

Girls on Boys' Teams . . .

Boost or Boomerang?

By KATHLEEN POWERS
Capitol Correspondent

Twenty-one per cent of New York State's public high schools had at least one girl on a boys' tennis team this past school year. Eighteen per cent had a girl or girls on the boys' track team. Thirteen per cent had girls

competing with boys for cross country. Ten per cent had girls on the boys' golf or swimming teams.

In the state's Catholic high schools also, tennis has been drawing many girls to boys' teams. So has track and swimming.

Girls competing on boys' interscholastic teams are no longer hypothetical: they are for real not only in New York but in Michigan, New Mexico, Connecticut, New Jersey, Indiana, Minnesota and Nebraska. And before long every state may be required to open boys — only noncontact teams to girls or face sex discrimination charges. (The U.S. Office of Civil Rights of HEW is completing guidelines this month that will explain what equal athletic opportunities schools must provide if the schools want to receive federal aid.)



longer have the same heights, weights or strengths. The average girl can easily beat the average boy in most school sports, edging all but exceptional girl athletes from places on boys' teams. If there is no girls' team, that means girls don't play; if there is a girls' team, it may have second-best status.

"Everything is pointing in the direction of girls competition being acceptable," said Dr. George Grover, director of Health, Physical Education and Recreation for the State Education Department in Albany. "But we can't do it overnight. We don't have the coaches, the facilities or the money." He said the demand for girls competition has to develop from physical education classes, and that the demand is not yet present in all schools.

What is needed in New York, according to teachers, coaches, students and parents surveyed by the State Education Department in 1970, are more opportunities for girls to play on interscholastic teams, especially on all-girl teams. Schools are responding to girls' needs by forming more girls' teams. The New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSAA) shows that for the past school year the number of schools reporting girls' basketball, cross country, gymnastics, soccer, softball, swimming, tennis, track and volleyball is up compared to the 1972-73 year. Association statistics also show that whereas in 1948-49 only 28.4 percent of New York's high schools offered eight or more sports for girls, last year 81.8 per cent did. And nearly every school offers at least three sports for girls today.

The executive secretary of the State Catholic High School Athletic Association, J. Alan Davitt of Albany, said that many professional women from the physical education departments of Catholic high schools have complained that allowing girls to play on boys' teams takes away their best girl athletes and downgrades girls' sports.

However he sees the Education Department regulation allowing girls on boys' teams to be a positive step. "It tells our schools that they should provide opportunities for girls in sports," he said. And, he added, schools are getting the message.

The Alternatives

Three alternatives for women's sports have been under study by the Office of Civil Rights of HEW during the past year. One or more of them will soon receive President Ford's approval as being nondiscriminatory to women athletes.

The first would require all sports programs to be open to anyone, regardless of sex, on a tryout basis. Girls would compete with boys for places on football, gymnastics and all other teams, with the most qualified athlete making the team on his or her merits as a player.

The second would require separate but equal sports programs for boys and girls. Equal budgets, coaching staffs, facilities, etc. would be mandatory.

The third would require schools to guarantee equal opportunities in sports to boys and girls, an extension of school athletics as it now exists in most schools in New York State.

Girls' sports in rural Iowa has been studied by federal officials as an example of what girls' sports can become all over the country. There almost 500 high schools compete with girls' teams for 17 championships in 13 different sports (basketball — the most popular by far — and also track, softball, golf, tennis, distance running, mixed golf, volleyball, gymnastics, swimming, mixed tennis, synchronized swimming and field hockey).

Most interscholastic games in rural Iowa are played as doubleheaders, with the girls playing first one night and the boys playing first the next. In some places girls and boys scores added together determine which school is the champion. Girls are coached, equipped, rewarded, etc. the same as boys. Sports writers focus on the girls' game and devote as much space to girls' sports as to boys'. Girl athletes enjoy high status within their communities.

Iowa's program may become the model for the country.

