

Collector's Edition
Founded 1997

real SPORTS® e-Zine

The Authority in Women's Sports™

Most Important Moments
in Sports 2012



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The Authority in Women's Sports™

June 23, 2012, marked the 40th anniversary of Title IX, the landmark legislation that mandated equal opportunity for both sexes in educational programs where federal funds are received. While access to sports is the most widely seen outcome of the legislation, the impact on professional careers from lawyers to doctors to scientists has been dramatic. The outcome of participation has also had an impact on the well-being of women demonstrated through overall self-esteem and confidence, as well as higher lifelong earnings potential.

Periodically, I am asked to speak on panels and at conferences about my own legal experiences regarding equal access. When I was 9, I simply wanted to play soccer on the best team possible. I didn't realize making an all-star team would cause such uproar. When my parents sat me down and said, "The youth league has said you can't play because you're a girl," it was as much a defining moment for me as it was for my parents. I simply asked what does the point that I'm a girl have anything to



"Getting in the Game: 40 Years of Title IX" panel: Carol Muller (left), Landmark Leaders Speaker Series chairwoman; Amy Love, publisher and founder of REAL SPORTS and client of Equal Rights Advocates in the 1970s; Noreen Farrell, executive director of Equal Rights Advocates; Tara VanDerveer, Stanford women's basketball head coach; Kiki Williams, former University of California basketball player.

do with my ability to play soccer? This began the journey of Love vs. Steele, a case filed on my behalf by Equal Rights Advocates in San Francisco in the mid-1970s under civil rights legislation. The case against the California Youth Soccer Association was ultimately settled in my favor, and I and girls statewide were allowed to play that year. The case then served as a precedent for other youth programs.

The case for access and opportunity for girls' and women's sports is one we can never rest easy about. The benefits are so very clear, yet the business and market value of women's sports has yet to materialize. Women's sports remain in a challenging place. This is why REAL SPORTS magazine remains committed to publishing its annual Most Important Moments in Women's Sports to serve as a thought-provoker for today, and a resource for the evolution of sports.

In this year's edition, we recognize the impact David Stern has had on the viability of women's professional basketball in the United States, and we raise concerns regarding his pending retirement and the potential impact it could have on the WNBA.

We also acknowledge the ups and downs of stars and teams and the continued challenge to find a formula that can translate women's soccer national team success into an ongoing professional opportunity.

REAL SPORTS™, publishing continuously since 1998.

Top 10 Most Important Moments in Sports selected by the REAL SPORTS editorial board. Chelsea Janes writer; La Tricia Ransom copy editor, Asa Enocson online, Amy Love Publisher/Founder. Special acknowledgment to ISIPhotos.com

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We also celebrate the accomplishments, while remaining skeptical given the realities of sports today, of some tremendous Olympians. And we also celebrate the accomplishments of the Baylor Bears in their 40-0 season and that of Gabby Douglas, all-around gymnastics Olympic champion.

We hope you enjoy this issue. As a fully self-funded venture, all we ask of you is that you pay the issue forward by encouraging your friends to like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter, and engage in a conversation about this year's edition on Facebook and Twitter.

Best regards,



Amy Love,
Publisher and Founder

P.S. In the photo, you might notice a little baby bump. I am pleased to announce that I am expecting a little girl. She is due on Jan. 25.

#10

Ups and Downs Continue for Women's Soccer

When the U.S. women returned home from Germany after a heartbreaking loss to Japan in the 2011 World Cup soccer final, they were still heralded as heroes after an epic comeback win over Brazil in the quarterfinals. In London, at the 2012 Olympics, the U.S. avenged that loss with a relatively easy 2-1 win over a Japanese squad that is among the world's most tactically advanced. Still, the U.S. had to battle to get to the final, somehow pulling out a perilous, but epic, overtime win over Canada in the semifinals.

The U.S. stars are gracious ambassadors for the game and have positioned the nation as a mainstay at the top of the FIFA World Rankings, with a 28-1-3 record in 2012. The U.S. prep and college systems are thriving, U.S. soccer funds its women's team as well as any in the world (but not at parity with the men), and the available training resources are unparalleled.

No one can take issue with an Olympic gold medal, particularly one



London, England - Thursday, August 9, 2012: The USA defeated Japan 2-1 to win the London 2012 Olympic gold medal at Wembley Stadium. Carli Lloyd scored both goals, one in each half.

won without one of the world's best defenders, Ali Krieger, who tore the ACL and MCL in her right knee in January 2012. Given the ability to restock its arsenal from a deep talent pool, the U.S. team should be dominating in all the world competitions -- but the U.S. is 0-3 in the last three World Cup Finals.

