

Women's sports still searching for equality

Following last spring's meeting, real progress has been made but there are still obstacles to overcome.

By Tim O'Shea

Last May, *The Campus* ran an article concerning the state of women's sports at Middlebury College. The story, prompted by growing concern among the female athletes who felt they were not getting equal treatment from the athletic department, raised awareness of the apparent lack of consistency towards men's and women's sports teams. The article raised awareness of the issue, so much so that Athletic Director Tom Lawson convened a meeting last spring with the captains of the female sports teams soon after reading the article.

Earlier this fall, more than three months after the meeting, Director Lawson commented on the initial outcry: "I was unaware of the concerns of the women before that article appeared in the paper." Director Lawson also expressed frustration at the fact that he was not contacted before the article went to print. "No one sought out my opinions, so I was a bit surprised after reading the piece," he said.

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The meeting between the female captains as well as Lawson and male and female coaches of various teams concerned, in the words of the students requesting the get-together, "coaches, assistants, B-teams, competition, and scheduling."

Director Lawson felt the concerns, though very valid, were due to the unwillingness of both the students and the athletic department to discuss the problems openly. "Many of the concerns were a direct result of a lack of communication," said Mr. Lawson.

The meeting, lasting for more than two hours, has produced some tangible results for the women's teams. For the first time in the school's history, there is now a



Athletic Director G. Thomas Lawson has been instrumental in bringing concrete changes to the women's sports programs this fall. He is pictured here with ski coach Patti Ross.

(photo by Tina Manville)

women's B-soccer team. Director Lawson was quick to point out that "not many schools have a B-team," a fact that proved true this fall as the coaches found only a smattering of games for their schedule. In addition, the Athletic Department hired two graduate assistants for women's teams to balance the previous inequality in that area. The two women, 1987 graduates Paula Riccardeli and Sarah Poiner, both worked in paid positions, mirroring the fact that the varsity football team has traditionally employed paid graduate assistants to help with the program. Poiner coached the B-soccer team and assisted the varsity and Riccardeli worked with the varsity tennis team as well as coached the B-tennis squad. "We are trying to fill the gap in a systematic way," added Mr. Lawson, also pointing out that two female graduates volunteered their services this fall to help out the women's programs. '87 graduates Megan Kemp and Ingrid Punderson worked with the sports teams without pay this fall, Kemp with the B-field hockey team and Punderson with the women's soccer teams. Both volunteers were the leading proponents for fairer treatment last spring, and the school's willingness to accept their generosity further exhibits the number of changes aimed at balancing the women's programs with the men's programs.

Another significant development is the hiring of graduate assistant Kim Maynard. Graduating last spring, Maynard will now work directly with the female captains following each season to review the concerns of any of those involved. "We're really trying hard to keep that line of communication open with the students," commented

Lawson on Maynard's hiring.

The most telling change to occur as a result of last spring's meeting was the hiring of Bill Mandigo to replace women's varsity ice hockey coach Mike Gerber. Gerber's position as head hockey coach was the most emotional issue for the women as well as the most glaring example of the Athletic Department's apparent lack of concern and sensitivity in years

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past. Gerber coached the team without having any extensive knowledge of the sport as well as struggling on ice skates. "We really felt he was hired first as a football coach and a women's ice hockey coach second," said senior team member Marci Griffith. It would be tough to argue such a point with the players as Gerber did not even attend early practices last season due to football practice. In addition, the women were forced to use late ice times to accommodate Gerber's required attendance at staff meetings following football practices.

However, Director Lawson responded to the underlying accusations, saying: "I would welcome being held accountable for reality of life at this level. Coaches are required to coach more than one sport in a limited program such as this." To remedy the problem, the department was faced with a unique opportunity: with the loss of coach Bob Ritter to Tufts University and the unwillingness of Gerber to

return to coaching the women skaters, Director Lawson could conduct a search for the most able candidate, hoping not to compromise either the football or the ice hockey teams in the process. The answer came in the person of Bill Mandigo. From a Rhode Island high school, Mandigo not only filled a football need but has an extensive background in coaching ice hockey, something the Administration needed to find in a coach.

However, some athletes feel the changes are insufficient to deal with a very serious, very pervasive problem. Problems of scheduling still exist, contend the women, as well as attitudes by the coaches and certain male players. Last season, there were statements made by Coach Bob Smith concerning the intensity levels of the women's teams. During a Teachers Education seminar last spring, Coach Smith stated that women's sports do not exhibit the same degree of outward intensity as do men's sports, and should therefore not be taken as seriously. This attitude has apparently continued into this fall, when a men's varsity soccer player, after watching the women's team practice in

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Halloween costumes, commented, "How are we supposed to take them seriously?" Junior soccer player Ellen LeMaitre responded to such comments, saying, "Take us so

seriously that we're going to the NIAC's, seeded second," emphatically explaining that the '88 team is the first in Middlebury women's soccer history to go to that tournament.

Another glaring example of the remaining inequalities in the Athletic Department centers again around the women's ice hockey team. Senior team member Marci Griffith explained that the team still receives less-than-desirable ice time. "Last year we had terrible times and it's no different this season. We have practice and the coach can't be there because he's at football practice," referring to Bill Mandigo's job as assistant football coach. In contrast, the men's varsity hockey team skates following the other team's afternoon practices, allowing Coach Bill Beaney not only to coach his women's soccer team but also conduct practice with his varsity men's ice hockey team. The women must rely on a student assistant until football season comes to a close. "They should at least switch it every other day, or something," suggested Griffith, adding, "It shows me that nothing's changed in that respect."

Despite the continued discontent with the department's willingness to change, the reactions to this newfound sensitivity have been generally supportive, the women athletes sensing the wheels of change have been set in motion. Junior Karen Griffith, a member of the varsity soccer and lacrosse teams noted that "things are changing." She also stated, "I can see that the Administration is doing something, but they've only just started," tempering her enthusiasm with words of caution. Karen's sister Marci added, "I definitely feel like they are more concerned about us possibly feeling like 'second-rate citizens.'"

The concern Griffith spoke of

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refers to a recent example of the Administration's change of attitude. The Athletic Department came directly to the women athletes last week wanting to discuss proposed changes to the athletic fields. "They wanted to make sure there would be no difference between the guys' and the girls' new fields," said Karen Griffith. Her sister continued, echoing the reality of the changes: "The problems aren't going away in one season. We'll see marked improvement three or four years down the road."

Women's soccer

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Williams is third. In the regular season the team defeated the Cows 1-0, in an upset victory. The Ephwomen were ranked far above the Panthers at that point, but Middlebury dominated play and toppled their arch-rivals. If they