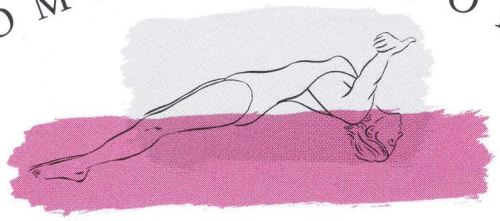
WOMEN IN SPORTS



DEBUNKING THE JOCKETTE MYTH

BY MARY ELLEN MENGUCCI

Kathleen Slattery could climb a fence and play schoolyard basketball as well as any of the boys in her sixth grade class. She knew what a first down meant in football, and not just because she watched the sport on television with her father. She played football with the neighborhood boys.

While the majority of the girls her age asked for Barbie dolls for their birthdays, Kathy wanted a baseball glove. Most people considered her an oddity in 1964.

Over 20 short years, we have witnessed a revolution in our acceptance of the female athlete. Nowhere is this more evident than on a college campus.

Virtually everyone called her a tomboy.

Twenty years ago, that stigma stuck to any young girl who expressed an interest in athletics. And for those who continued playing sports after grammar school, the labels generally became less endearing. At the high school and collegiate level, *jockette* became one of the more popular (and more polite) terms used to describe women athletes. It represented a slew of labels designed to challenge the femininity of female athletes.

Although inexcusable, it's easy to see how such misconceptions were perpetuated. For centuries, society perceived women as fragile creatures, incapable of vigorous competition. Whenever a woman dared to assert her athletic abilities, her family and peers discour-

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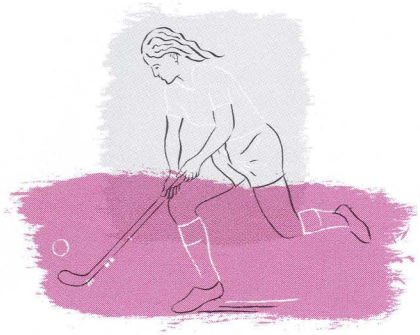
aged her from pursuing them. It was simply easier for people to assign labels to women athletes than to try to understand their desire to compete in sports.

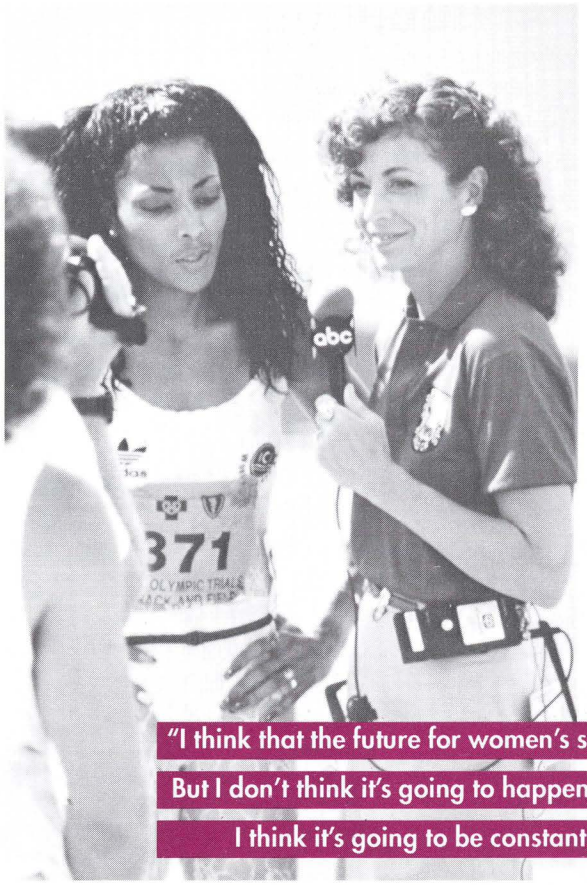
It would be naive to say that negative images of female athletes no longer exist, or that everything is perfect in the world of women's sports. But since the women's and civil rights movements, and Title IX legislation in particular, women have made great strides towards debunking the jockette myth. Much of that progress is evidenced by the growing popularity of the female athletes themselves, and by the increasing amount of funding and support of athletics available to women of all ages.



