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Tucker Center NEWS

for Research on Girls & Women in Sport

SPRING 2007

SONY ERICSSON INVESTED \$20 MILLION TO BECOME THE TITLE SPONSOR OF THE WOMEN'S TENNIS ASSOCIATION SONY ERICSSON OPEN, EXTENDING ITS LANDMARK 6-YEAR, \$88 MILLION GLOBAL TITLE SPONSORSHIP OF THE TOUR WHICH SHATTERED ATTENDANCE RECORDS IN 2006.

—WOMEN'S SPORTS FOUNDATION

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Listen Up, Media!: Interest in Women's Sports is Growing

Thirty years of sport media scholarship have shown that women's sports receive about 6-8% of all media coverage. Given that nationwide, females represent approximately 40% of all sport participants, it is safe to argue that sportswomen are significantly under-represented throughout mainstream media. Those who challenge this lack of coverage hear a familiar and enduring refrain from the media: "We don't participate in promotional journalism. We simply cover the sports people are interested in."

This notion of interest is at the heart of the argument surrounding why women's sports continue to be absent from the media radar screen. As the above quote suggests, writers and editors do not believe they have an obligation to serve a particular social agenda such as "promoting" women's sports. Yet those on the other side of the argument—advocates of women's sports—counter this position by pointing out two important facts: 1) mainstream sport media routinely promote (hype) men's sporting events as a way to generate fan interest; and 2) in many cases, interest *already exists* in spite of the widespread media blackout surrounding women's sports.

The two most prominent ways we display interest in sports is through participation and attendance at sporting events. In addition, one can display "interest" by watching sports on television, reading print or electronic media, blogging, and volunteering (e.g., joining booster clubs). Let's look at actual participation rates in women's sports. During the 2005-06 academic year nationwide, girls and women participated in interscholastic and intercollegiate sports in record numbers. For example,

the National Federation of State High School Associations reported that approximately 3 million girls participated in high-school athletics. The top five sports females engaged in were basketball, track and field, volleyball, softball, and soccer. In 2006, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) member schools offered an average of 8.45 women's teams per institution, again a record number. The most popular collegiate women's sports were basketball, volleyball, soccer, cross country, and softball.

Perhaps these significant increases in participation help explain parallel increases in the growing number of fans interested in women's sports. Without question, spectator interest in women's professional and collegiate sports has exploded over the past 25 years. As our guest columnist Nancy Lough points out on page 2, some prominent examples include the sold-out crowd of over 90,000 fans who watched the U.S. battle (and beat) China in the 1999 Women's World Cup Soccer Championship. In the professional ranks, the WNBA recently celebrated its 10th anniversary and boasts an average of 7,500 fans per game. And for those who constantly (and negatively) compare such figures to men's sports, it should be noted that the NBA took 18 years to reach a similar result.

Increasing fan interest in women's sports is not confined to basketball and soccer. In professional tennis, women's matches have drawn higher television ratings than men's matches (CNN.com), while the sport has also witnessed an increase in attendance and a growing recognizability of superstars such as Maria Sharapova. In addition to tennis, the LPGA's TV viewership

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Letter From the Director

Spring Greetings from the Tucker Center! I am excited to share with you the theme for this issue of our newsletter—competing media narratives and tensions that impact all aspects of women's sports.



Nicole LaVoi

Research consistently reveals sportswomen are significantly under-represented throughout mainstream media. Our feature story—*Listen up, Media!*—explores the tension between the media's resistance to covering women's athletic events (not to mention female athletes themselves), by routinely stating that such coverage is nothing more than "promotional journalism," and their obligation is to cover those sports "people" (read "men") are interested in. The media apparently miss the irony that more coverage would certainly lead to increased interest in women's sports.

Dr. Nancy Lough, Associate Professor and the Director of the Sport Administration graduate program at University of Nevada-Las Vegas, discusses a similar pattern in her guest column on page 2. Lough asserts that the marketing and promotion of women's sports is often ineffective due to an over-reliance on traditional strategies created for men's sports. Lough argues that due to some unique aspects of women's sports, those who market and promote them must look for more targeted and creative ways to increase fan interest and corporate sponsorships.

