

Historical Myth: Progress in Society's View of Women In Sports

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Prologue

Thirty five exhausted young women sit in a sloppy circle. The focus of the team's tired, but fulfilled, gaze is an energetic woman twice their age. She motions furiously with her hands, her body swaying rhythmically as she discusses team's latest triumph. Each girl takes her turn, one negative and one positive element from the match.

The first girl sports a high ponytail.

A small girl speaks.

Now a tall, lanky girl.

A black girl.

A girl with short hair.

Thirty five different girls have spent the afternoon playing the most physical sport they have access to, rugby. Some these girls will be at home studying in a few hours. Some will curl up with a movie. Others will primp and then head out to parties. And most likely some will cuddle with their boy or girl friends. The media views of women in sports seems to define an athletic young woman more than her personality, smile, or play on the field.

Introduction

Media images of women are contentious in today's world. Feminist scholars awakened our consciousness to the role the media plays in imprinting gender roles. The rise of women's sports led to the inevitable media response. The 1920s saw the first conflict over women in sports. The heady years of World War II found an entirely different view of women, on and off the playing fields.

This was an age where women could vote, a time of flappers and the first wave of female sexual liberation. Middling women began to pick up tennis rackets, golf clubs, and swim. The demagogues fought fiercely, the old guard decrying these new women and their inability to stay still or be content.

The Great Depression and World War II years saw the rise of women's team sports such as basketball and softball. The war saw a huge break with traditional roles for women, as they moved into employment positions previously held by men. It also saw women playing baseball professionally, America's first foray into women's professional team sports. The experiment would not be duplicated on a national scale for another 50 years.

We Have Come So Far: Historical Myth

Young female athletes are growing up PMH, post Mia Hamm, in a world where you now see female athletes as stars and role models. This generation is supposedly reaping the benefits of female trail blazers, who made it acceptable to play sports. Has there really been a qualitative change in the view of women in sports since the 50s in America? The answer appears to be no.

The way the media has portrayed female athletes has changed but not the nature of those portrayals. Media commentary and coverage is still dictated by heteronormative expectations. Female athletes in the 50s were plagued by the reemergence of the cult of domesticity. Babe Zaharias, Tenley Albright, and Patricia McCormick all were effected despite their varying backgrounds and sports. In 2005 our heteronormative views have changed, women's sexuality has been liberated and they are expected to use and flaunt it. Anna Kournikova, Jennie Finch and Heather Mitts, are all representative

of today's high profile female athletes. Society has constructed a myth that Tenley Albright and her generation were treated so badly in comparison to Jennie Finch and company are today. While the opportunities for women to play sports have expanded exponentially in the last 50 years, the views society has regarding their involvement has been qualitatively static.

While the way female athletes are portrayed by the media has changed, the nature has not. At the heart of media representations of women in sports has been a heteronormative prism. Heteronormative is a Queer studies term that describes the social bias and expectations that surround "normal" relationships that exist between heterosexual men and women.¹ Heteronormative values have not staid still in the last fifty years and have changed significantly. The projections and allusions of the media when portraying female athletes has likewise evolved. Female athletes once stood in the specter of "June Cleaver" now female athletes have to deal with "role models" like Jessica Simpson.

The period following World War II saw a return to the "cult of domesticity" as the primary heteronormative value. This was a reaction to the socially destabilizing nature of World War II, which allowed the mobilization of various groups whose aims were returning to normalcy. These groups were diverse, as was their primary focus, from the KKK to McCarthy inspired red hunters. Despite the diversity in these groups primary agendas, most put some focus on returning women to their "traditional role." The "cult of domesticity" is at the heart of this role.²

The "cult of domesticity" centers on women's duty as angels of the home. Women's purpose is creating the perfect home environment and raising children. The home is to be a place of respite for one's husband, from the man's work world. As such, her moral virtue and nurturing spirit were considered her most important traits. In the period following World War II this view of women was enhanced by certain economic concerns. The 50s saw the promulgation of consumer and durable goods targeted at these women. Electric washers and driers, dishwashers, and electric kitchen aids all were

1 Frum, David. "A New Word, A New Day," [National Review](#), 3/28/2005.

2 Rowbotham, Sheila. [A Century of Women](#). Penguin Books: New York 1997.270-279

targeted at these women. In such a way the “cult of domesticity” became both social and economic imperatives.