On the cover: Brittney Griner dunking against Georgia Tech in the 2012 NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament – Sweet 16 round.





Tom Sermanni was named the new head coach as of Oct. 30, replacing Pia Sundhage, who left to coach her native Sweden following the Olympic win. Heading into the next World Cup/Olympic cycle, Sermanni has many questions to answer – among them is Hope Solo, the enigmatic publicity magnet whose glibness and off-field demeanor continued to attract the spotlight in 2012, the goalie for the future? She’s the best in the world, and has the stats back it, but with plenty of goalkeeping talent waiting in the wings, is the media attention regarding her on and off-the-field issues, rather than the team’s on-field results, worth keeping when one star goes to no great pains to align herself with the rest of the squad?

London, England - Thursday, August 9, 2012: Hope Solo makes a save over Japan's Saki Kumagi.

2012 also saw the official demise of Women’s pro soccer – and its re-emergence. As the U.S. national team continues to pack the stands, U.S. soccer joined forces with its Canadian and Mexican sisters to draw up what it hopes will finally be a sustainable women’s professional soccer league – the third such attempt in the past decade: WUSA (2000-2003) and WPS (2009-2012) both folded after three seasons.

The new league, National Women’s Soccer League, will have eight teams, and the U.S., Canadian and Mexican national federations will subsidize the salaries of a number of players to

Soccer continued...

lessen the burden on team owners. The teams will play in small venues in *Boston, Chicago, Kansas City, Mo., Western New York, New Jersey, Portland, Seattle and Washington, D.C.* and hope to drum up strong grassroots support to sustain the league long term.

If the fall of WPS in May taught the women's soccer world anything, it was that the old business models weren't working. With this latest attempt, U.S. soccer is hoping it can capitalize on its national team members' popularity to build a new league that can last and, ultimately, feed a national team program that will be even stronger for it. For the latest in soccer news, visit www.usoccer.com/Teams/US-Women.aspx

#9

Vonn wins 57 World Cup races, still can't race the boys

To say Lindsey Vonn is the best female downhill skier in the world may be an understatement – Vonn, who won her 57th World Cup race and fourth World Cup title in five years in 2012, wants a new challenge and made a compelling case in 2012 to demonstrate that she could be one of the world's best downhill skiers period. Vonn, 28, petitioned the International Ski Federation to ski



Schladming, Austria – March 18, 2012: Vonn competing in giant slalom race.

in a men's race in Lake Louise, Alberta, in November: her request was denied.

Since then, she has decided to take a break from the tour to fully recover from an intestinal illness that plagued her in November. Vonn has said that competing in a men's race is still a goal, and her story highlights the age-old question: if a woman consistently displays a skill level comparable to men, why wouldn't she be allowed to compete against them?

#8

Female athletes not immune to off-field trouble

Female athletes seem to avoid being as vilified for off-field missteps as their male counterparts. Rarely do we hear of a female athlete in trouble with her organization, the law, or about her personal issues, but that silence does not reflect the reality of the women's sports world.



If we look at the root cause, it's likely related more to the lack of national media coverage rather than a different standard.

A handful of stars have found themselves in trouble in recent years (e.g. Diana Taurasi's DUI arrest in 2009), and in 2012, Chamique Holdsclaw, a former WNBA star and Olympic gold medalist, was arrested in Atlanta on charges of aggravated assault, second-degree criminal damage, and possession of a firearm during commission of a felony. Holdsclaw is accused of following ex-girlfriend, and Tulsa Shock player, Jennifer Lacy to her Range Rover, breaking its windows, pouring gasoline on it, and firing a handgun towards it as she left the scene. No one was injured. Holdsclaw was initially held in a Fulton County jail on \$100,000 bond and later was required to wear an ankle monitor as a condition of bail.

The three-time NCAA champion and Tennessee Volunteers legend has been open about her on-going battle with depression for the past decade, a fight that included a suicide attempt when she was a member of the WNBA Los Angeles Sparks in 2006.

Her public fall from grace is a tragic one, a story that would presumably garner significant media attention if it belonged to a similarly talented male star. But if part of us pities her decline, we have to wonder: would we feel the same if that violent outburst had come from a male athlete, or would we just condemn him as another violent jock and move on?

