

# THE PROS

Professional sport is big business. Like most similar enterprises it suffers growing pains. These come and go in a continual procession, but most of them are eventually solved. Other difficulties, however, are more permanent. One such issue is sexism. By repeatedly raising its ugly head it creates situations that are often unjust and sometimes even funny. The results are usually embarrassing, and rarely are they sufficiently worked out.

Sexism in sport, as everywhere else, revolves around equal rights. Media coverage and prize money vastly favor males. This is especially evident in tennis and golf where male and female tours exist side by side. Everyone hears about Jack Nicklaus and Tom Watson, but few of us even know the names of female stars. The likes of Billy Jean King regularly lament their smaller stakes. On the surface at least, their argument holds weight. The inequality is rationalized away though, on the grounds that the men have more talent and that they attract more fans. Is this good reasoning? It's debatable.

One might have the sexes compete together. Yet even then problems would remain. The women might continue to win the smaller portion of the prize money. To make matters worse, defeat by the opposite sex would crush many male egos.

In professional sports where women take less active roles, sexism also comes into play. Even if we ignore the lack of female participants, baseball, football, hockey and basketball are all guilty. One publicized example occurred during the last World Series. The New York Yankees allowed only male reporters and broadcasters into the dressing room. Nothing, of course, is unusual about that. The franchises in all major sports do the same. This time, however, the women retaliated. Melissa Ludtke, a female reporter for Sports Illustrated magazine, was the offended party. She and Time Incorporated then filed suit in

American federal court against the Yankees and against the American Baseball League. Her claim was that it was unfair discrimination for her to be banned from the team's clubhouse solely because of her sex. The injustice, she argues, "deprived her of covering the sport in the same way as he male colleagues." What she said is certainly true. She was deprived, it was discrimination, and it was unfair. Athletes, though, also have certain rights. Those of them wanting the privacy deserve to have it.

Here too, a possible solution comes to mind.

All reporters might be banned from the players' quarters. That move, however, would be rather unprecedented and even more unpopular. Thus it isn't likely to happen. It is just unfortunate that the present situation pits the rights of athletes against those of female reporters. One group can't be satisfied without angering the other. That is what you call a tricky situation.

Some cases of sexism border on the ridiculous. The problems of Renee Richards are one example.

Now, although Richards can play, her opponents sometimes won't. First

Helle Viragh of Denmark refused to finish a match against her. Then Beth Norton of Fairfield, Connecticut, pulled the same trick, giving no reason except that "it had to be done". Her father, however, declared it against his daughter's "religious and moral convictions" to play Richards. The truth is clear. Renee just isn't accepted.

What is the answer? There may not be any. Sexism has always existed and probably always will. It will remain an issue in professional sports, just as it will in almost everything else.

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