When sportswomen are actually covered in the media, numerous scholars around the country, including Tucker Center Director, Professor Mary Jo Kane, have discovered some troubling trends. Most notable is the persistent finding that sportswomen are much more likely to be covered for what they look like off the court than for what they accomplish on it. What is missing from the overall picture, however, is how various forms of representation, from athletic competence and achievement to "sexy babes," actually influence fan interest in women's sports. Not surprisingly, we are working hard to fill in that missing piece (of data) by undertaking audience reception research. We are very excited about this ground-breaking work because so little is known about those fans who do (and might in the future) support women's sports as a function of how it is represented throughout mainstream media.

Our spring Distinguished Lecture highlights this same theme. *Sex vs. Athletic Competence: Exploring Competing Narratives in Marketing and Promoting Women's Sports* will provide further insights into the strategies, techniques, and effectiveness of how women's professional and college sports are marketed and promoted. See page 4 for more details about our spring lecture. Finally, in the "Learning Our Legacy" column, we profile the Fast Break Club—a grassroots group of enthusiastic fans who help market, promote, generate, and sustain widespread interest in the U of M Gopher Women's Basketball Team.

We hope you enjoy this issue of our newsletter and invite you to stay current with all of our programmatic endeavors and research initiatives by going to our Web site at www.tuckercenter.org. Happy Spring!

—Nicole LaVoi, Associate Director



GUEST COLUMN: DR. NANCY LOUGH

Marketing Women's Sports: Time to Move Forward



As participation rates of girls and women involved in sports continue to increase, and interest rises, many assume marketing that involvement and interest is keeping pace. However, efforts designed to market and promote women's sports lag behind actual involvement and interest. Nevertheless, there are significant markers of progress: The 1999 Soccer World Cup; the prime-time broadcast of the U.S. Open Women's Championship tennis matches; and the ongoing success of the WNBA. Similarly, commercial success of individual athletes such as Danica Patrick, Michelle Wei, and Maria Sharapova lead many to believe that the marketing of women's sports is on par with men's sports. Yet these marketing "successes" can be partially attributed to the quality of competition and impressive talent exemplified. Thus, what appears to be effective marketing may be coincidental good fortune. To date, marketing

women's sports is not based on critical research, and has often failed to focus on the unique aspects of women's sports.

What little research does exist has primarily focused on what motivates fans to attend women's contests. Several studies have now confirmed that a difference does exist between fans of women's and men's sports. Fans of women's sports attend because the events are affordable, provide a wholesome atmosphere, support opportunities for girls and women, and achieve a sense of accomplishment. While these motives are not completely unique to women's sports, they can be utilized in marketing campaigns to more effectively communicate with the target audience. While this seems intuitive, the vast majority of marketing efforts for women's sports are modified versions of marketing plans generated for men's sports. And even if marketing plans are developed specifically for women's sports, little is known about who the marketing plan should be aimed toward.

The demographic and/or psychographic attributes of fans of women's sports are also largely unknown. First, sport marketers often refer to the "women's market"—assuming all consumers are the same. Second, many fans of women's sports are men. Just as women are often an overlooked and underappreciated market for the NFL, MLB, and other mainstream sports, male

fans of women's sports tend to be ignored. For marketing to be successful, it must effectively appeal to the targeted demographic, which will in turn build a lasting fan base. ESPN is a prime example of how audience building for mainstream sports can be done effectively. Yet for women's sports, a more focused effort needs to be made simply because women's sports cannot rely on ESPN or mainstream media to generate interest. And far too often, mainstream media promote a "sex sells" approach which may undermine fan interest and loyalty, as well as trivialize the athleticism and achievements of female athletes.

Fortunately, new media avenues are continually emerging. For example, women's sports-specific blogs are innovative vehicles for dedicated fans who can't find coverage of their favorite sport and/or athlete. In summary, women's sports remains a vastly untapped source for corporate sponsors and marketers who are willing to recognize the unique opportunity it holds. Similarly, the marketing of women's sports remains a fertile area for further scholarly inquiry.

Dr. Nancy Lough is Associate Professor and Director of the Sport Administration graduate program at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas. She is also the associate editor for Sport Marketing Quarterly.

