR LEGACY: DONNA OLSON *(continued from page 2)*

Sports Day. “Donna Olson’s 30 years of service to the athletic administration profession have been extraordinary,” says Chris Voelz. “Her service has been hallmarked by a tremendous work ethic, honesty, loyalty and a beloved sense of humor.”

Donna is now consulting for the U of M’s Women’s Athletic Department from her home in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. “My life in women’s sports has been a challenging and rewarding experience, especially get-

ting to know the over 3,000 athletes during my career!” From our perspective, Donna Olson has successfully passed the torch on to the next generation of women athletes and athletic administrators. Her trailblazing light will continue to shine, guiding us all for years to come.

—Diane Scovill

## KUDOS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Mary Jo Kane and Kim Pearce will present their paper—“Media Representations By, For and About Athletes with Disabilities: What’s Race & Gender Got to Do With It?”—at the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport annual meeting, Oct. 31-Nov. 4 in San Antonio, Texas.
- Maura Rosenthal recently accepted the position of Minneapolis Sports Center Coordinator. The Center is a large indoor facility connected to, and affiliated with, the YWCA of Minneapolis at Midtown. Anyone interested in renting the Sports Center call Maura at (612) 215-4321 or [mrosenthal@ywca-minneapolis.org](mailto:mrosenthal@ywca-minneapolis.org).
- Kath Pinch received the Fall, 2001 Margaret Barto Scholarship from the College of Education and Human Development and will use the money to assist in completion of her dissertation research involving adolescent girls participating in outdoor adventure programs.
- Mary Jo Kane was recently elected by her peers as a Fellow in the American Academy of Kinesiology and Physical Education (AAKPE), the highest honor in her field. Fellows must demonstrate a significant contribution to advancing the course of knowledge in an important area of scientific study. Kane will be inducted at the AAKPE’s annual meetings in Tucson, Arizona, September 20-22.
- PBS’s showcase for independent films—P.O.V.—presents *5 GIRLS*, a film that tracks adolescent girls from Chicago’s diverse neighborhoods. The film examines the challenges of growing up female in America. One of the girls featured is a high-school basketball star. *5 GIRLS* airs Tuesday, October 2, at 8:00pm CST (check local listings).

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University of Minnesota  
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