The social activism of the late sixties and early seventies brought with it some radical changes in the way society perceives a variety of populations in this country, female athletes among them. A few pioneering women took advantage of this change of climate, and began pursuing athletics with fervor. Kathy Switzer '68 was one of them.

Unwilling to wait, Switzer set out to shatter some stereotypes in 1967. After training with the men's cross country team at SU (no formal intercollegiate sports existed at that time for women at Syracuse), and proving to her coach that she could handle the distance, she officially entered the Boston Marathon, then a male-only event. She signed her entrance form K.V. Switzer.

The morning of the race was damp and cold, so Switzer bundled up in heavy clothing. Not until she was partly through race—when she began to remove some of the extra clothes—did anyone see she was a woman. An official who made the discovery ran onto the course, attempting to tear off her registration number and pull her out of the race. But her running mate shoved the official aside, and Switzer completed the race, making history and international headlines.



"I think that the future for women's sports is extremely bright. But I don't think it's going to happen with a magic explosion. I think it's going to be constant, almost plodding."

Kathy Switzer Now

Switzer, considered one of the leading advocates for women athletes, is best known as a commentator for ABC Sports. She also serves as an advisor to the Women's Sports Foundation and is writing a book on women and sports. In addition, she and her husband, world-class runner Roger Robinson, recently launched a national speaking tour about sports-related topics. Switzer still runs at least 45 minutes a day.

Kathy Switzer Then

As a journalism student at SU, Switzer began running with the men's cross-country team in 1966. After proving herself capable of running long distances, she entered the Boston Marathon along with some of her teammates in 1967, becoming the first woman to officially complete the marathon. Switzer graduated from SU in 1968 and earned her master's in 1972. Two years later, she won the women's division of the New York City Marathon. She spent nine years working for Avon as director of media affairs and sports programs. In 1981, she played an instrumental role in convincing the International Olympic Committee to include the women's marathon in the 1984 games.

Switzer shocked the country by running the marathon—not only because she proved herself capable of completing 26 miles, but also because she failed to conform to society's idea of a female athlete. Attractive and slender, Switzer looked more like a homecoming queen than a jock.

"When I ran the marathon," says Switzer, "the universal view was that to be in a sport was to be masculine. Girls avoided sports so as not to become masculine. They were afraid that somehow you caught it. And mothers wouldn't encourage their daughters because they were afraid they might catch it—you know, get big legs, grow mustaches, and turn into lesbians. I couldn't understand that, because I certainly was very feminine and very attractive to men and I liked men, too. But I liked to work hard and I liked movement. And I wanted to compete."

As a result of that historic race and similar events like it, and an array of social activism

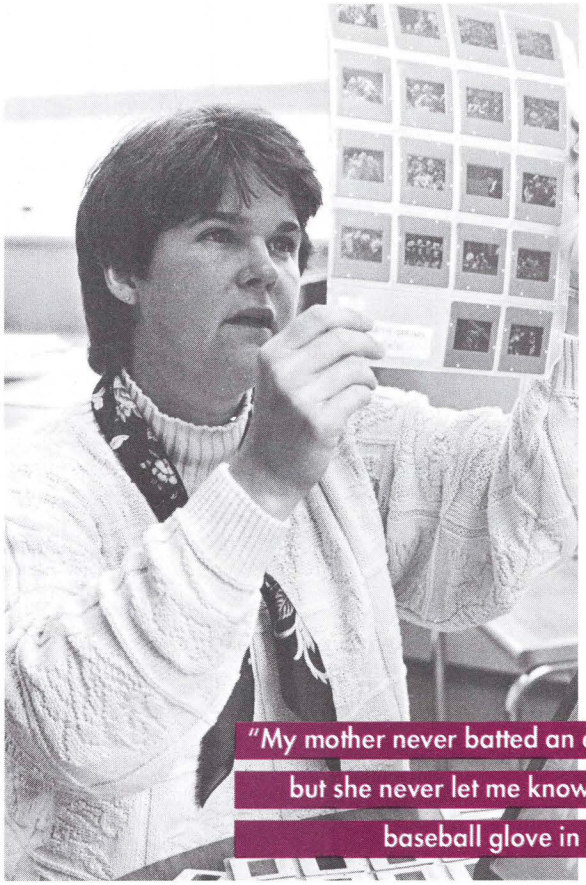
and pressure, society has virtually reversed its attitudes about women athletes. Rather than being ostracized for participating in sports, women today are often heralded for their athletic achievements. Distinguished athletes such as Chris Evert, Nancy Lopez, Debbi Thomas, Jackie Joyner-Kersee, and Steffi Graf represent but a few of the women whom society not only now accepts, but admires.