The media's representation of women in sports following World War II does on face value seem archaic. Constant allusions and references to amazing athletes by hair type, “the blond golfer” or “the brunette diver” litter articles in *Time* and most Philadelphia papers. Use of the diminutive “girl” for female athletes who are clearly adult women does not happen in does Associated Press articles. At the same time the media shows an ability to describe the athletic accomplishments of these women in very flattering views. This returns to the fundamental question of how displays of athletic prowess and associated masculine virtues could be assimilated by the media. The answer seems simple, you can be strong, athletic, and even courageous, as long as dinner is in the oven and the house clean by the time George gets home. In short you can be an acceptable female athlete as long as you conform to heteronormative expectations.

Mildred “Babe” Didrikson Zaharias is considered by many to be the greatest female athlete ever and possibly the greatest athlete of either sex. She was the daughter of Norwegian immigrants who settled in Texas. Didrikson received her nickname “Babe” during a baseball game where she hit five homeruns. Babe's greatest achievements came in athletics and golf; in both games she proved to be a world class champion. She married George Zaharias in 1948 but the motivations behind this would always be submerged in questions over her sexuality and possible relations with Betty Dodd. In 1956 she lost a battle with cancer.³

Babe's portrayal in the media was often strained and showed the constant pressure for female athletes to conform to heteronormative values. The Babe's career spanned almost 25 years, a good deal of it during the Great Depression and World War II. Yet she remains an important figure in examining the importance of heteronormative expectations applied to female athletes through the media.

From the beginning of her rise to athletic fame, Babe had to deal with the media. Perhaps the

3 National Women's Hall of Fame. <http://www.greatwomen.org/women.php?action=viewone&id=177>. 11/20/05

most telling media controversy early in the Babe's career was surrounding direct accusations of her unfeminine nature and negative comments she made regarding housework. In 1932 Babe said that marriage was a “decathlon” and even as an all around athlete she couldn't imagine doing that. In response the *Philadelphia Inquirer* printed a remonstrance from local housewives. Quoting a housewife the paper explained, “Miss Didrikson simply isn't inclined to house work, and I, like many other married women, am not athletically inclined-that explains a great deal.” This quote gets right to the heart of the “cult of domesticity.” Clearly Didrikson was not good at housework says the sources, but *married women* are for the most part not athletically gifted either. The connection between the heteronormative behavior of marriage and housework is contrasted with the unfeminine nature of sports.⁴

The media attention regarding Babe's less than feminine traits eventually led to a direct response to the papers. A mere six months after her verbal miscue about housework, and subsequent rebuke in the media, Didrikson proclaimed her feminine traits to the world. She had been misunderstood she claimed, “[I'm] no 'muscle moll',”⁵ and “I know people decided I am just the queer sort of girl...that isn't so at all.” In the article she goes on apologizing for herself, bowing point by point to the heteronormative pressures. Why no boys, what about kids, why can't you do housework, and why don't you dress like a girl? Didrikson defends herself on all accounts.⁶ Stunningly enough, words equal reality, as Babe makes a remarkably conscious effort over the next fifteen years to realize social expectations that she had just subscribed to.

By 1937 Didrikson had already to transform in the eyes of the media. She no longer had worry about the “muscle moll” moniker. Gone were the cropped hair, “mannish” clothes and her single status. The new Babe wore wavy shoulder length hair, pretty dresses, and sported a gigantic man, 300 pound George Zaharias, a former wrestler. One reporter was dismayed at the duo, “I've seen everything

4 “Housewives Deny Work Is Crushing,” In Urban Archive., 8/26/32.

5 Along with muscle Mary, both terms leveled at athletic women, akin to tomboy, but worse in their day

6 “No 'Muscle Moll' Says Didrikson,” *The Evening Bulletin*, 1/19/33.

now...when were these two lovers married?"⁷ But another reporter had already changed his mind about the former "muscle moll," describing Babe's physical attachment to George, "[She's] just a coy, clinging vine." The beginning's of Babe's positive relationship with the media begins with her acceptance of heteronormative values

The papers picked up more and more about Didrikson's new found feminine skills. Her skills as a homemaker were not in doubt ten years after marriage with George had marked a seeming peace with the media. The papers were keen to learn how Babe took care of her husband and home. Her skills with a sewing machine were juxtaposed with her skills as a golfer. "I think a lot of housewives waste time...Babe just slams at it...and then goes out and plays golf,"⁸ said George of his wife. The most famous female athlete in the world had now become a media darling; she was the perfect wife and house keeper. She was the perfect picture of the "cult of domesticity," gone golfing.