Research Updates

- **The Tucker Center** will participate in the upcoming "Girls & Women Rock: Celebrating 35 Years of Sport and Title IX" conference in Cleveland in March 2007. Presentations include "Have You Seen Her? The Female Athlete as Contested Terrain" and "Coaching Girls: A Content Analysis of Popular Press Coaching Books."
- Associate Director **Nicole LaVoi** received funding to conduct "Disparities in Youth Soccer: Unequal Opportunities, Unequal Outcomes," one of only seven projects funded out of a pool of nearly 60 proposals submitted to President Bruininks' Initiative on Children, Youth, and Families. LaVoi and her colleagues will work with the Minnesota Youth Soccer Association (MYSA) and community leaders to help increase the number of ethnic minority children playing youth soccer in Minneapolis. They will conduct focus group conversations with families and their children to identify barriers to participation. Results will be used in policy recommendations.
- Two members of the Tucker Center Student Research Team were awarded U of M Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) grants. **Kim Resheske** will examine motivation in intercollegiate women's and men's hockey game sport fans. Resheske will also work with doctoral student **Heather Maxwell** to help facilitate effective development of marketing plans. The second grant recipient, **Katie Anderson**, will work with graduate students **Julie Hughes** and **Cheryl Wick** to conduct an intervention using *Dance Dance Revolution* to improve the cardiovascular, bone health, and body composition of overweight Hispanic children.
- Affiliated Scholar **Dr. Moira Petit** and her graduate students have begun two studies examining various components of bone health including the role of bone health and muscle fatigue on stress fractures in female athletes, and the role of hormones and physical activity on the bone and muscle health of females runners diagnosed with amenorrhea. Dr. Petit is the director of the School of Kinesiology's **Laboratory of Musculoskeletal Health**.
- **Nicole LaVoi**, Affiliated Scholar **Diane Wiese-Bjornstal**, and Doctoral Candidate **Jens Omli** are launching a series of ground-breaking studies on the effects of "angry" sideline behaviors of adults on young athletes. Their data indicate angry behaviors emanating from adults on the sidelines occur with regular frequency, but no research has examined how such behaviors affect children and their families.
- **Wiese-Bjornstal, LaVoi**, and **Omli** are also co-authoring a chapter on developmental issues for the *International Olympic Committee Medical Commission Handbook of Sport Psychology*.
- **LaVoi** is interviewing former female collegiate athletes who currently have children participating in organized youth sports. Little is known about parent-coaches, particularly mother-coaches. This study will help shed light on the dynamic interplay of motivations and barriers mothers face and negotiate when choosing to coach, or not to coach, their own children.
- **Mary Jo Kane** and graduate student **Heather Maxwell** began collecting data for their study "Expanding the Boundaries of Sport Media Research: An Exploration of Consumer Responses to Representations of Women's Sport." The study is supported by a grant from the **Women's Sports Foundation**.

KUDOS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **The Tucker Center** received the Minnesota Coalition of Women in Athletic Leadership Special Merit Award for 2006. This award recognizes research, education, and outreach organizations that have shown exceptional contributions to promoting girls and women in sports. The award was presented February 7 in the Minnesota State Capitol Rotunda during a celebration of National Girls and Women in Sports Day.
- **Mary Jo Kane** will be a panelist at the "Title IX Today, Title IX Tomorrow" conference sponsored by Stanford Law School at Stanford University in April 2007.
- **Professor Kane** presented "Title IX: A 35-year Progress Report" to the Media & Sport Law Society at St. Thomas University Law School last November.
- **Jo Ann Buysse**, Affiliated Scholar, gave a talk to the wellness and human performance students at Southwest Minnesota State University in February.
- **Diane Wiese-Bjornstal**, Affiliated Scholar, was featured on the WCCO evening news last October discussing inappropriate behavior by parents whose children are involved in youth sports.
- **Nicole LaVoi** visited Algeria in February as a part of a U.S. State Department delegation to deliver *Unity Through Sport (USport)* to youth basketball athletes and their coaches. The *USport* program utilizes collaborative resources to build mutual understanding, appreciation, and cooperation between the United States and the Muslim world.
- **Bonnie Reimann**, School of Kinesiology graduate student and instructor of Health & Exercise Science at Gustavus Adolphus College, recently traveled to Namibia to study social justice issues. Reimann writes about her experiences and insights, including the impact of sport and physical education on the lives of girls, in her poignant narrative, *A Physical Educator's Perspective of Namibia, Africa*. (www.tc.umn.edu/~reim0037/home.html)
- **Heather Maxwell**, doctoral student in Sport Management, wrote a guest column—"Developing Sport Leagues Suffer from Media's Choices"—for the October 9, 2006, issue of *Street & Smith's SportsBusiness Journal*.
- Stay current on **Tucker Center** news and research initiatives and visit links to published studies by visiting www.tuckercenter.org.



