

How has Title IX Changed My World

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I was a junior year in college in 1979 when I was invited to come play volleyball one night by a friend and his older sister, who played on the University of Wyoming volleyball team. Being young and stupid, I jumped at the chance to go play a sport I knew nothing about with an attractive older woman. Turns out, she just wanted hitting targets that would try to block and were a little more aggressive than the other kids she played with on Sundays. But that didn't matter - I got hooked - on the game, not the girl. Well, OK, maybe a little on the girl - we became friends, and still are today.

Three years later I was playing on a mixed recreation league in Amarillo, TX with a couple other girls who also played in college. They weren't our captains, but they bossed us guys around like they were. I was stronger and faster than these girls were, I could out hit, out jump and out hustle them, but they could make me look like a complete fool on the court, any time they wanted to. I was just starting to outgrow being young and stupid, so when I realized how much more they knew about volleyball than I did, I actually tried to absorb some of what they tried to teach me. The main thing I learned from them was to love playing volleyball.

From my introduction to volleyball in 1979, over the next 18 years I played every chance I got - men's leagues, mixed leagues and pick-up games in the park. (Have you ever played a game of side-out volleyball to 100? Twelve guys, no subs. We started at noon and finished at 11PM, my team lost 93-100). As the years went by I discovered that I always seemed to have more fun - playing with the girls than the boys. I like watching girls play better than the boys. I prefer the pace and style of the play of the women's game. I have always assumed this was because I was introduced to the game by girls. I had learned to play the game from girls. I had learned to love the game - from girls.

When first introduced to volleyball I was trying to turn myself into a soccer player. Eventually I needed surgery to repair multiple torn ligaments in my left knee. When the ligaments didn't heal well, and I wasn't able to return to soccer, I threw everything I had into trying to be a volleyball player for the next 15 years.

In 1997, 18 years after I first walked onto a volleyball court at the Baptist Church in Cheyenne WY, the jumping, twisting and pounding had taken its toll on my knees and ankles. I found myself on the stairs into the gym at our local Community College massaging my knees because they still hurting from playing the week before. Suddenly I realized that this would be my last night ever as a volleyball player. I didn't say anything to my friends about my decision that night. But three hours later, I limped out of the gym and completely away from volleyball for almost six years.

During those 6 years the game changed - a lot! Rally scoring, liberos, let serves, and Europe decided they were too uppity to play a game, and started playing sets instead.

Then one day in 2003 I came home from work, settled into my chair, grabbed the paper, and was ambushed by the following conversation with my oldest daughter, who had just finished her first day of middle school at the small parochial school she attended.

Mandy: "I want to join the volleyball team at school."

Me: "OK. What do I have to sign?"

Mandy: "Mommy already signed it."

Me: "Good."

Mandy: "Ummmmmm" (while pulling on the paper), "They need a coach, will you do it?"

Me: "No."

Mandy: (pulling harder on the paper) "Why Not?"

Me: (putting down the paper) "I don't know how to coach."

Mandy: "Uncle Dave says you used to be a good player, so you could coach."

Me: "Knowing how to play doesn't mean that you can, or should, coach. Besides, haven't you learned yet not to believe everything your Uncle Dave tells you?"

Mandy: (giggling) "That's funny, cause he says the same thing about you."

Me: "Well, maybe he's right, about listening to me. But not about me coaching."

Mandy: "PPPPllllleeeeeeeaaaaaasssssseeeee?????"

Me: (reaching again for the paper) "No."

Mandy: "Why not?"

Me: "My bad knees forced me to give up playing when you were four. I haven't seen or touched a volleyball since then. I'm certainly not going to start standing around now and watching a bunch of little girls try to play."

Mandy: "PPPPllllleeeeeeeaaaaaasssssseeeee?????"

Me: "NO! I - Do - Not - Know - How - To - Be - A - Coach!"

This conversation was followed by several hours of begging, pleading, cajoling, hugging, batting eyelashes, kissing, pouting, crying and all the other tricks little girls use to get their daddies to do things they don't want to do. Eventually I did what most daddies do when faced with this childish assault by their daughters - I caved.

I spent the next two years proving to my daughter and her teammates that - Indeed, I did not know how to coach. Then the other coach at the middle school left and I inherited the entire program. Since I didn't have the other coach around to blame anymore I threw myself into learning how to be the best coach I could for the next two years.

Then I discovered club volleyball. A club started up in our little town and I talked them into letting my barely 14 year old high school freshman daughter play on to their one u16s team. I followed her around, just being a volleyball Dad. She had a lot of fun, learned a lot, made some good friends and improved enough to make the high school varsity team her sophomore year. But I was hooked. Club volleyball was the most incredible thing I had ever been a part of. (a year later a parent of a very young 6th grade player was staring at the sea of EZ-ups outside the American Sports Center and the young volleyball players swarming around them and he asked me - "What kind of weird sub-culture have you dragged us into?") Well, I was in love with that "weird sub-culture".

I went back to my middle school team that next fall, and every anecdote I related throughout the season was about the teams and players I had met during that first club season. By the time the middle school season ended I had 6 or 7 girls absolutely convinced that, even though they had never even seen a club volleyball team or tournament that they needed to be club volleyball players. The local club had expanded out to two teams (one u16s and one u18). They didn't want me as a coach and they didn't have roster space for, nor want a bunch of young twelve to fourteen year old players. When it became clear that these girls were not going to get to play, one of their mothers looked at me and asked "You sold them on this idea, now what are you going to do about it?" A week later I started the Ridgecrest Starlings Volleyball Club.