Tenley Albright was born in 1937, in Newtown Center Massachusetts. Tenley was stricken with polio at age eleven and upon recovering they instructed her to continue doing her normal activities to regain her strength. For Albright this meant figure skating, and four months after regaining the use of her legs she skated away with the Eastern United States Junior Ladies Figure Skating title. By the age of twenty one she had won the Olympics, World Championships, and attended Radcliffe College. She then quit skating, instead entering Harvard Medical School to become a surgeon. Married to a Boston attorney, Tenley's accomplishments have not diminished: member of the International Olympic Committee, surgeon and blood plasma researcher.⁹

Tenley had much easier time with the media, because she was entirely non-threatening to the heteronormative ideals of the time. This seems like a contradiction. On the surface, the idea of a woman going from Polio victim to Olympic gold to surgeon would seem a serious violation against the "cult of domesticity." Yet Albright had several things on her side. She was physically very attractive

7 Cuddy, Jack. "Sports Parade: They Won't Call George 'Mr. Babe Didrikson,' *SSJ*, 8/15/47.

8 "Babe's a Real Champ in the Home," In Urban Archive, 7/23/47

9 Tenley, Albright, M. D. Profile. <http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/alb0pro-1>. 12/05/05

and the sport in question was traditionally feminine one.¹⁰ Albright also downplayed her achievements and struggled publicly, unlike Didrikson she did not simply pick up a pair of skates or a text book and find success.

Tenley was a media darling from the start: a smile that melted hearts and skating that lit the ice on fire. However, her personality and spirit is what earned her fans everywhere. Six years after battling Polio, Tenley basked in the glow of world championship,

Miss Albright has done more for her country than win a skating championship. Her examples gives hope and encouragement to all victims of infantile paralysis...the most essential medicine is the patient's will to win-the courage and determination between a competitor and a champion.¹¹

we see the key difference in the perceptions of Babe and Albright, the inborn skill versus the courage needed to succeed. This perception was only heightened by her experience during the second Olympics she participated in. Just weeks before the games she slipped in a rut in the ice and punctured her skin to the bone. In serious pain, she made no excuse, "I have no one to blame but myself."¹² Albright's gold at the Olympics certified her status a courageous athlete and further enshrined her as humble super star. Her loss in the world championships was equally graceful.

Albright's media recognition during the 50s ended with the same positive nature that it began. By the time Tenley was set to retire she had added the important heteronormative event of marriage to her "achievements." The press received the wedding between Albright and Tudor Gardiner, no slouch himself as the son of a former governor and lawyer, well. The article details the skater's dress and veil to the last flourish. And of course you can't forget the flowers, which oddly enough were variety that had been named after Albright herself.¹³ When Albright bowed down to her first love, the love of medicine, it was well taken by the media. Which is amazing by its self, a women who has been at the height of athletic competition and now is seeking the height of knowledge (in a male dominated field)

10 I'll spare you the boring recitation of Albright's physical attractiveness, but most cited sources contain such commentary

11 "Courage Makes a Champion," In Urban Archives, 2/17/53.

12 Associated Press. "Tenley Albright Injures Leg In Olympic Skating Workout," In Urban Archive, 1/19/56.

13 Associated Press. "Skater Tenley Albright Weds Boston Attorney," In Urban Archive.

is not being labeled as masculine at all.

Albright was beloved by the media and qualities that might otherwise have been attacked were embraced. This is because she fulfilled all of her heteronormative expectations. Her strength, intelligence and drive to be the best were not considered downsides or unnatural because she obeyed society's expectations first. On top of that she was an understated winner and a gracious loser, further projecting heteronormative ideals onto her success.

Patricia McCormick was born in 1930 in California. McCormick's love was diving and grew to excel at both the fixed and springboard events. At the height of her competitive career she won two gold medals at two consecutive Olympics. Her victory in the 1956 was the largest margin ever in women's springboard history. What made her second victory so astounding was that she trained up until two days before she gave birth to her first child. For her efforts in 1956 she was awarded the Associated Press Female Athlete of the year. Her husband John McCormick was an AAU diving champion. Her daughter Kelly would go on to medal at both 1984 and the 1988 games on the springboard.¹⁴

McCormick was like Albright when it came to the media, she was pretty, succeeded in a “feminine” sport, and perfectly fit the heteronormative model that society and the media demanded. Her petite frame and pretty face earned her constant commentary in the papers. Diving was considered a feminine sport, unlike most of the team sports of the day and some athletics events. McCormick was married fairly young, was enthusiast about motherhood and in general engaged in maternal like behaviors in her viewing of young divers.