It is a necessary evil of the fight for equality among female athletes: if women seek the same compensation, visibility and professional opportunities as male athletes, they must also accept the same intense public scrutiny and off-court standards: In 2012, we saw that while women stars are not immune to the same troubles as male athletes, they are partially immune to the same level of criticism.

#7

New Jersey allows gambling, NCAA pull championships

When New Jersey announced it would be legalizing sports betting effective January 2013, the National Collegiate Athletic Association pulled five championship events scheduled to be played in the area in accordance with its policy against hosting championships in states with legal sports wagering. The NCAA also joined Major League Baseball, the National Football

Gambling continued...

League, National Hockey League, and National Basketball Association in a lawsuit to block the law, which would still prohibit betting on college games played in New Jersey.

The events now lost to the state and its fans are the Division III wrestling regionals, Division III men's volleyball championship, Division II and III women's lacrosse championships, and Division I regionals in swimming and women's basketball.

The NCAA has always been exceptionally cautious about keeping sports bettors at arm's length, a stance exemplified by its willingness to move already-scheduled revenue-generating events to avoid potential pitfalls of student-athletes competing in a gambling-friendly host state. If New Jersey's law is upheld, it will join Nevada, Delaware, Oregon and Montana as states in which betting on sports is legal. The NCAA banned the hosting of championships in any of those states.

#6

Legends battle difficult illnesses

One of the most storied coaching tenures in sports history came to an end this year when Tennessee women's basketball coach Pat Summitt stepped down from active coaching in April. The move came



Pat Summitt, shown with Tara VanDerveer, in 2011 was REAL SPORTS sports person of the year for 2011.

eight months after she revealed she has early onset Alzheimer's disease.

The 60-year-old Summitt, REAL SPORTS's 2011 Sports Person of the Year, is free to continue coaching as head coach emeritus as her health allows, but control of the program is now officially in the hands of Holly Warlick, who served as an assistant to Summitt for 27 years.

Warlick has a tough act to follow. Summitt won 1,098 games in 38 seasons in Knoxville, Tenn., more than any other coach in college basketball history (men's or women's). After taking over as head coach before the 1974-75 season, Summitt led the Vols to eight NCAA Championships and an 84 percent winning record. Tennessee is the only team to play in every NCAA tournament since the tourney's inception in 1982.

Legends continued...

Fittingly, Summitt is one of the most widely respected figures in American sport, and the revelation of her condition drew an outpouring of support from around the sports world – support she is channeling toward finding a cure for her devastating illness. The Pat Summitt Foundation (www.patsummitt.org), founded after her diagnosis in 2011, aims to elevate awareness about Alzheimer’s and raise money to find a cure.

ABC Television’s Robin Roberts is another sports legend whose personal battle is being used to help others. A host of “Good Morning America” who won Emmy awards for her work at ESPN, Roberts underwent a bone marrow transplant in September 2012 to treat a rare blood and bone marrow disorder called myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS). That after battling breast cancer in 2007 and 2008.

Roberts teamed with Be the Match (www.marow.org), an organization that matches bone marrow donors with those in need, to film a public-service announcement to increase awareness about the need for bone marrow donors and to persuade people to join the national registry of potential donors. The more donors, the greater the chances patients suffering from leukemia, lymphoma and similar diseases will find a bone marrow match and receive the transplants they need to survive.



Serena Williams reasserts her dominance

After a disappointing and injury-riddled 2011 season that saw her drop to No. 12 in the Women’s Tennis Association singles rankings, Serena Williams reminded everyone of her rightful place atop the tennis world with a return to dominance in 2012.

The 31-year-old posted a 58-4 record en route to seven titles, including wins at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open, giving her 15 career Grand Slam titles. She also took home her third tour title with a win in the WTA Championships, a tournament featuring the season’s eight top-ranked singles players.

Williams sparkled in London, where she cruised to victory in the Olympic final against Maria Sharapova to earn her first Olympic gold medal in singles. She also teamed with sister Venus to bring home another gold on the doubles side, the tandem’s third Olympic title.

Serena won gold in London in singles as well as in doubles with her sister Venus. Next page: Serena’s strength was on full display at the WTA Championships.





Dominance continued...

The spectacular season earned Williams her fourth WTA Player of the Year Award, and the International Tennis Federation named her its world champion.