The popularity and acceptance of woman athletes has manifested itself in a variety of ways during the 1980s. The sheer number of women participating in sports has skyrocketed. In the New York Marathon in 1988, for instance, almost 4,000 women completed the race, compared to two in 1972. Today there are more than 35,000 women's softball teams, twice as many as in 1978. Women tennis players total eight million more today than 10 years ago.

What's more, female athletes continue to appear in places once reserved for men. After her stunning Olympic performances, gymnast Mary Lou Retton became the first woman to grace the cover of a Wheaties box. And in 1984, *Sports Illustrated* named Retton Sportswoman of the Year. Lynette Woodward made history in 1985 when she became the first female member of the Harlem Globetrotters. And the endorsement offers continue to roll in for 1988 Olympic gold medalist Florence Griffith Joyner. A toy company, impressed with her appeal, plans to release a Flo-Jo doll this summer.

Now imagine that 20 years ago.

Women athletes have come so far, so fast, that today it is hard to believe they were considered incapable of running a mile, much less a marathon, in 1967.



"My mother never batted an eyelash—maybe she did, but she never let me know it—when I wanted a baseball glove in sixth grade."

Kathleen Slattery Now

Slattery works as director of sports information at Dartmouth College, writing news releases, producing brochures, and traveling regularly with various Dartmouth teams. In 1988, she won the New Hampshire state golf championship, women's division.

Kathleen Slattery Then

Slattery, a journalism and anthropology major who graduated from Syracuse in 1974, was a member of the SU swim team, which received varsity status during her sophomore year. She also served as swim team coach for the Syracuse Chargers, a group of junior and senior high students who competed in a variety of sports at the University.

Some of the greatest progress in women's athletics, particularly in recent years, has occurred on college campuses. In 1972, Title IX, a federal statute that prohibits sex discrimination in any program offered by educational institutions, became law. It provided women with opportunities never before available to them. While Title IX addressed many issues, it particularly affected athletic programs. Faced with the loss of federal funds if they didn't comply, universities were among the first institutions to scramble in the early seventies to offer females opportunities in sports.

Women's athletic programs at Syracuse University represent a case in point. Prior to 1971, SU offered no intercollegiate varsity sports for women. Women interested in participating in athletics turned to recreational programs or club sports sponsored by the Women's Athletic Association (WAA), an organization established in 1950 to foster the spirit of good sportsmanship among the women of Syracuse University. The early events sponsored by WAA, called "frolics," and "fests," were social social affairs primarily, rather than competitive events.

"Women's athletics just weren't very popular at the time," says Lucille Verhulst, director of women's physical education at SU from 1950-1973. "Even those women who enjoyed sports were hesitant about participating in them. There was an image problem even then. We felt we were working against the odds in trying to stimulate activity. You did more of that than you did training women in athletic skills."

By 1970, though, attitudes began to

change. Many women at SU wanted more structured competition than the frolics offered by the WAA. At that point, says Doris Soladay, associate director of athletics at SU, competitions consisted of one-day trips to a neighboring college. To participate in a sports day, women signed up for the events that interested them (anything from modern dance and synchronized swimming to basketball and fencing), and then waited for a team advisor to call them together for a practice session or two.