You can see a great deal of heteronormative flattery when journalists described McCormick's diving. They describe McCormick as a “low board artist” and compare her perfection to that of the ballet master Pavlova.¹⁵ Another writer, celebrating the diver's AP athlete of the year award, described

¹⁴ International Olympic Committee – Athletes. http://www.olympic.org/uk/athletes/heroes/bio_uk.asp?PAR_I_ID=5303. 12/05/05.

¹⁵ Page, Court. “McCormick Seeks Only Happiness, Won't Turn Pro,” In Urban Archives, *New York Herald Times*, 1/23/53.

her similarly, “[she] won only because her artistry, grace and perfection could not be denied.”¹⁶ The portrayals of her athletic performance are described in entirely non-threatening ways, heteronormative ways. Her athletic performance is characterized as artistry instead of strength, compared to Pavlova versus Ruth.

The media was kind to McCormick and loved to constantly quote her comments regarding children, child rearing, and being a housewife. In between her Olympic triumphs there was a good deal of discussion about her future, and the press loved to point out her desire for a large family.¹⁷ The role as a housewife came up frequently following her second gold medal Olympics. “From now on it will be Mrs. McCormick , mother and housewife” wrote one columnist.¹⁸ An article talking about McCormick's retirement from competitive diving wastes no time pointing out that she was quitting to raise a large family.¹⁹ A different article speaks about her interest in young divers, paying special attention to her role feeding, housing, and clothing them if they come to study with her husband and herself.²⁰ The media’s near obsession with McCormick’s maternal strain and the heteronormative connections are explicit.

The star female athletes of the fifties all were expected to conform to heteronormative values by the media. Babe Didrikson originally did not conform to these values and the media wasted no time in presenting her unfeminine traits. When Babe changed her ways to conform to the heteronormative ideal she was rewarded by positive press exposure. Her golf accolades in the late 40s and 50’s were applauded by the media and during the time frame won numerous awards, including Associated Press Female Athlete of the Year. Albright and McCormick had a much easier time with the media. Despite showing courage and athletic prowess in the same category of Didrikson, their status as women was never attacked because they also subscribed to the heteronormative values of the media and society.

16 “Pat McCormick Honored,” In Urban Archives, *New York Herald Times*, 12/27/56.

17 Page, Court. “McCormick Seeks Only Happiness, Won't Turn Pro,” *ibid*

18 Pat McCormick Honored,” *ibid*

19 Page, Court. “McCormick Seeks Only Happiness, Won't Turn Pro,” *ibid*

20 Tuckner, Howard. “Pat Has Change of Status, Not Change of View,” In Urban Archive, *New York Times*, 5/13/05.

Heteronormative values have changed since Babe, Tenley, and Pat were stars among female athletes. The social “revolution” of the 60s included a clear attack on the traditional role of women. Women's participation in work has increased dramatically, women now outnumber men in many universities, and participation of women in college athletics had grown from a meager 7% to over 37%.²¹ Women have taken control of their bodies in terms of their sexual, reproductive, and clothing rights. Yet unlike the 50s there is no universal heteronormative experience.²²

There is still a media portrayed heteronormative “experience.” Gone is the image of the cloistered, virginal housewife. June Cleaver must be rolling her grave watching girls lounge around in low riders and tiny tee shirts embossed with “future MILF.”²³ In 2005 we have embraced the female right to be sexual, now more of a demand, as the media elevates sex symbols like Jessica Simpson and Paris Hilton above all else. Even our fictional characters that most embody, “girl power,” do so while touching up their makeup, wearing leather and pulling on the heart strings of hapless men.^{24, 25}

Of course heteronormative behavior as a media stereotype has a complement in 2005. We have acquired a set of homonormative media images and we're not shy talking about them. Homosexuality was simply too taboo following World War II for the media to effectively create a stereotype for gay or lesbian people. Now we have both sides of the coin in the media, the conundrum for female athletes (and the media that sells them) is this: our new found openness regarding GLBT individuals means now we have to deal with news and commentary regarding a female athlete's sexuality.