Mixed sports teams have been legal in New York since 1971 when the Regents approved mixed competition in archery, badminton, bowling, cross country, fencing, golf, gymnastics, riflery, rowing, shuffleboard, skiing, swimming and diving, table tennis, tennis and track and field. For a girl to compete either her school must not offer a girls' team in the sport or she must get the consent of her principal to play on the boys' team.

For talented girl athletes, the opportunity to play on a boys' team has meant either better competition than they could have received against other girls, or the chance to play in a sport unorganized for girls in their schools. Girls surveyed soon after the regulation was changed in New York said that they would prefer to be on a boys' team by a margin of two to one. They said there was greater challenge, a higher level of skill and more opportunity for competition playing with boys. Seventy per cent said no other girls in their schools could challenge them in athletic ability, and even more said they believed other schools lacked sufficient competition.

But for girls of average athletic skills, the change may not have been a blessing. Girls can compete fairly against boys before puberty, but by junior high school age girls and boys no

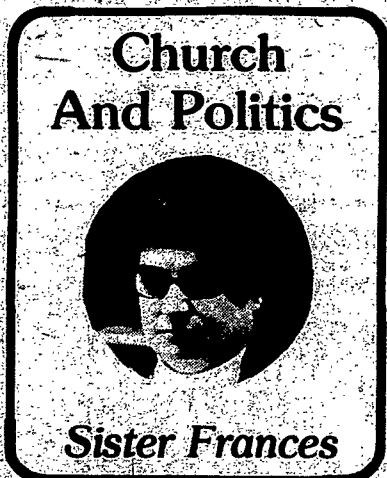
kind of conscience to the political process, asking it to be more just, more truthful, more human. Examples of this abound everywhere. Pope Paul, in his letter, "A Call to Action" declares that "it is necessary to have the courage to undertake a revision of the relationship between nations . . . the control of profits, the monetary system," etc. (Paragraph 43). Here he tells the political community that the common good might demand governmental interference in the economic system. This is the Church, as institution, speaking to the political powers.

In this same letter, Pope Paul states that "laymen should take up as their own proper task, the renewal of the temporal order." (Paragraph 48). Thus, the Christian, as a member of civic society, can participate in a number of ways in this renewal of the world. His membership in the Christian community does not exclude him from participation in the civic community but gives inspiration and direction to that involvement. One of the ways a Christian can be involved is as a member of a political party — bringing to that party the values learned from his faith. As a Christian, he should constantly evaluate his political action in the light of his commitment to the gospel of Jesus, always remaining sensitive to the opinions of others and working with them toward a more human world.

The Church, then, can and should be involved in politics although the way in which it is involved must always be re-examined. The individual Christian, as member of civic society, must likewise constantly re-evaluate his participation in light of the gospel demands.

DRIVERS NEEDED

Volunteer drivers are needed to deliver more than 2,000 Christmas baskets and special gifts to the elderly and infirm on Thursday, Dec. 19 between 9 a.m. and noon. The project is sponsored by the Christmas Bureau of Rochester. Volunteers may call 271-0868.



The role and competence of the Church being what it is, she must, in no way, be confused with the political community, nor bound to any political system. — Documents of Vatican II

On the surface, this statement by the Bishops at Vatican II seems to prohibit the Church from political involvement. What it really does, however, is help to define the limits of church involvement and the way this involvement is carried out. It is a complex question and the answers are not simple.

A good place to start, it seems, is by examining what we mean by "church." By "church" do we mean the bishop, the diocesan office, the parish council and other institutional expressions, or do we mean each individual Christian? Well, it seems that both are part of the definition yet they are not the entire definition. The Church is a community of unique individuals who live out their witness to Christ in the different ways that the Spirit works within them. Because it involves believers who are concerned about their religious traditions (the past), their day-to-day living witness (the present) and their life to come (the future), it is of necessity, an institution. As an institution, the Church cannot be involved in the political process as a party but must be a critical voice, constantly challenging and prodding the political community to be better than it is. The Church is a



Midtown Plaza is now open Monday thru Saturday 10 to 9

CHRISTMAS DOWNTOWN AND ALL THE THINGS IT MEANS ARE AVAILABLE AT MIDTOWN PLAZA