How Title IX Is Holding Us Back In Athens

by Phyllis Schlafly Aug. 25, 2004

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The Olympic games are in full swing with the finest athletes in the world. The sine qua non of the Olympics is unlimited competition that yields record-breaking feats.

Should the gold medals be divided equally among the participating countries? Of course not, nor should money be allocated equally to everyone who shows up.

Yet that is what Title IX regulations impose on our schools and colleges. Our teams suffer as a result, robbing many athletes of opportunities to develop the skills needed for great achievement.

Contrary to the intention of Congress, Title IX is used to impose gender quotas on high schools and colleges. They must equate the ratio of males and females in sports programs to their overall enrollment.

When there are more women than men in a college, as is now typical, Title IX regulations mandate that women outnumber men by the same ratio on its competitive sports teams. Consequently, across the United States at every level, schools have eliminated men's teams solely to meet the quota set by total enrollment.

This has forced, for example, Howard University to eliminate men's teams such as baseball in order to reduce the overall total of male relative to female athletes. Meanwhile, women's sports that use large squad sizes, such as rowing and horseback riding, are sprouting up at many colleges.

Title IX has compelled colleges to eliminate hundreds of teams having large male squads, such as wrestling and track. At the same time, colleges are offering full-ride scholarships to women with no experience in sports that are easy to learn, such as crew.

Despite the claim that Title IX helps women athletes, it has actually caused the elimination of traditional girls' teams such as gymnastics in favor of easy-to-recruit sports such as water polo or horseback riding. Title IX caused the reduction of women's gymnastics teams from 190 to only 90, and as a result U.S. girl gymnasts were unable to win a single medal at the 2000 Olympics.

In mandating outcomes of gender equality, Title IX violates every principle of athletic competition. Simply to meet quota targets, dedicated, hard-working male athletes are cut from their teams in favor of females who are here today and gone tomorrow.

Since Title IX was interpreted in 1979 by the Carter Administration to require quotas (under the code word proportionality), our percentage of Olympic medals has repeatedly declined (not counting 1984 when top medal-winning countries boycotted the games). In 2000, our share of medals fell to its lowest ever for Olympics that the U.S. attended.

Some experts predict that our medal share will fall even lower this time. Our men's track team, traditionally a leader in medals, has been decimated by Title IX quotas.

Of course, we still produce tremendous athletes. As the land of opportunity, we will always generate individual stars such as swimmer Michael Phelps, who set a world record in winning his first of several medals in Athens.

But Title IX quotas killed the UCLA swim team that spurred Mark Spitz to his records. Private swim clubs can still train champions, but other sports such as wrestling and track depend entirely on school-based competition.

The promising baseball players at Howard University lost their chance to develop their skills and become stars. Our future Jesse Owenses have been replaced by less talented women who took an athletic scholarship to get a free college tuition, not because they were keen on sports.

Title IX is holding us back, interfering with dedicated athletes and wasting money on the less motivated. It sets the tone of mindless equality of result, rather than the Olympic spirit that rewards the best athlete.

Political correctness is especially hurtful to team sports. It has led to acquiescing in the feminists' demand that coaches be picked by gender rather than talent, and that successful male coaches of women's teams be replaced by a female coach even if less talented.

A male coach led the women's soccer team to the Olympic gold medal in 1996 and the memorable capture of the World Cup in the Rose Bowl in 1999. But he was oddly replaced by a relatively inexperienced female coach who has never been able to repeat those successes.

The United States spends more on sports than any other country in the world, perhaps more than all other countries combined. But if our future great athletes have their spots taken away from them in the name of gender equality, what are we getting for our money?

It is an obvious sex difference that men are far more interested in competitive sports than women. Men have more testosterone, enjoy the camaraderie more, and are not as vulnerable to injury in rough sports such as football and basketball.

In the Olympics, we compete against other countries that field and fund their best athletes without regard to political correctness or feminist demands for gender equality. Title IX is disadvantaging our country by denying opportunities to male athletes and pushing women into sports that they pursue only long enough to pay their college tuition.