The mainstream media continues to look at female athletes through a heteronormative lens, with the exception of the few spectacles that erupt when sexuality comes to the fore front. It's hard to miss the buzz that surrounded Sheryl Swoops coming out or Penn State's women's soccer program being accused of anti lesbian practices. However, for the most part, the mainstream media continues to

21 Empowering Women In Sports. Feminist Majority Foundation. <http://www.feminist.org/research/sports/sports3.html>. 12/10/05.

22 While clearly there was not one set of heteronormative expectation in the 50s either, it was far more clear in the 50's atmosphere of conformity than it is today

23 MILF, mother I'd like to fuck, a crude abbreviation that was spawned for porn and adolescents boys, hijacked by girls

24 Fudge, Rachel. *The Buffy Effect: Or, A Tale of Cleavage and Marketing Bitch*. San Francisco: Jan 31, 1999., Iss. 10; pg. 18

25 Clearly this can be seen as far back as *Charley's Angels*, but found a truer post third wave feminist bent in Josh Weadon's *Buffly the Vampire Slayer*, or the more recent *Alias* and *Veronica Mars*

pretend that issues of homonormative behavior in the both genders only exist as occasional, big ticket stories.²⁶

Heather Mitts, Jeannie Finch and Anna Kournikova are all elevated by heteronormative nature of the media . This can be seen not only in how they are portrayed by the media, where they are portrayed, but the relationship it has with advertising dollars. While the nature of media has shifted greatly in the last 50 years, the people who pay for it has not. For the most part this means advertisers; advertisers who would capitalize on female athletes new found fame in the media, fame almost always tied to their heteronormative image in the media.²⁷

Anna Kournikova was born in Russia in 1981, to a former professional wrestler and part time tennis coach. She began playing Tennis at the age of five and was first noticed by scouts in 1990. Noticed by a management company, she was shipped off to the famous Nick Bollettieri Tennis school in Florida. She progressed quickly and by age fourteen was the Junior World Champion. She went pro at the following year, making it to the fourth round of the US Open. Her greatest tennis accomplishment was winning the doubles at the Australian Open twice with Martina Hingis. Anna retired in 2003 because of back injuries.²⁸

Anna Kournikova seems out of place in this paper compared to the other stars. Granted she is an international athlete but not a very good one. Yet Anna is one of the best known female athletes in the world. In a heteronormative media where sex appeal is king, Anna was for many years queen. This could be seen in both the media and the advertisers who support media.

Anna Kournikova was idolized in the heteronormative media since she entered professional tennis. This idolization occurred despite the fact that her on the court stardom really never appeared, or

26 WNBA star Sheryl Swoopes comes out. ESPN.com. <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/wire?section=ncw&id=2204077>. 10/26/05
Penn State to review anti-lesbian bias accusations. ESPN.com <http://sports.espn.go.com/ncw/news/story?id=2189172>. 10/26/05

27 Carty, Victoria "Textual Portrayals of Female Athletes: Liberation or Nuanced Forms of Patriarchy?" " *Frontiers*. Boulder: 2005. Vol.26, Iss. 2; pg. 132, 25 pgs

28 Kournikova.com – Official Site of Anna Kournikova . <http://www.kournikova.com/facts/bio.php>. 12/05/05.

partially because it didn't.²⁹ Kournikova has appeared numerous times in major newspapers for her sporting deeds (and failures) but far more telling is her appearance on other covers and in the pages of other magazines. Appearances included spots in *GQ*, *Vogue*, and even *Forbes*, most having her pose in less than tennis gear. They certainly weren't discussing sports either, conversations focused on her star studded relationships with the likes hockey hunk and fellow Russian, Sergi Federov.^{30,31} Her 2000 cover and spread in *Maxim* was a huge step in moving her from merely sexy starlet to sex icon.³² In 2003 Espn.com's *Page 2* crowned her the hottest female athlete but this was hardly telling world and sporting public anything they didn't already know.

