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Keith Hernandez on women in the dugout

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Keith Hernandez on women in the dugout
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Each time I hear the name Keith Hernandez I am taken back to March of 1989 when, at the New York Mets' spring training facility, Darryl Strawberry threw a punch at the first-baseman. It was one of those forgettable moments except for the line that someone got off about the incident: "It was the first time that Strawberry ever hit the cut-off man."

On Saturday night someone in the Mets' radio booth in San Diego needed to hit the cut-off button, as Hernandez proceeded to land a hay-maker with his foot squarely to his mouth. It was in the second inning of the Padres-Mets game that Hernandez made a discovery that offended his male sensibilities and rendered him senseless. Hernandez saw a woman in the Padres dugout and is reported to have said: "Who is the girl in the dugout, with the long hair? What's going on here? You have got to be kidding me. Only player personnel in the dugout." He went on, "I won't say that women belong in the kitchen, but they don't belong in the dugout."

The woman in the dugout turned out to Kelly Calabrese, a full-time massage therapist for the San Diego Padres. She has been working for the team for four years on a part-time basis and this is her first year full-time. She is the only female holding a training staff position with a major league baseball team. There are, in fact, very few female athletic trainers at the professional sports level, while at the college level it is quite common. According to the National Athletic Trainers' Association, nearly half of its membership is female.

Reacting to the comments, San Diego Manager Bruce Bochy said: "I didn't think gender was even an issue anymore." Well, apparently it is, and no doubt will continue to be for some time to come.

The old stereotypes and old habits die hard. Since the emergence of sport in America as a significant institution, it has been constructed by males as a "masculine" activity, even though women participated from the earliest days of collegiate and professional sport. As the cultural norms developed, sport was increasingly defined as "masculine" by those males who dominated sports organizations and sports writing. In the late 19th century, the male dominated medical community lent its voice to the notion that women and sport could not mix.

The first half of the 20th century produced a struggle by women to maintain women's competitive sport, but by mid-decade those men and women who found competitive sport unladylike had come to dominate popular thought, and even dominated the women's physical education community.

Sport as a "masculine" activity also led to the disparaging of those women who participated in sport. Terms such as "tomboys" ultimately gave way to "lesbians" and "dykes" and became part of the vocabulary of men seeking to hold the sporting fields for themselves. This was compounded by a growing use of terminology designed to denigrate poor performance by male athletes. These terms ran the gamut of taste from "you throw like a girl" to "you pussy," the latter still being in widespread use on the playing fields and in the sports bars of America.

Clearly much of the society continues to see sport as an essentially masculine activity. The remarks of Keith Hernandez are but one more reminder of this reality. Decades after Title IX and decades after the struggles over girls playing Little League baseball, the dugout is still seen by some as a male province, sacred male ground signifying the masculine character of sport. What this demonstrates is a fundamental need to remove gender from any definition of sport, a task that is formidable but not impossible.

For a look at this issue from another angle, HBO is now broadcasting a documentary on the life of Billie Jean King. The great tennis star of the sixties and seventies brought women's tennis to a new level of popularity and insisted that men's and women's tennis should be treated equally. She was instrumental in creating the Virginia Slims Tour and the Women's Tennis Association, and her 1973 Astrodome match with Bobby Riggs has become the stuff of legend.

King's life was complicated by the interaction between gender definitions and her sexuality that were played out against one another in the public spotlight. No matter your views on these issues, King's life demonstrates just how important the issue of "gender" is in sport, and how it still complicates any discussion of sport.

And as if to underline the entire business, the Neanderthals at the All England Lawn Tennis Club announced today they will remain the last holdout on equal prize money for men and women. The Australian and U.S. Open tournaments have given equal prize

money for years, and the French Open will do so for the first time this year.

However the "toffs" at Wimbledon will not. It is clearly not a matter of available money. Indeed when you look at the meager differences in prize money, some four percent, it is clear that the old boys at the All England Club have gone out of their way to insult women. The remarkable thing is that for several decades now it has been clear that, from the standpoint of spectator appeal, the women's game has surpassed that of the men.

Perhaps Keith Hernandez should apply for membership at All England Lawn Tennis Club where it seems he would find a number of kindred spirits.

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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