Associate Director Nicole LaVoi (center) with Algerian women basketball coaches in Algiers, Africa, as part of the *Unity Through Sport* delegation. These women were some of the over 200 male and female coaches who took part in the *USport* coaching clinics.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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... "Listen Up, Media!" continued from page 1

and attendance on the tour have enjoyed 59% and 11% increases, respectively, over the past three seasons (LPGA.com). Finally, at the intercollegiate level, fan attendance at women's basketball games has increased from 1.9 million to 10 million fans per year since 1982 (NCAA.org)—a 900% increase! Similarly, fan support of other popular collegiate sports such as volleyball and soccer continues to grow. One example is the University of Hawaii volleyball team which averaged 7,302 fans per game in 2005-06 (NCAA.org).

Such numbers offer powerful support to the notion that there is a clearly established and ever-growing interest in women's sports. It is

important for scholars, educators, fans, and the athletes themselves to monitor sport media trends and to be aware of both progress and resistance to a more accurate portrayal of women's sports. In short, in spite of media claims to the contrary, the reality on the ground is that women participate in sports in increasing and overwhelming numbers, and that those who support them do so as well. While one can turn to the media for answers concerning the criteria they use to justify their coverage of women's sports, no one can deny the power of the message communicated by fans in the stands. It is more than time for the media to reflect that reality.



10,876 people attended the University of Minnesota vs. Michigan State women's basketball game on January 15, 2006. In average attendance for the 2005-06 season, Minnesota was first in the Big 10 and fifth nationally.

DID YOU KNOW?

Newspaper Coverage of Women's Sports in the Twin Cities Declines Over Time

A recent study examining newspaper coverage of women's sports in Twin Cities' newspapers revealed some attention-grabbing results. Spanning the years 1940 to 2005, one might assume that coverage of women's sports would increase, especially in the wake of Title IX and the explosion of interest in women's sports. In short, you could argue that greater equality in athletics for females would result in greater prominence in media coverage. Not so fast, my friends!

A content analysis of approximately 2,700 front-page articles and 1,400 photographs appearing in the *Star Tribune* and *Pioneer Press* revealed that patterns of inequality between women's and men's sports have persisted and possibly worsened over time. For example, results indicate that front-page column inches and photographic square inches devoted to men's-only sports increased from 1940 to 2005, while front-page coverage of women's sports decreased over this same timespan. This unexpected finding is especially troubling in that what appears on the front page is culturally significant—"front page" news signals to readers which sports are valued and meaningful in this culture.

For more information, contact the authors of the study, **Kent Kaiser** (School of Journalism & Mass Communication) and **Erik Skoglund** (School of Kinesiology), both graduate students at the University of Minnesota.

LEARNING OUR LEGACY

The U of M Women's Basketball Fast Break Club—More than a Booster Club



Terry McFarland and Sue Corbin, president and vice president of the U of M's Fast Break Club

Their presence is visible and palpable in Williams Arena. Wearing old-school maroon and gold striped rugby shirts or Gopher gear from head-to-toe, this self-proclaimed "zealous" group of fans is known as the **Fast Break Club** (FBC). Technically, they are considered the Gopher Women's Basketball "booster club," but members quickly discover they are much, much more.

How did the FBC come into being? Terry McFarland and Sue Corbin, president and vice president of the FBC, respectively, passionately explain the club's inception, steady growth, and overwhelming success. Early in the 2001-02 season, McFarland was watching Lindsay Whalen display her on-the-court magic during a TV broadcast. This experience created the following epiphany for McFarland: "More people have to see this kid play!"