Yet for all her successes, Williams' powerful physique remains a topic of conversation, if not a source of criticism for some, not unlike what Martina Navratilova experienced when she began cross-training during the off-season.

In a tennis world populated by leaner, less-muscular athletes, Williams' curves continue to inspire everything from ad campaigns (the WTA's "Strong is Beautiful" ads featuring Williams) to imitations, including one from her friend Caroline Wozniacki, who stuffed her chest and shorts with padding to mimic Williams' build.

But as Williams' brawn sets her apart from her peers, there is no doubt it is a key reason she has separated herself from them on the court, as well. She won her first Grand Slam title (the 1999 U.S. Open) over a decade ago, but shows no signs of slowing with a game as powerful, intimidating and effective as ever. That kind of enduring dominance is unparalleled in recent tennis history.

#4

Tamika Catchings completes impressive trifecta

Until 2012, WNBA star Tamika Catchings had done it all: almost.

At the University of Tennessee from 1997 to 2001, Catchings turned in one of the most decorated careers in the history of that storied program, despite tearing her ACL in the 17th game of her senior season – an injury that ended her collegiate career. She was part of an undefeated Lady Vols squad that won the national title in '98, a four-time Kodak All-America pick, and the Naismith National Player of the Year in 2000.

Catchings has also been on three Olympic teams – which means she's a three-time Olympic gold medalist (2004, 2008, 2012).

In 12 years in the WNBA, Catchings has accrued almost every honor imaginable. She was Rookie of the Year in 2002, a five-time Defensive Player of the Year ('05, '06, '09, '10, '12), a seven-time WNBA All-Star, and the 2011 WNBA Most Valuable Player – all with the Indiana Fever.

But until 2012, the one thing Catchings hadn't done was win a WNBA championship, though she'd come close: the Fever made it to the finals in 2009, only to fall to the Phoenix Mercury. But when

Photo Courtesy: Left: Ron Hosking, NBAE; Right: Courtesy NBAE



After 12 years in the WNBA, Tamika Catchings earns her WNBA title, with long-time mentor and former coach, Pat Summitt, watching the victory in person.



Catchings and the Fever made it to the finals in 2012, the superstar wasn't about to let her team fall short again.

Catchings and the Fever downed the Minnesota Lynx in four games. The Lynx, the 2011 champions, were trying to become the first team to repeat as champions since Los Angeles in 2001 and 2002.

Catchings was named finals MVP after averaging 22.3 points, 6.0 rebounds, and 3.5 assists, moving

her name from the list of all-time greatest athletes to never win a championship to the list of all-time greatest athletes – ever.

Making the win even more special was the fact that Summitt, Catchings' legendary college coach, mentor on and off the court, and the woman she said became her mother away from home while she was at Tennessee, was in the stands for her championship win.

REAL SPORTS caught up with Catchings, who plays professionally in China in the WNBA off-season, and asked her to look back on her championship, mentor, and spectacular career.

What did it mean to win that WNBA title after so many years in the league?



It was definitely a huge blessing and a weight off of my shoulders. Of course, when you're in this game and put so much time in practicing and working hard to win that championship, everything along the way prepared me for this moment. It was sweeter than I could have ever dreamed of.

What did it mean to you to have Coach Summitt in the stands for your win?

Pat became my mother away from home when I attended UT. The thing that Pat has always preached is being a great overall woman – not just a basketball player. So, the things that I have learned from her and in having a front-row seat to how she's handled both success and failures has helped shape me into the person I am today. Having Pat on the sidelines to watch me accomplish something I have chased for so long was special. She has spent plenty of time on the phone with me through my professional career encouraging and motivating me. To have her there for me was something that I'll never forget!

You're now an NCAA champion, Olympic champion, and WNBA champion: Which of those achievements are you most proud of?

Honestly, I don't really have a tier of where these achievements fit in. They were all at different times of my life and were huge in the years that I was in "in the moment." The WNBA championship was definitely the most challenging as far as the number of years it has taken to finally accomplish this feat. But, I'm super proud of every accomplishment and so blessed to have had the opportunity to play with so many great players along the way.

Beyond all those championships, is there any particular moment in your basketball life that sticks out as one of the most meaningful?

I think the thing that is always the most meaningful to me is the friendships that you develop over the years. It's awesome to have so much fun competing with one another, but even more fun to keep in touch with the players that you played with and develop friendships that will last a lifetime.

You've been a part of three Olympic teams – which was your favorite and why?



