

Summitt

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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From across the nation, from the world of basketball and the world of sport, the reaction to Pat Summitt relinquishing her position as head basketball coach at the University of Tennessee has been overwhelming in praise, admiration, and volume. Those who played for Summitt talked of the tremendous impact that she had on their lives, praising her as a coach and human being, often referring to her as a mother-figure. Those who knew her in other capacities talked about her strength in the face of adversity. This quality distinguished Pat Summitt throughout her career and not just in the past year as Alzheimer's has increasingly impacted her life.

At the end of thirty-eight seasons at the University of Tennessee, Pat Summitt leaves behind record books written entirely in her name. Wins, conference championships, national championships, number of players coached, players who have gone on to coach others; the ripple affect of such a career is endless. She will be remembered not just in Tennessee, but wherever basketball is played, an irony of the cruelest sort.

It is true that women's intercollegiate basketball did not begin with Pat Summitt. There were many who had gone before her, fighting for recognition on campuses where men's sport totally overshadowed women's sport. There were many before her who had fought for practice space and time, for the use of facilities, for budgets, and for access to the massive support systems that are taken for granted in intercollegiate athletics. The fact that so much has changed in these areas is in no small part a result of how much Pat Summitt's success has helped transform the world of women's intercollegiate basketball.

The women's game now draws large crowds on many campuses. Television coverage has increased dramatically and the Women's Final Four has become a significant event on the sports calendar. These things happened for many reasons, one of which was the effort and impact of Pat Summitt. A few years ago she told ESPNW's Graham Hays that although she did not know how much credit she should be given, she did take pride in the recognition of and appreciation for women's sport, as well as its growth across the nation.

There were of course many reasons for these changes, some relating to sport and some relating to larger social changes in America. Whatever disconnects there may be between feminism and women's sport, the impact of the women's movement over the last half-century has played a significant role in changing the social atmosphere for the development of women's sport. Changing gender definitions is one such atmospheric change that has altered perceptions of what is "male" and "female."

Perhaps more than any other force for change in sport has been the impact of Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972. In the wonderful world of "unintended consequences" this small piece of stealth legislation has done much to transform the world of women's sport, not just at the intercollegiate level but all across the board. It was Pat Summitt's good fortune that her career trajectory coincided with the coming of Title IX, and she used that coincidence to her advantage and the advantage of her sport. As with most great leaders Summitt arrived at the crossroads of history with perfect timing, and then grasped the leadership role available to her to great effect.

For all that has happened of a positive nature in women's intercollegiate athletics and women's basketball, one development has been decidedly negative. The position of women's basketball coach that Pat Summitt helped to develop has become a source of employment for men rather than women.

The numbers are startling. When Title IX was passed in 1972 ninety per cent of coaching jobs in women's sport were held by women. By 1978 women held 58.2% of coaching positions in women's sports, and last year it was down to 42.9%. In basketball in 2008 the figure for women coaching women was 59.1% down from 79.4% in 1978. The trends are clear. Since 2000, NCAA programs have added 1,774 women's head coaching jobs and men have been hired in 1,220 of them. About three per cent of the men's coaching jobs are held by women, and that figure has remained steady since before Title IX.

So why has this happened? Clearly there is no shortage of potential female coaches. The numbers of women who have played the game has risen sharply and one assumes that has increased the potential coaching pool.

There seem to be at least two reasons that men have become coaches in women's basketball programs. First, the money has changed. Coaching women's basketball is now a well-compensated job. In the 1970s few men were willing to work for the low salaries that coaches like Pat Summitt were being paid. As that changed men were attracted to the higher paying positions. The increase in women's athletic budgets also played a role in this change.

Second, it would seem that those who hire coaches, more often than not male athletic directors, prefer male coaches, although women athletic directors and women coaches feel pressure to add men to their programs. This pressure is not felt in the other direction.

So despite the changes produced over the last several decades in women's intercollegiate athletics by Pat Summitt and those of her generation of coaches, the area in which she made her mark has seen a marked decline in the percentage of women holding jobs.

For those who have offered their tributes to Pat Summitt, especially those in a position to reverse these trends in women's intercollegiate athletics, no tribute could be more appropriate than to do all that is possible to reverse the current trends.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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