

All Mary Ellen Wants Is to Play Basketball

By CHARLES RANDISI

Mary Ellen Hart had no ideological desire to break any barriers against women's participation with men in athletics. She carried no banners proclaiming her rights. The 13-year-old Mother of Sorrows student just wanted to play basketball.

There was no team for girls at her parish, however, so she tried out for the boys' team, in the CYO's elementary northwest division.

"I didn't see how I could not let her play," said coach Donald Lenzo. "She's as good as many of

the boys on the team, and better than those who tried out and didn't make it."

Lenzo's 5-5 guard "suited up" for all the games, went to all the practices, but only got the chance to play in one league game, before the CYO advisory board ruled her ineligible.

At the beginning of the season, Jack Quiggle, CYO program director, received from Lenzo a team roster which included the name "Mary Ellen Hart."

"I checked it out," said Quiggle, "and sent a notice to Albany, requesting a copy of the rules. The state education

department does not allow mixed competition in contact sports."

The advisory board met, and a majority vote ruled that Mary Ellen could no longer play. Quiggle mentioned two prime reasons for the board's decision: New York State rules and concern for Mary Ellen's safety. The State has no official jurisdiction in this matter, Quiggle stated, but the board felt the state had issued "sound guidelines."

"After the ruling," Quiggle said, "her father notified me. He said he felt he was not represented at the board meeting. We held another meeting with them (Mr. and Mrs. James Hart), and the advisory board explained its reasons to them. He said he understood, but still felt that his daughter could compete. . . . He accepted our decision."

Quiggle pointed out that his meetings with the Harts were all "on a friendly basis. There have been no hard feelings at all because of this case."

Some changes are in the works. The CYO is expanding its program for girls, offering basketball, cheerleading, and possibly co-ed tennis and sailing.

For next year's basketball season, said Quiggle, the CYO will write into its rules a clause prohibiting mixed competition in basketball.

James Hart is busy trying to organize a girl's team at Mother of Sorrows for the 1974-75 season, but not for his daughter.

By that time, Mary Ellen will be attending Cardinal Mooney High School as a freshman, and will be eligible for the girls' team there.

For now, the Harts have accepted the decision of the CYO, but remain in disagreement with it. In a Feb. 22 letter to Bishop Joseph L. Hogan, Mr. and Mrs. Hart clarified their position.



Mary Ellen Hart drives for a layup.

(Copies of the letter were issued to Quiggle, Lenzo, Father Joseph D'Aurizio, director of Catholic Charities, and the Courier-Journal.)

the other 'Mary Ellens' in the future."

Mary Ellen herself said she should have been permitted to play because "I don't think basketball is a 'contact' sport."

"We still believe that the sex of the child has nothing to do with a possible injury in a game," the letter states, "however, even though the size of a child may contribute to an injury, small boys are allowed to play, but taller, stronger, better coordinated girls are not."

Her mother said that although Mary Ellen would have liked to play this year, she agreed to sit on the bench, "because she didn't want to jeopardize her team's chances for winning." The Mother of Sorrows team finished in second place in its division.

The Harts in their letter also stated that "we didn't think that anything could be done for Mary Ellen this season but we were pursuing the matter, because of

Mrs. Hart is "not totally disappointed . . . and we are grateful that the CYO was willing to hear our side of it."



Welcome

Sister Mary Lynch, SSJ, new religious education coordinator for Corning's St. Patrick's religious education program, welcomes the children at Saturday morning classes. The Corning program is rapidly expanding to include adult education and teacher training.



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