Again, I don't really look at and compare the Olympics because of how different each one was and my role on each one. My first Olympics, I was one of the youngest ones on the team, and it was challenging because in trying to find my niche on the team and be effective – defense was the role that that team needed me to have. I remember constantly getting yelled at and the frustrations that went along with the experience, but it made me into a better player.

The second Olympics, I had one under my belt and was in a different position with Coach (Anne) Donovan and the team. I still had the defensive role, but I felt like the Beijing experience, you could sense how close the men's and women's team was and how much we supported one another. Plus, the families from both; it was more of a community support system that was something that couldn't be replaced.

And, this third Olympics was special because going into it, I stated that this would probably be my last go-around. But, once again, to be able to mentor the younger players and just continue to grow, both on and off the court, was important to me.

Who's the best player you've ever played with?

I would say the best teammate I ever had was my first year with the Fever, Zuzana Klimesova. I always talk about her, because she wasn't the most skilled and very rarely played, but just her positive outlook on life, ball and just the opportunity there with us was amazing. I'll never forget Zuzi because of the individual support that she always gave me. Sometimes people don't realize that it's not always the players that have the most skills that make the biggest difference.

What do you think of the state of the WNBA now? It has lasted a lot longer than other women's professional sports leagues – what do you think has to happen for it to continue to grow?

I'm confident that the WNBA will stick around for many, many, many, many years to come. I think the biggest thing that will have to happen for us to continue to grow is the marketing piece. I do believe that we've gotten a lot better over the years from that aspect, but it's still an ongoing process. I also think that it's vital that the former players continue to stay involved and that we continue to mentor the younger players along the way.

#3

Women Continue to Shine on the Olympic Stage

At the 2012 Olympic Games, women participated in greater numbers, garnered substantial headlines and attracted tremendous public attention. Here are just a few of special moments from the London games.

Beach volleyballers Kerri Walsh-Jennings and Misty May-Treanor's

journey to a third straight gold medal captured the hearts of their nation, which has watched for over a decade as they've turned seamless teamwork and palpable friendship into title after title.

The dynamic duo's dominance – a 21-0 record in Olympic competition – built them a following that transcended gender lines and propelled them to superstardom in a nation whose sports culture embraces few female athletes so widely.

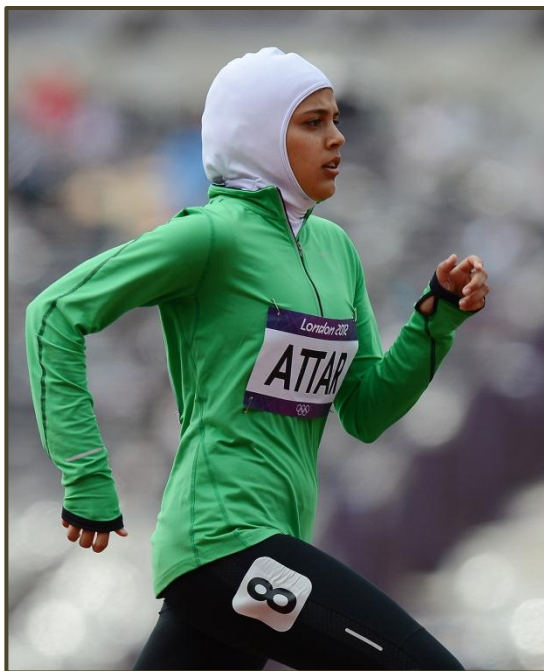


Kerri Walsh-Jennings spikes the ball past Jennifer Kessy and April Walsh as Misty May-Treanor watches in position to react to a return play. Team USA finish 1-2 – gold and silver.

Olympic Stage Continued...

Then there were the women from countries who barely seem to embrace women at all, let alone female athletes. The London Games was the first Olympics where every country present featured a female athlete on its team, including Saudi Arabia, Brunei and Qatar, which had never brought women to the Games before. The latter two, however, have sent participants to the Islamic Women's Games.

Sixteen-year-old Wojdan Shaherkani and 19-year-old Sarah Attar did not meet Olympic qualifying standards in their events of judo and track, respectively. But the IOC mandated that Saudi Arabia bring the women to the Games, and their participation, albeit brief, was powerfully symbolic.



Sarah Attar of Saudi Arabia competes in the 800m prelims wearing a hijab.