Anna's dramatic portrayal as a heteronormative sex icon in the media is echoed in her status as queen of endorsement. In 2003, despite the total collapse of her tennis game, her endorsement contracts were worth nearly nine million dollars. This was slightly less than the Williams sisters, but they have the advantage of being both sex icons and *real* tennis stars. Kournikova's doubles partner and singles star Martina Hingis earned 50% less in endorsements. All world golfer Annika Sorenstam also earned nearly 50% less.³³ Hingis and Sorenstam are simply not as marketable in the media because their sex appeal has been deemed inferior to Anna's. Luckily for Hingis and Sorenstam they actually earn prize money in their sports; Kournikova's nine million dollars in endorsements is juxtaposed with "only" a million dollars a year in prize money during the peak of her competitive career.³⁴

Thanks to the media and advertisers Anna Kournikova is one of the world's best known female athletes. She is not known because of her athletic endeavors but rather because she is the perfect heteronormative icon. The media loves her because is sex icon. Her play on the court is secondary to her ability to attract, largely male, readers, viewers and listeners. Advertisers picked up on her image and rewarded with generous endorsement deals.

29. "Double Or Quits?" *Sports Business International*, 4/05

30 *GQ*, 08/00

31 *Vogue*, 06/00

32. *Maxim*, 05/00

33 "The Big Bucks Brigade" *Sport Business International*, 04/04.

34 Newcomb, Peter "Playing The Net Game" *Forbes*, 03/20/00.

Jennie Finch was born in California in 1980. Finch has been a towering presence in every sport she participated in, including volleyball, basketball, and her international status as a softball player. This is in no small part due to her size, at six feet tall and almost 200 pounds Jennie towers over the competition. After four years of dominance at La Mirada High School, Finch moved to Arizona University. She led the Sun Devils to four college world series appearances, including a victory in her junior year. She holds NCAA record for consecutive games won at 60 and was twice named NCAA Softball Player of the Year. From 2002 to 2004 Finch was part of the women's national team, including the 2004 Olympic team that earned gold in Athens. Finch married Casey Dangel, pitcher for the Arizona Diamondbacks, in 2003.³⁵

Finch's burst onto the media scene soon after the hype surrounding Anna Kournikova had just ended. Finch was quickly accepted into the spot because she also fit the heteronormative narrative very well. Anna was a spoiled sex icon, all looks and no game. Finch had amazing skills, was stunningly attractive, and her evangelical roots kept her clothed. While there would be no Maxim covers for Finch, that didn't stop her from getting the sex icon treatment.

Finch was already a star before 2004. Her appearance at ESPN's ESPY awards netted her both the best college female athlete award and also best dressed.³⁶ In 2004 she was catapulted into the spot light when she was nominated by *Page 2*'s hottest female athlete competition. She handily won the competition and won a battle of champions versus Anna Kournikova with ease.³⁷ The media picked up on her achievements on and off the field. She was named one of *People Magazine*'s "50 Most Beautiful People," adding to the media's attention to her sexual attractiveness. Finch remains ambivalent about her status as a sex symbol and won't be appearing nude.³⁸ Even she crossed the line in 2005 when she was part of *Sports Illustrated*'s swim suit issue.³⁹

35 Jennie Finch. <http://www.jenniefinch.net/bio>. 12/05/05.

36 2002 ESPY Awards. ESPN.com. <http://espn.go.com/espy2002/s/bestdressed2001.html#>. 12/09/05.

37 Who's the hottest? Finch vs Anna. ESPN.com <http://espn.go.com/page2/s/hottest/female/finals.html>. 12/09/05.

38 10 Burning Questions With Jennie Finch. ESPN.com <http://espn.go.com/page2/s/questions/JennieFinch.html> 12/10/05.

39 SI Swimsuit Collection. CNN.com. http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/swimsuit/collection/athletes/jennie_finch.html. 12/11/05.

However, her reluctance to embrace the sex symbol fully as affected her ability to attract endorsements. While her deep belief in evangelical Christianity was noble, and never attacked, what advertisers wanted was a real sex spot. Despite being part of the gold medal team in Athens and being part of the professional women's fast pitch softball league, she earns less than half a million dollars in endorsements. The main endorsement deal is with Mizuno, they named a softball line after her, but that is fairly meager compared to Anna's endorsements even today.⁴⁰ Her relatively meager endorsement earning might also be because softball is not a "sexy" sport the way that tennis is. In fact homonormative views tend to cast softball as being a lesbian sport. If Finch had stuck with volleyball, by contrast a very "sexy" sport, it is very possible she would be worth far more in endorsements.

The media tried to move Jennie Finch into the heteronormative ideal of sex spot. While she had the good looks and personality to fulfill such a position, she spurned it for religious reasons. Her unwillingness to bear more skin for the media combined with performing in a sport deemed "unsexy" or even "gay" has kept endorsements low.

