Introduction to Title IX Theme

Title IX in the Aftermath of
President George W. Bush’s
Commission on Opportunities in Athletics

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The year 2002 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the passage of Title IX by the United States. For those familiar with the history of resistance to the application of Title IX to athletic programs in schools receiving federal financial assistance, it was also the year in which the United States Department of Education, upon the urging of President George W. Bush, appointed the Commission on Opportunities in Athletics. According to its stated purpose, the Commission was charged to “collect information, analyze issues, and obtain broad public input directed at improving the application of current Federal standard for measuring equal opportunity for men and women and boys and girls to participate in athletics under Title IX” (Commission Charter, 2002). In point of fact, the creation of the Commission was a response to allegations made by several men’s minor sport constituencies, like the National Wrestling Coaches Association, that Title IX was being enforced as an illegal quota system and was being used by education administrators to eliminate men’s varsity sports programs. The impetus for the Commission derived from a lawsuit filed by the National Wrestling Coaches Association and other men’s minor sport organizations against the Department of Education, in which the plaintiffs sought to vacate existing standards of compliance.

At an objective level, the approach taken by the Bush Administration and the Department of Education regarding Title IX in
its 30th year defies logic. While acknowledging that the vast majority of educational institutions had not yet complied with the mandates of Title IX after three decades, and girls and women in the United States were still being denied access to equitable educational opportunity in schools, the argument the government officials embraced as most compelling and warranting the most attention were the false allegations that boys and men had somehow become victims of Title IX enforcement. At a fundamental level, Title IX as it applies to athletics, seems to trigger the most central of our concerns as a nation about the proper behavior of men and women and their roles in society. Just as author, Mariah Burton Nelson has pointed out that “the stronger women get, the more men love football”, so too has it been the case that the stronger women get in sport, the more resistance there has been to the enforcement of Title IX.

This special section of Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal devoted to Title IX in the aftermath of the Commission’s hearings is intended to do several things. First, as shown in Theresa Walton’s contribution entitled “Title IX: Forced to Wrestle Up The Backside”, the Commission’s validation of the argument that the enforcement of Title IX was harming men’s sports prevented a considered understanding of the campaign of misinformation that led many Americans to reach this erroneous conclusion. Walton situates the claims made by some members of the wrestling community within the broader “war on boys” advanced in opposition to perceived affirmative action programs by political conservatives. Further, Walton’s piece also excavates the role of women within the wrestling community, an aspect of the recent Title IX dialogue that has been largely obscured by the more publicized claims that Title IX hurt men’s sports.

Whereas Walton’s contribution provides background on the forces that led to the Commission’s hearings, Laurie Priest’s article “The Whole IX Yards: The Impact of Title IX (the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly)”, reveals the inherent flaws in the Bush Administration’s decision to take up an examination of Title IX in its thirtieth year in the manner it did. Beyond the benefit this piece has as a record of the