The Saudi government bans physical education of girls from public schools, and its national Olympic committee had no programs for women prior to 2012, and most Saudi women aren't even allowed to exercise or practice sports.

Attar's and Shaherkani's participation, then, represents a small step towards big change. They gave a nation of women forced to stay out of representation hope for a future where they can take that stage much more often.

London also saw women deliver captivating moments of outstanding physical achievement that the Olympics always seems to provide. Yet in today's sports culture, those too-good-to-be-true showings are often overshadowed by questions borne of a history of artificial enhancement. We've been burned too often by one-time heroes like Ben Johnson and Marion Jones to not question these unbelievable performances.

So while we want to believe in the remarkable performance of 16-year-old Chinese swimmer Ye Shiwen, for example, we wonder. Shiwen set a world record with her 4:28.43 in a gold-medal win in the 400 individual medley, but did so 5 seconds faster than her personal-best time and swam the final 50-meter leg in a time faster than Ryan Lochte.

Olympic Stage Continued...

While there's no evidence that doping was involved, and though the IOC's drug-testing policies are strict and thorough, we still wonder. Our skepticism is a telling sign of the times in which past transgressions of a few unfairly tarnish – however lightly – the genuine achievements of many.

But as they always seem to do, the 2012 Olympic Games offered more redemptive stories than disappointing ones, and in London, women provided many of those heartening reminders of the power and joy of sport.

Missy Franklin maintained her amateur status post Olympics and will be swimming for the University of California Berkeley.

One of those reminders came from 17-year-old American swimmer Missy Franklin, whose performance in London earned her four gold medals, five medals overall, and launched her to national prominence.

Yet in a rare example of an athlete prioritizing the joy of competition over personal gain, Franklin chose to forgo capitalizing financially on her achievements with endorsements and other deals to retain amateur status and continue swimming with her Colorado high school team and then in college at the University of California in Berkeley. Franklin would likely have earned millions, but will instead enjoy the less-lucrative benefits of amateurism: education, the team environment and competition driven purely by the desire to win and love of the game.



Olympic Stage Continued...

With so many memorable components to the London Games, one particularly impressive performance by American women was almost entirely overlooked. As the U.S. soccer team grabbed endorsements, beach volleyball earned TV ratings, and Franklin stole headlines, the U.S. women's basketball team quietly continued a decades-long run of domination with its fifth straight Olympic gold, the most consecutive medals ever won by a team in a traditional team sport. The women's team makes the dominance of the men's "Dream Team" look miniscule by comparison: the U.S. women have not lost an Olympic game since the Barcelona Games in 1992, and have gone 58-3 since women's basketball became an Olympic sport in 1976.

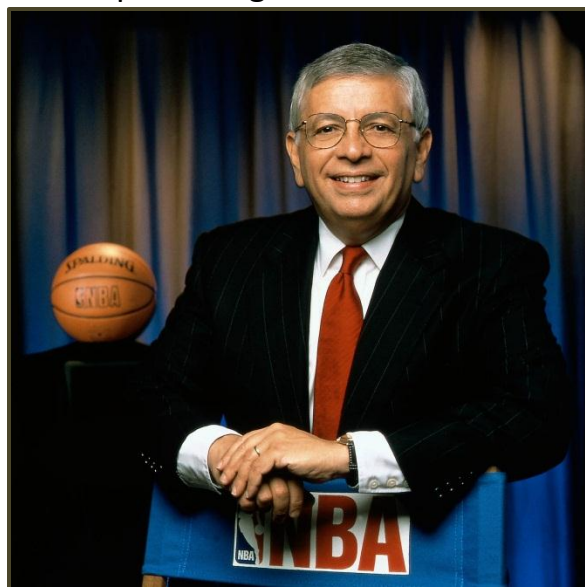
American fans were looking elsewhere as this squad, perhaps the most decorated and talent-laden team yet, dominated opponents by an average of 34.4 points per game in London. Yet the team's media coverage was limited, ironically suffering from the lack of inflammatory tweets, off-court issues or team infighting that threw the spotlight on other Olympians.

From women's basketball's domination to Franklin's choice and the groundbreaking performances of the two Saudi athletes, the London Games were a defining moment in many different ways for women in sport.

#2

Stern Announces Retirement – Fate of the WNBA a Fair Question to Ask

NBA Commissioner David Stern announced he will retire Feb. 1, 2014, ending a 30-year tenure at the league's helm. Stern has been among the most dogged supporters of the WNBA and its product and a critical part of its survival for 16 seasons and counting – significantly longer than any other women's professional team sports league.