Heather Mitts was born in 1977, in Cincinnati Ohio. Mitts has been a dominant soccer player since her high school days at Saint Ursula Academy, where she was twice all state. She led them to a state championship as a junior before heading to Florida State for college. Mitts led the Gators to their only national championship in 1999. While in college she had two tours with the US under 21 national team. Since then she has played in 31 international matches, including the 2004 Olympic contests. Heather played three seasons with the Philadelphia Charge in the WUSA before it folded. She is currently dating quarterback A.J. Feely.⁴¹

Heather Mitts was one of the few WUSA players to earn heteronormative sex icon status. It was no secret that the league needed such publicity, as reported by Sports Illustrated in 2002. That same year she earned the title of Sexiest Single from *Philadelphia Magazine*. That was just the beginning of

40 Beech, Mark "Star-Powered", *Sports Illustrated*, 6/20/2005.

41 Heather Mitts Online -Defender for the Philadelphia Charge. <http://www.heathermitts.com/bio.htm>. 12/05/05.

a long string of sex icon media prizes for Mitts. She was crowned sexiest WUSA player in the same year. She was altogether a bit dismayed by these nominations at first but believed the press was good for the WUSA.⁴² She followed that with magazine appearances in both Maxim and FHM before being named Hottest Female Athlete by *Page 2* in 2004.⁴³ In 2005 she added the slightly tamer *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit issue to her sex spot resume.

Mitts is the only post Mia Hamm soccer player to capture the mainstream media's attention. Despite the failure of the WUSA she successfully negotiated her Olympic success and sex appeal into a lucrative endorsement deal. She became the first female athlete to endorse Under Armour's women's line of performance apparel. The Under Armour contract is in addition to a previous endorsement deal with Fila. While no details were available regarding her earnings, it's safe to say that the deal easily put her ahead of Finch in terms of endorsement earning.

Heather's initial media exposure through the WUSA has been exponentially increased by the media's cultivation of her sexual appeal. In a league hungering for the limelight she was elevated, both athletic and sexy, a combination that the media loves. Despite the failure of the WUSA, her star has not fallen among advertisers, having used her sex icon status to land a major endorsement deal with Under Armour.

In 2005 our female athletes are now judged by the media the same way movie and music stars are, for their sex appeal. As the main value of heteronormative expectations in 2005, sexuality has been used to distinguish and enrich certain athletes. Anna Kournikova was loved by the media for her willingness to sell her sexuality to the public. The advertisers responded in kind, making up for Anna's poor tennis earnings with huge sums of money for advertising. Jennie Finch seemed like she would fill the void left by Kournikova, she was an impressive athlete and had the physical beauty required to be a sex icon. While she received extra media coverage, she was a reluctant siren. Endorsement deals have

42 O'Brien, Richard, "Sports Beat," *Sports Illustrated*, 7/15/2002.

43 "Couples Therapy," *Sports Illustrated*, 2/18/2005.

been in short supply for Finch, possibly because she did not accept the ultimate in heteronormative roles. Heather Mitts was thrust forward as the sexy image of the WUSA. The soccer star was reluctant to accept such a status, but believes it is good publicity for the sport. It has also been good for her bank account, as her sex icon status was no doubt a reason for her recent endorsement deals.

Conclusion

Traditionally we like to believe that the increase in rights for a given group, whether women, African-Americans, or gays, comes with it an end of social injustice as well. The traditional, historical narrative for women in sports follows this same path. People look to large increase in participation and opportunities for women to play sports as social progress. But this seems to be incorrect if media portrayal of women in sports is related to social views.

Clearly female athletes in the 50s and 2005 are both held to heteronormative standards by the media. Female athletes unwilling to conform to those standards are either attacked or ignored by the media. In 2005 this extends to the opportunity for endorsements. Yet people are easily confused, they see quantitative change in heteronormative standards as social progress. In essence female athletes are still restricted by society; but the nature of those restrictions has simply changed. You must be a woman in the heteronormative narrative before you can be an athlete.

True social change will only be realized when female athletes are allowed to be athletes who just happen to be women. This holds true in so many areas where we have made so called "progress," Sandra Day O'Connor was the first female Supreme Court Justice, hopefully the next women to serve will be known as a Supreme Court Justice that just happens to be a woman.

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