We had one u14s team - eight girls ranging from 11 to 13, and two 10 year olds that practiced but did not travel with us, all being run by a first time club coach/director whose daughter was playing on the other club's 18s team. It was a toss-up who had the most fun that season, the players or me. We finished ranked 180/280 in the SCVA u14 division. And we managed to tie for 5th in the U14s division at Starlings Nationals.

Now four years later, the other club has been gone for 3 years, and our club is 38 girls, four teams, and we have achieved a 2nd at Nationals, a U14s Championship at Nationals. We have placed teams in the top 50% of the age groups in the SCVA region. We have girls coming from up to 50 miles away to play for us. We have girls from even smaller towns that are 70 and 140 miles away showing up for tryouts to see if they can endure the travel needed to play here because we are the closest club to where they live. Last fall every girl on the local high school varsity team started out as, or currently were, Ridgecrest Starlings. Overall, 28 out of 37 girls in the high school program played for our volleyball club.

So what does all this have to do with Title IX? I'm a guy, title IX had nothing to do with me. Title IX is all about girl's sports. Except...

I was introduced to volleyball by a University of Wyoming college player in 1979. Prior to 1972 (and title IX) UW did not have a women's volleyball program.

From 1982-1985 I learned how to play, and to love volleyball, from two other girls who also attended schools that prior to 1972 did not have volleyball programs for girls.

Title IX resulted in the wide spread popularity of high school and college women's volleyball programs. Those programs led to middle schools having volleyball teams instead of just volleyball lessons during PE classes. Without those junior high school programs my daughter never would have browbeaten me into becoming a coach.

Before USAV hosted their first junior's championship in 1980, junior's club volleyball was almost unknown. Without the enormously popular club volleyball system we have now, I certainly would never have been pressured into starting a volleyball club here in our small remote desert community. And I would never have gotten to hear the two most common statements I hear from mothers watching their daughter's practice and play:

“Why doesn't my daughter get more play time?”

- and -

“I wish I would have had the chance to do something like this when I was her age.”

I ignore the first question. I love hearing the second statement. And I hope that their daughters never have to say the same thing to someone else when they are older.

How has title IX changed my world? There is a very simple 238 word answer to that question. The answer is simple, but it is also very complex, beautiful, often confusing, powerful, frustrating, sometimes awe-inspiring, happy, occasionally heart-breaking, and always a wonderfully life-affirming answer.

Title IX changed my world by allowing me to share some small part of it with: Mandy, Lexy, Ashley, Lauren, Katie, Phoebe, Stephanie, Kristin, Kelly, Jenny, Grace, Sammi, Gloria, Amanda, Laura, Maggie, Britney, Ashley, Nicole, Amanda, Alexis, Becca, Kat, Kate, Bridget, Brooke, Jazmine, Karinna, Leah, Michaela, Sarah, Athena, Sorena, Allie, Alexis, Samantha, Alyssa, Rebecca, Grace, Stevian, Michelle, Shyanne, Monica, Sarah, Joanna, Candace, Savannah, Allie, Emma, Lindsey, Haley, Colleen, Alex, Hanna, Madelyn, Morgan, Lisa, Caitlin, Chrystle, Maddie, Terah, Kendal, Jamauri, Michelle, Tiffany, Roselyn, Jordyn, Cielo, Victoria, Adison, Katie, Aryn, Susana, Marisela, Jasmine, Marisa, Amanda, Nicole, Lexi, Ashley, Victoria, Jasmine, Becca, Markelle, Naomi, Kaitlin, Lindsey, Jessica, Kristiana, Metzli, Bailey, Brianna, Megan, Macey, Lauren, Zoe', Cora, Nivia, Kristel, Emma, Micah, Lillie, Annie, Madelyn, Vanessa, Cassandra, Katherine, Brooke, Beka, Giselle, Katie, Elizabeth, Hannah, Mariah, Rebecca, Abbie, Brittany, Brittney, Leanna, Briannah, Rachel, Laurie, Marjorie, Elise, Evelynne, Ma'aka, Ellyse, Brooke, Brianna, Kiara, Maria, Callie, Katie, Naya, Samantha, Jamie, Staci, Edith, Audry, Gabrielle, Kassidie, Sydney, Molly, Haley, Rebeka, Romina, Ashley, Sara, Paige, Delaney, Evelyn, Erica, Victoria, Julie, Mariella, Lizzie, Emily, Amelie, Sherlyn, Melissa, Jamie, Michaele, Lexi, Caroline, Isabelle, Melissa, Renee, Bry, Madison, Lilliana, Katelynn, Gillian, Summer, Abbey, Joelle, Justine, Simrin, Abby, Ellie, Natalia, Lauren, Joemy, Aubri, Brooklyn, Gillian, Hannah, Olivia, Regina, Kassy, Alyssa, Olivia, Lacey, Madison, Ariel, Naomi, Megan, Casey, Skyelar, Katherine, Susanna, Taylor, Cayden, Sasha, Marthina, Brooke, Sophia, Roxy, Kayla, Charlene, Isabella, Miranda, Sara, Logan, Kayley, Lola, Allison, Emily, Lilianna, Jayda, Maria, Samantha, Alexa, Camila, Ashlyn, Patrick, Lexi, Avery, Amelia, Chloe, Xochitl, Isabel, Haley, Brenda, Miriam, Danika, Valentina, Genevieve, Adria.