"Then," says Soladay, "we'd get on a bus, play all day against similar teams from eight or nine other colleges, and come back home. It was fun, recreational activity, but really not very competitive. So women started asking for more."

In 1971, the women's volleyball team submitted a proposal to the University to institute a formal intercollegiate program for women at SU. Chancellor Melvin A. Eggers approved the program, making SU a charter member of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women. Five of the strongest club sports at SU received varsity status in the 1971-72 season—just prior to the enactment of Title IX legislation that would have required such action.

The gains brought about by Title IX are visible across the country. Before the mandate passed, colleges devoted less than two percent of their athletic budgets to women. Today, the allocation is closer to 20 percent, according to the National Association for Girls and Women in Sport. Nearly two million girls participate in interscholastic sports at the high school level, as opposed to 300,000 before Title IX. Colleges and universities now offer more than 10,000 athletic scholarships to women each year; scholarships were almost nonexistent before Title IX. At SU alone, the number of women receiving athletic scholarships jumped from zero prior to 1971 to 83 today.

The women's basketball team at SU illustrates this remarkable progress. Prior to 1971, team advisors recruited whomever they could find already on campus to participate in the sport. By 1978, the basketball team had six tuition scholarships to offer. And today the team has 15 full-ride scholarships, the most allowed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

With more and better scholarships, women's teams are also stepping up their recruiting methods, says Barbara Jacobs, head coach of the SU women's basketball team since 1978. "Now we recruit much the same way the men's team does. We're evaluating the talent of sophomores now. We already know which juniors we want to recruit, and we've already signed the seniors," she says. "It's a continual thing and it doesn't start and stop with the beginning and end of the school year."

Athletic recruiting by colleges and universities has had a direct effect on attitudes in the high school and junior high schools. Parents who once discouraged their daughters from participating in sports have become their biggest supporters, because athletic ability can pay for a daughter's college education. As more parents have encouraged girls to participate in athletics, more have excelled at their sports, and society has started taking female athletes seriously.

Eileen Donnellan DiBartolomeo '82 was a member of the first generation of female athletes to expect scholarship opportunities. Although few existed when she began applying to colleges, she knew enough to scout out the schools that provided them. Interested in math,

Eileen DiBartolomeo Now

DiBartolomeo works for General Electric in Syracuse, writing computer software to test electronic equipment in radar. She remains active in athletics, particularly in post-collegiate field hockey. This year, her team advanced to a national tournament at Towson State in Maryland. She also referees for area high school field hockey games.

Eileen DiBartolomeo Then

DiBartolomeo, an engineering major, received the sole field hockey scholarship in 1978. She played mid-field while at SU and became the leading assist holder before the program became Division I. She served as captain of the team in 1980 and 1981 and was inducted into SU's Orange Plus Hall of Fame in her senior year.

"Sports gave me confidence in working with people and making decisions on the fly. In business and in field hockey you have to do both a lot."

science, and field hockey, DiBartolomeo looked for colleges that offered both an engineering program and a scholarship in field hockey. SU had both.

To compete for the scholarship, DiBartolomeo traveled from her home town on Long Island to participate in an open tryout (the University was not yet recruiting field hockey players). Along with 30 to 50 other prospective team members, she ran drills and played scrimmages while the coaches on the sidelines scrutinized her. A handful made the team, but DiBartolomeo got the sole scholarship that year.

By the time Vera Jones '88 began applying to colleges, however, scholarship opportunities had increased significantly. She was fully aware that her athletic skills were going to pay for her college education.

Unlike many of her predecessors, Jones was encouraged to participate in sports at an early age. Her older brother and cousins often let her play ball with them, and Jones's parents supported all of her athletic endeavors. They even helped her get her first basketball. "Raisin Bran had an order form on the back of the box for a free basketball with two proofs of purchase," says Jones. "My Mom and Dad helped me order it when I was five years old."

Jones's love of the sport was apparent to the coaching staff at SU, too. They recruited her and offered her a full scholarship to play forward on the women's basketball team at the start of the 1984-85 season. Although Jones continued to excel in sports (in 1988 she was named the Big East Scholar-Athlete of the Year in basketball), she found it tough to juggle her athletic and academic schedule at the collegiate level. She admits that her primary reason for sticking it out was the quality education afforded her, particularly since playing pro ball was not an option.

