



Celebrating 50 Years of Title IX

Administrators, Leading the Way

By Todd Fertig

If high school sports were effectively a boys club prior to 1972, they would be no longer, thanks to the enactment of Title IX. That meant opportunities for girls in all activities, and it also mean opportunities for women in the administration of those activities.

Women like Cheryl Gleason and Charlotte Davis, who saw their athletic opportunities limited while in high school prior to Title IX, were some of the earliest administrators in Kansas high school sports once that door opened.

Davis was the first female athletic director in the Kansas City, Kansas, Public School District.

“When I first went to Wyandotte as athletic director, that was kind of scary because I didn’t know how the men would accept me,” Davis said. “But that ended up working out very, very well. They had confidence in me.”

Gleason, who coached and was an physical education teacher for several years before taking a position at the KSHSAA state office, said breaking into sports administration wasn’t easy in the early days.

“There was no guidance to be an athletic director back then,” Gleason said. “Sports administration, that wasn’t even an option. I got my master’s in physical education. I thought it would be nice to be an athletic director, so I took a lot of administrative classes as well. But there was no official training.”

Fran Martin, another longtime KSHSAA administrator, recalled breaking in as an athletic director at El Dorado.

“It was interesting going to the AD meetings for our league, because, for the most part, it

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was me and the boys,” Martin said. “The male athletic directors in that league were pretty accepting of a woman as part of the team. There were some of those stereotypes in the beginning. If some notes needed to be taken, ‘Fran can do that.’ But for the most part, those gentlemen were very respectful of women.”

Davis had few opportunities to play sports at Wyandotte High School in the 1960s. She entered the teaching and coaching field just as Title IX was taking effect. She recalled some passive resistance to change at first.

“I remember that at one school, I saw the boys basketball players got socks,” Davis said. “I went to the AD and said ‘If you bought all those boys socks, you must provide socks to the girls.’ And he said ‘Oh my. I know.’ There were things they weren’t going to do unless you noticed it.”

Gleason’s was able to play several sports at Southwestern College, which propelled her into coaching. Her opportunities were limited while a high school student at Columbus, however. The pre-Title IX tennis team at Columbus had little financial support.

“Our uniforms were homemade by someone,” Gleason said. “We had to drive ourselves to meets. So if you had a car, you were on the team. When we went to state tennis in Hutchinson, we drove a school vehicle with a hole in the floorboard. In the beginning it was tough, because there was no money allotted for it.”

Davis recalled taking a job at a school that designated a large gym as the Boys Gym, with a smaller space named the Girls Gym.

“When I took over, I made sure to get rid of those designations and said we were going to share them equally,” Davis said.

When Gleason graduated high school in 1972, she knew change was coming.

“People were excited,” Gleason said. “I remember going to college knowing that something was going to happen. But we all knew there was a lot of catching up to do.”

Once the law mandated equal opportunities for girls, the long battle to elevate girl’s sports still remained.

“When I started, I didn’t see anything really purposefully overlooked,” longtime Dodge City administrator Tamie Preston said. “But the boys’ sports were the first thing on the docket. They were in the media and were talked about more. The hurdle to overcome was to get the girls sports to have the same recognition.”



Cheryl Gleason received a proclamation from Kansas State Senator Brenda Dietrich Thursday at Gleason's retirement reception.

A handful of girls' sports, particularly basketball, spread quickly across the state. Soon state championships were held in those sports. Then began the long, slow development of a robust offering of activities for girls.

"It took a long time in some cases," Gleason said. "In the late 1980s, there were still some schools that didn't have volleyball."

The growth in the number of girls sports has been mostly organic, Martin said.

"We don't force anything down someone's throat," Martin said. "The things that grow and last start at the grassroots level. That's why the girl's sports that we've added have been successful.

"We've got so much more participation from the girls now than in the early days. As the popularity of a sport increased, we would reach a number where we could add championships."

"It was a very rewarding career," Preston said of her work as an AD. "I loved helping the kids experience the things that they were passionate about, and that I loved when I was a student."



Francine Martin began her administrative career at El Dorado HS.

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