Not only has Stern provided NBA funding to prop up the WNBA, but he has advocated time and time again for the value of the women's league and the need for more coverage. When some, including even WNBA owners, have doubted the league's viability, Stern has been the one emphasizing its value over its profits. His retirement leaves the league to wait and see if his successor, Adam Silver, will match that support, or leave the league to fend for itself.

Photo Courtesy: Baylor University

WNBA Fate Continued...

That question is of particular interest to some of the nation's top collegiate programs – namely Connecticut, Tennessee, Stanford, Duke, Rutgers, and Louisiana State – that provide the 12-team league with the vast majority of its players.

Young stars like the L.A. Sparks' Nnemkadi Ogwumike, a Stanford product and No. 1 pick in the 2012 Draft, face the same future as their

WNBA predecessors, one in which they must bolster their WNBA income by playing abroad in the off-season. With flat attendance rates and growing ownership turnover, the league's future is far from certain.

REAL SPORTS honors Stern for his commitment to the WNBA, and we hope Silver will build upon his legacy of opportunity for the top players and the distinct and dedicated fan base to enjoy professional basketball in the United States, not just overseas.

#1

Maturation for Griner, as Baylor Dominates



Brittney Griner was dominating in the NCAA Championship game against Notre Dame.

Few players have dominated their sport the way Brittney Griner has dominated women's college basketball the past three years. From national player-of-the-year awards, to All-America accolades to all-conference honors, Griner had everything on her resume but an NCAA championship.

She got that in 2012, fulfilling a promise she made to Baylor Coach Kim Mulkey and marking a major milestone in a maturation process that has had its ups and downs. It was only two years ago that Griner was suspended for two games for throwing a punch that broke the nose of Texas Tech forward Jordan Barncastle, with whom she'd been jockeying for position.

Baylor Domination Continued...

Griner said then that she let emotions get the better of her, but she has reined them in since then to become one of the most effective post presences in the history of women's basketball. She has had to learn to control her emotions: her unique physique, unparalleled talent and meteoric success have made her a topic of constant jabs, criticism and other verbal and social abuse, even as she has avoided further incident, accumulated accolades and won a national title.

That title came in only the second Final Four in women's tournament

history to feature all four No. 1 seeds. The Lady Bears, the overall No. 1, completed their undefeated 40-0 season with an 80-61 win over Notre Dame, and along the way, Griner's emphatic two-handed dunk against Georgia Tech in the Sweet 16 made some people a bit uncomfortable.

If the national championship filled a void on her resume, Griner looks poised to add even more to it this season: she is averaging over 20 points per game, more than seven rebounds, and almost three blocks per game, and the Lady Bears are seeking to repeat, despite a 71-69 loss to Stanford in November.