By using their athletic abilities to reap a college education, DiBartolomeo and Jones represent how far women's athletics have come. Had either of them been born 20 years earlier, athletic scholarships would have been out of the question.

Certainly the prospect of a free college education plays a part in attracting and motivating today's athletes. But only one part. No athlete puts in the long hours of practice and training unless she enjoys the sport as well. Talk to female athletes, and you're reminded of their simple love of sports.

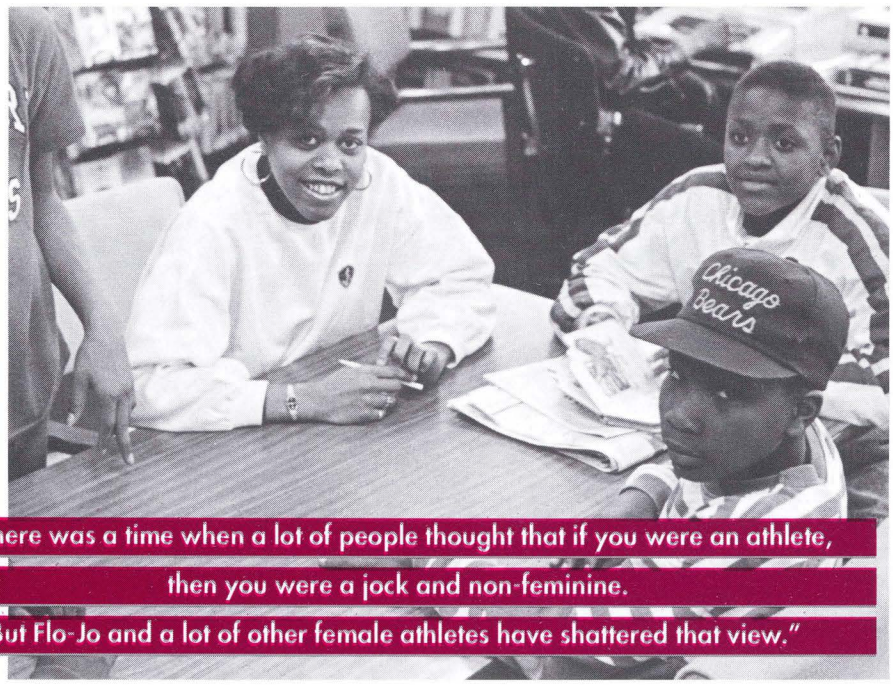
Lori Barnett Fuller '77, who was instrumental in making crew a varsity sport while she attended SU, didn't train year round with antiquated equipment in undependable weather for the sake of a scholarship. "I loved the challenge," she says. "I'd never done anything so demanding and felt such pride in accomplishing these feats."

Fuller attended SU when the women's crew team had to borrow oars and tubs from the men—"clunkers that weighed 500 pounds," she says.

"We even drove our own cars to practice. It was a major accomplishment when we were finally allowed to ride the bus with the men to practice." She says she "had a lot of pride in the fact that we were blazing some trails in uncharted waters."

Like their male counterparts, women enjoy feeling fit. They like the physical and mental challenges sports provide, and they relish the sense of accomplishment that comes from athletics. Many women also find that sports help them reduce stress, improve athletic skills, form lasting friendships, and promote team work.

Susan Scharoun '78, G '82 got involved with sports for the health benefits. A member of the field hockey, basketball, and lacrosse teams, Scharoun says, "I loved the way my body felt. My mind was clear when I was active



"There was a time when a lot of people thought that if you were an athlete, then you were a jock and non-feminine. But Flo-Jo and a lot of other female athletes have shattered that view."

Sharon Daniels Now

As the coordinator of a teen center in Syracuse, Daniels works with youths between the ages of 12 and 21. She schedules educational programming to help teens develop social and leadership skills. Daniels also does some part-time modeling and plays in a softball league each summer.