The next day, McFarland called then-athletic director Chris Voelz to see how he could turn his passion into a reality. Shortly thereafter, he was asked to become president of the newly forming FBC. "Previously, the booster club was comprised mostly of parents and relatives of the women on the team, so when their daughter graduated, they were done [being involved] ... There was no continuity in the club's leadership." When McFarland's efforts began there were 97 members in the FBC. Today, that number has grown to over 550 members strong!

The FBC is committed to building a fan base by exposing people, one by one, to the team and the game. Consider the example of current FBC member Pat Dix. McFarland invited Dix to her first women's game

hoping to spark some interest and enthusiasm because, "the FBC tries to convert people into lifelong fans! Once people see it, they're hooked!" Dix was not only hooked, she also convinced 30 of her friends to become season ticket holders. Dix explains why she became so involved with the FBC by referring to their unofficial mantra: "If you bring them, they will come back." Dix and her friends are fondly referred to as "The Dixie Chicks."

Corbin and McFarland point out that the FBC is a "non-traditional booster club because we do so much more than just raise money." FBC members don't join just for the traditional reasons of access to the coach and team. "They are people who love the game and love the team. There are no casual FBC fans...Our mission is more than just raising money." Despite their pride in being a "non-traditional" booster club, the FBC nevertheless raises impressive amounts of money for the team. Corbin recounts a story involving a Janelle McCarville jersey raffle: "The winning bid came from a retired school teacher who wanted it for her elderly mother. The woman was so excited that her hand was shaking when she wrote out the check." It is stories like this that bring the passion and commitment of FBC members to life.

The impact of the FBC is best captured in another incredible story. Prior to the 2001-02 season, the women's team played their home games in the Pavilion. One of the FBC's goals that year was to sell out a game (5,700 tickets) and "Pack the Pav." A few days before tip-off, a water main broke, flooding the Pavilion and moving the game into the much

bigger (14,500) Williams Arena. With a never-say-die attitude, FBC members vowed to "Pack Williams."

To the surprise of many, the Gopher women ran out onto Williams court to over 10,000 cheering fans. When the team took the floor, they literally stopped to take in the overwhelming size and energy of the history-in-the-making crowd. Corbin jokes, "There is a conspiracy out there that Terry was responsible for that broken water main!" What no one knew was that this effort was just the beginning for the FBC. Last year, the Gophers were ranked fifth nationally and first in the Big Ten for attendance. Head Coach Pam Borton attributes those amazing figures to the influence of the FBC. Indeed, Borton readily recognizes their importance to her program. "The FBC has been an integral part of our program. They help create excitement and awareness in Minnesota. They fundraise for our program, they endow scholarships, and they help put people in the seats by working with our marketing department. The FBC has been so important to our program in so many ways."

The Fast Break Club is a wonderful and commendable example of a grassroots group that makes a real difference in promoting women's athletics. We thank all the members of the FBC for their important work and for providing a powerful example of how to promote women's sports the right way—with passion, commitment, and tireless energy, all for the love of the game!

For more information or to join the FBC, please visit their Web site at www.fastbreakclub.net.



SPRING 2007 DISTINGUISHED LECTURE

Sex vs. Athletic Competence: Exploring Competing Narratives in Marketing and Promoting Women's Sports



Kristin Bernert



Regina Sullivan



Mary Jo Kane



Heather Maxwell

Tuesday, April 17, 2007, 7:00-9:00pm

Cowles Auditorium

Hubert H. Humphrey Center

University of Minnesota

West Bank Campus

The Tucker Center's spring Distinguished Lecture features a dynamic panel of experts with diverse professional, educational, and research-related backgrounds who share a common interest in women's sports. Media scholars have repeatedly documented the unequal and marginalizing ways female athletes are portrayed, marketed, and promoted in all types of media. However, there is little empirical evidence regarding how marketing strategies for women's sports are actually developed, how sport consumers perceive and interpret images of athletic females, and whether these interpretations influence consumer behavior such as watching or attending a sporting event. These high-profile panelists will examine differing philosophies and strategies surrounding the various ways in which collegiate and professional women's sports are marketed and promoted, as well as the effectiveness of those strategies in light of innovative research being conducted by the Tucker Center.