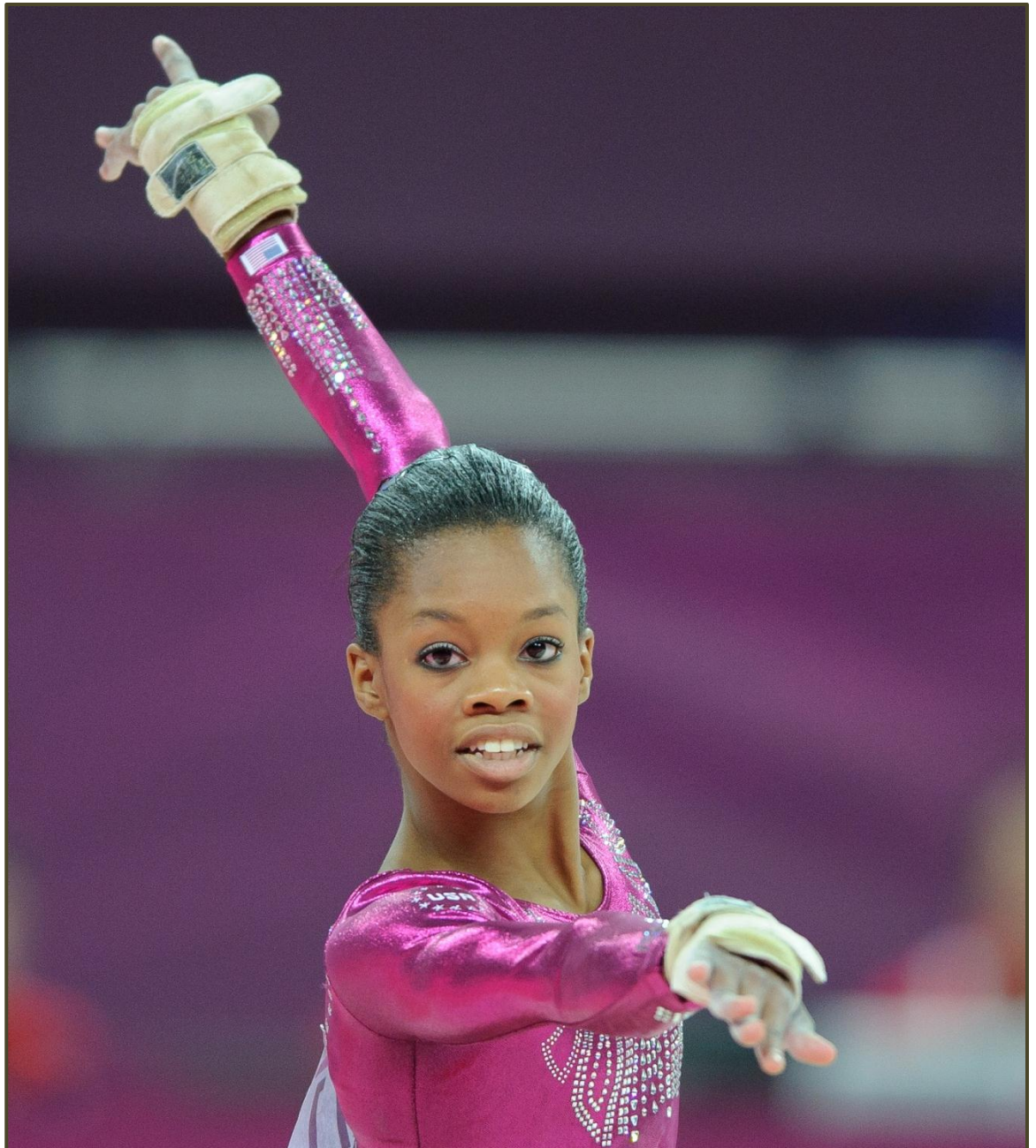


Baylor coach Kim Mulkey guided her team to a perfect 40-0 season while dealing with Bell's Palsy.

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Gabby Douglas 2012 Sports Person of the Year



As if the tale of becoming the first African-American gymnast to win Olympic gold in the individual all-around at 16 years old isn't impressive enough, Gabby Douglas' rise to prominence is also a nuanced story of perseverance, which illuminates the good and the bad in sport.

Douglas, a daughter of a single mother of four, grew up in Virginia Beach, Va., where she said she was taunted and belittled for being African-American by coaches and gymnasts at her training center.

Undaunted, Douglas left her family at 14 to train in Iowa under Liang Chow, coach of the likes of Shawn Johnson. She climbed the national rankings in the years leading up to 2012, but was far from a lock for the U.S. Olympic squad. Yet neither injury nor the challenges she faced, nor her family's limited means would slow Douglas' Olympic dream, and she earned a spot on the U.S. squad with a win at the Olympic trials in San Jose, Calif.

She beat the odds again in London, taking home the all-around gold despite not being the favorite to do so even among her teammates. But in a telling indictment of the world of women's sports today, her spectacular performance was not greeted with unbridled adulation, but with criticism of aspects as trivial as her hair, which some attacked as unkempt in the midst of her medal-winning performance. Fox News also criticized her uniform. While the 16-year-old performed brilliant feats of strength, grace and athleticism, some felt it appropriate to look first at her hair, expected to be perfect in the midst of the sweat, movement and intensity of Olympic athletic competition.

Criticism of Douglas came from the African-American community as well as Fox News. Rather than celebrate the ascendancy of an African-American woman to a peak of athletic achievement no African-American woman had ever reached, Douglas experienced the reality that success for some people, perhaps accentuated because of color, is often deprecated, not celebrated. Douglas' story is an inspirational one, and makes her an



Gabby Douglas skies high while performing her balance beam routine.

obvious choice for the REAL SPORTS sports person of the year. Her tale is also a reminder to us regarding the pitfalls that still exist for female athletes given the public's impulse to tear down successful athletes like Douglas, Griner, Wambach, Williams and others for being strong and dominating athletes. [RS]

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