Sharon Daniels Then

Daniels, who majored in economics, set seven track and field records by the time she graduated from SU in 1985. She earned the Big East championship title in the indoor long jump in 1984. In 1985, Daniels captured the same title and added the Big East outdoor triple jump crown. In 1986, she became the 22nd woman inducted into the Orange Plus Hall of Fame.

in sports. It kept me in good physical and mental condition. . . . When my body felt fit, I felt much more eager to go home and study."

Scharoun, who remains active in recreational athletics, says her involvement in sports has helped her in her career as well. She is a clinical neuropsychologist who oversees a 23-member team, and Scharoun thinks that she's a better team player in the work place because of her experience in sports. "As a member of a sports team," she says, "you learn to put your personal goals aside sometimes for the team's sake. Plus team sports teaches you to strategize. Both are important in the business world."

The discipline of athletics also carries over to the working world, according to Sharon Daniels '85, who is the coordinator of a teen center in Syracuse. While at SU, Daniels set seven records in track. To do so, she learned to organize her time and to stick to a rigorous schedule. "I draw on that to stay organized in my job," she says.

Daniels, who schedules social and educational programs for young men and women between the ages of 12 and 20, says her knowledge about sports also helps her to get better acquainted with some of the kids at the center. "Most kids are interested in sports, and they feel more comfortable with me when they learn that it's a common interest of mine, too. It serves as an ice-breaker," she says.

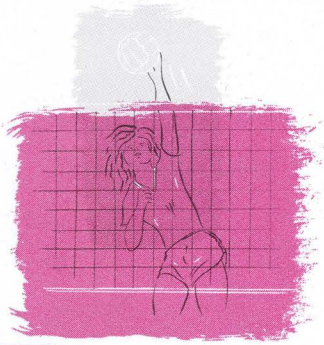
"I think I was always personally secure with myself and who I am and I just didn't let stereotypes bother me."

Vera Jones Now

Jones works as a sales representative in the beverage division of Proctor & Gamble. She has accounts with 130 retail stores and numerous retail headquarters in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. In addition, she works part-time as a disc jockey for WBUX-AM in Philadelphia. Jones is also a member of two basketball teams in the Philadelphia area, one of which won its league championship this year.

Vera Jones Then

Jones, a broadcast journalism major who graduated in 1988, played small forward on the women's basketball team at SU. She scored more than 1,000 points in her college career and was named Big East Scholar-Athlete of the Year in basketball in 1988.



Women athletes have indeed made great progress. The image problem has decreased while scholarships, funding, popularity, and support for women have increased. But many challenges must still be met. The largest is professional opportunities for women in sports. With the exception of tennis and golf, few professional outlets exist for female athletes.

Getting more women's events covered on television is one of the best ways to ensure continued progress for women athletes, says Coach Jacobs. "I think that's the market that needs to be tapped to make women's sports go and be accepted throughout the country."

She maintains that most people who dismiss women's sports as boring or noncompetitive have never seen a women's game. "They don't really know. That's what they've heard," she says. "I tell people, 'I'll buy the first ticket for you to come and see us play, because I think you'll keep buying them after you see us in action.'"

"We keep making small inroads and taking steps forward," Jacobs adds. "We're not reaching all of the pinnacles we'd like to reach, but that's just going to take time."

Deborah Winsor '82 agrees that it's just a matter of time before women athletes break their last major barriers. Winsor, who played field hockey while at SU, now works as a foreman at an all-women construction firm in Nantucket. She compares the progress of women in sports to women in construction.

"In construction, we're of the same status that women in athletics were in 15 years ago. We're an oddity and we're still required to prove ourselves," says Winsor. "We're under a lot more scrutiny than the average Joe contractor. But having been through similar challenges with athletics, I can say, 'This is old news. These people will get over this.' It may take 20 years, but they'll get use to this, too.

"It's almost nouveau chic for women in sports today," she says. "I imagine one day you'll see a woman with a tool belt on in a Stanley tool ad and people will think that's great, too."