Panelists include **Kristin Bernert**, **Regina Sullivan**, **Mary Jo Kane**, and **Heather Maxwell**. Bernert, Vice President of WNBA Team Development, held previous administrative positions with the Detroit Shock, the Cleveland Indians, and Division I intercollegiate athletics. Bernert will share her many insights into how to most effectively market and promote women's sports, as well as discuss specific marketing strategies and philosophies the WNBA currently uses to promote women's professional basketball.

Regina Sullivan is the Senior Associate Athletic Director at the University of Minnesota. Sullivan was profiled in our Fall 2006 newsletter and is a long-time leader, advocate, and pioneer in women's intercollegiate athletics. Sullivan will provide information about the marketing philosophies, strategies, and techniques employed by the University of Minnesota to promote athletic excellence in and for women's sports. She will also discuss how these strategies may or may not differ from those used to promote men's sports and women's professional sports.

Connecting current marketing techniques to 30 years of sport media scholarship, Professor Kane will examine recent trends in media representations of female athletes. Kane, an internationally known scholar at the U of M, will explore various cultural assumptions behind a "sex sells" narrative that assumes the best way to market and promote women's sports is to portray athletic females as sexy and feminine rather than as accomplished athletes. She and

Tucker Center research assistant, Heather Maxwell, will highlight their innovative study on media images and the impact of these images on fan behavior. Their research is being funded by a grant from the Women's Sports Foundation.

Please join us for what promises to be an interesting discussion about the future of effective marketing and promotion of women's sports!

This event is FREE and open to the public. Parking is available. For more information call the Tucker Center at (612) 625-7327, or visit the Tucker Center Web site at www.tuckercenter.org.

RECAP FROM LAST FALL'S DISTINGUISHED LECTURE

"Best Seat in the House"



Distinguished Lecture speaker Christine Brennan

Last fall, **Christine Brennan**, award-winning sports columnist for *USA Today* and frequent guest commentator on ABC News, ESPN, NPR, and Fox Sports Radio, delivered the Tucker Center's Distinguished Lecture, "Best Seat in the House—From the Locker Room to the Press Box: Women's Sports in the 21st Century." Throughout her lecture, Brennan kept the standing-room only crowd thoroughly engaged as she candidly shared her experiences as a pioneering sports journalist. She also shared passages from her latest book, *Best Seat in the House: A Father, a Daughter, a Journey Through Sports*.

As evidence of Brennan's impact on the world of sports journalism, many local female sports journalists and broadcasters, ranging from Pam Schmid and Rachel Blount of the *Star Tribune*, to Rita Maloney, formerly of *WCCO*, were in attendance.

Brennan is an accessible role model whose professionalism and passion—not to mention her tremendous accomplishments—provide encouragement and inspiration to young females (and males) interested in pursuing a career in sports journalism. To read Brennan's column at *USA Today*, go to www.usatoday.com/sports/columnist/brennan/.



TUCKER CENTER STAFF UPDATE

Erin Becker

Erin joined the Tucker Center staff last fall as a Program Assistant. We claim Erin as "one of our own" because she earned her undergraduate degree in Kinesiology—with an emphasis in sport psychology—last May. Erin first got involved in the Tucker Center by helping faculty with a variety of

research-related tasks. Her exceptional work proved Erin was the natural choice to take over many of our administrative functions, as well as assist with a number of research and programmatic needs.

When a new position opened up last year in the Tucker Center, we offered Erin the job. To our good fortune, she accepted, and, not surprisingly, she has become indispensable to the day-to-day workings of the Tucker Center. Erin's background both playing and

coaching girls' soccer enables her to provide valuable insights on several Tucker Center projects. For example, one exciting project involves a content analysis of popular books designed to coach girls' teams. This research will be presented at the "Girls & Women Rock: Celebrating 35 Years of Sport & Title IX" conference in Cleveland in March.

Erin will pursue a graduate degree in sport psychology at

the School of Kinesiology with an interest in examining moral development and best practices for coaching girls. Her experiences in the TC should help her do just that!

