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The Week in Woman's Sport

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - THE WEEK IN WOMAN'S SPORT
April 6, 2017

While much of the country was caught up in the final weekend of March Madness in Phoenix, the biggest stories were taking place in Women's sport, both on and off the field of play.

The big story from the hard-court was the upset of the University of Connecticut basketball team by Mississippi State. The one-hundred-and-eleven game winning streak by the Lady Huskies came to an end in overtime in the national semi-final game in Houston. With seconds remaining Morgan William, the smallest player on the floor at five-foot, five-inches, hit a pull up jump shot as the clock ran out.

William played with intensity and high energy throughout the game and from the start it looked like it just might be the night that ended the streak. In the first half Mississippi State built a sixteen point lead, but slowly, and one sensed surely, UConn chipped away at the lead, tying the game in the fourth quarter. From there the lead went back and forth as Mississippi State refused to go away.

It appeared that the Lady Bulldogs might win the game in regulation but a last second shot by William was blocked. In overtime both teams were tight as only ten points combined were scored, with Mississippi State getting six of the ten. Throughout the game the Huskies seemed unsettled by the tenacious defense and the rebounding of Mississippi State, only occasionally showing the smooth offensive flow that marked their game throughout the season.

When regulation time ended at 60-60 those interested in numbers noted that in the previous meeting between these two teams, a year earlier, UConn had won by sixty points. If Mississippi State looked to this game for redemption from that humiliation,

they had already achieved it. The process was completed with the jump shot by William at the end of overtime.

As with all streaks this one had to end. It did so in dramatic fashion. The question now is whether or not UConn will built another streak to rival this one, or if this victory by Mississippi State will be the end of the mystique forged over the previous decade.

Two other developments in women's sport were of considerable significance. Last week the deadlock between USA Hockey and the women's national team over their contract came to a head. The women had to threaten to boycott the World Championships in order to get USA Hockey to negotiate with them. The players put their careers on the line and ultimately it payed off this week with a new working agreement guaranteeing equity with the men's team on a number of fronts, including monthly training stipends, travel and insurance.

The men who control the administrative side of women's sport are slowly and reluctantly coming to the realization that the landscape in sport has changed. The new realities generated by Title IX must be acknowledged. National teams must be treated equally regardless of gender, even if the governing bodies are dominated by men who have a pre-Title IX view of Sportsworld.

It was heartening to see that the men across a wide spectrum supported the women on this issue. Players and player unions from the NHL, the NBA, the NFL, and MLB all expressed support for their fellow athletes. The US Women's Soccer team, the WNBA, and the National Women's Hockey League gave its support to the boycott, and twenty U.S. Senators wrote a letter of support to USA Hockey.

Less than a week later the U.S. Women's Soccer players concluded a new five year collective bargaining agreement with US Soccer.

This will result in substantial pay increases with bonus opportunities. Travel, accommodations and working conditions were agreed upon, and the union gained control of some licensing and marketing rights. Equal pay with the men was not achieved but it was felt by some that major advances had been made in this area setting the stage for the next round of negotiation. The five year agreement runs through the 2019 World Cup and the 2020 Olympics.

US Soccer's positions on the women's team were among the most archaic of any governing body in the United States considering the tremendous success of the team in world competition and its popularity in the United States. The women had outperformed the men's team over the last twenty years and this generated more resentment, from those who governed US Soccer, than rewards. All that can be said about this new agreement is "It's about time."

Finally, in case you may have missed it, last weekend the World Figure Skating Championships were held in Helsinki. If you want to check the results and watch some of the video it is available at the NBC Sports website. There were any number of excellent performances in the short and long programs, and U.S. skaters represented themselves very well.

The big news, although not surprising news, came in Women's Figure Skating as another major Russian superstar defended her World title with a record setting performance. Evgenia Medvedeva set records in the free skate and in total score with a free skate performance that was one of beauty, grace, and high level skating skill. To watch the performance from Russian television follow this

link: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2017/mar/31/medvedeva-repeats-skating-world-champion-karen-chen>

This seventeen year-old is the first to defend a women's title since Michelle Kwan did it in 2011, and Medvedeva is now poised to win a gold medal in the 2018 Winter Olympic Games.

Only two obstacles will stand in Evgenia Medvedeva's way. First she must win the Russian title in 2018 from a wave of young Russian women who may surpass her by next year. Second, it is possible that the current ban on Russian Olympic competition could keep her out of the 2018 games.

Politics often trumps talent.

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.