

Women still struggling for respect in sports

By MICHAEL PIASETZKI

(CUP) — When Elana Rabinovitch tried out for Concordia University's wrestling team last fall, she attracted a lot of interest and attention. That's because she was attempting to become the first woman to compete for the university in a male-dominated sport.

As it turns out, Rabinovitch gave up her quest to join head coach Victor Zilberman's team in late October. She decided free-style wrestling wasn't for her.

These days, Rabinovitch continues to train and compete in Brazilian jujitsu wrestling and in the sport of grappling, a martial art that resembles wrestling but requires an opponent's submission rather than a pin-fall to win.

But when asked about her impressions of training at the Montreal Wrestling Club, the 22-year-old Psychology major admits she was looked at differently by a few men because of her gender.

"I trained mainly with the guys and most of them were great. However, there were a few who had an attitude and weren't that friendly towards me," she says.

"I also think Victor Zilberman still has a mind set about women wrestlers. He wouldn't admit it, but in his mind he might have been thinking that way," she adds.

Rabinovitch also says the first woman who trained at the Montreal Wrestling Club, Anna, wasn't accepted as an equal at all and really had to prove herself. She is also amazed about Concordia heavyweight David Chodat's remarks about women's roles in amateur wrestling.

Chodat, an Olympic hopeful, believes "the only way women wrestlers are judged

by most male wrestlers are by their looks."

He continues to say that women will always be inferior athletes in a sport like wrestling and that they're a lot slower and much less aggressive.

"Women don't add anything to wrestling. They actually detract from it," Chodat says.

"They now have a world championships of wrestling for women, and the worst part is they're taking cash away from the guys — and if they take money away from the male athletes and give it to the girls, that's wrong," he continues.

"After all, would you rather watch the major leagues or softball?"

"Men start reacting that way when they start to lose their priveleges... you see very few women competing in professional sports."

Chodat further comments that amateur women wrestling is a side show. Rabinovitch feels that Chodat's comments come from a fear that women will walk into the world of amateur wrestling and take over.

"Sure he's scared," she says. "That's because when I'm there, we're partners. It's sort of like having a million dollars and then having that fear that someone will take it away from you. So you protect yourself."

"Men start reacting that way when they start to lose their privileges," she says. "I'm sure a lot of men feel that way. But sports are a big part of life. Still, you see very few women competing in professional

sports."

Dave Wilson, captain of Concordia's wrestling team, disagrees with Chodat's comments. But he does feel that some male wrestlers might be jealous of their female counterparts.

"One of the reasons some guys might have a feeling of animosity towards women wrestlers is because there's a good chance women will be allowed to compete in the 2002 Summer Olympics in Australia. So maybe they feel threatened."

Wilson says having women in amateur wrestling is relatively new, and it's going through growing pains. He offers the example of how male coaches must carefully make it clear to women before they start training that part of the instruction process might involve some touching.

He also disagrees with Rabinovitch's opinions about Zilberman. He points out that women are more than welcome on the Concordia wrestling team.

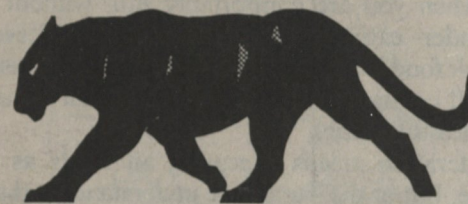
"We have a world class coach here at Concordia who would be more than happy if more women competed for Concordia. He knows that if the women wrestlers do well, then more funding will be given to the team, just the same as would happen if the men do well."

For her part, the 5-foot 1, 124-pound Rabinovitch still believes women can compete with men in a sport like wrestling. She says wrestling is more than a sport that emphasizes strength.

"I don't see a problem if both competitors are the same weight," she says.

"It's a matter of push and pull. Attitudes like [Chodat's] are just an excuse for women not to advance."

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