

Sports equity needs re-evaluation in Fort Mill

Staff Editorial

"No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." -The United States Department of Justice.

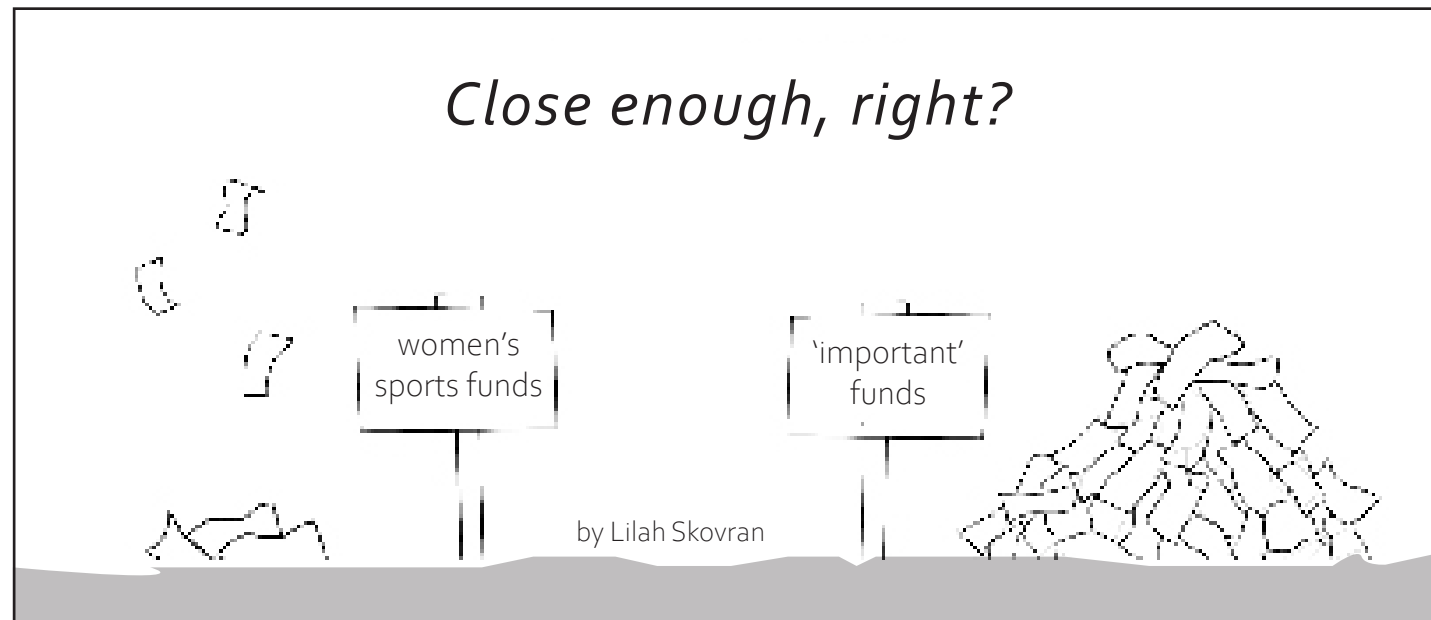
Title IX, a law that prohibits gender discrimination in public school organizations, including sports, took effect 50 years ago in 1972. Title IX is supposed to ensure all institutions who receive federal funding disperse money and assign all facilities and play times without discrimination. Title IX was meant to create an equal opportunity for men and women in sports, but that ideal has yet to materialize.

Despite the law, many women's sports teams in the U.S. have to deal with unfair bias and opportunity. This situation needs to change—and it needs to start with us.

While the Title IX problems at Nation Ford may not be intentional, the oversight and bias do exist. When it comes to funding, equipment, and facilities, women's and less popular sports still tend to get brushed aside. In terms of facilities and money, the focus tends to stay on the sports that bring in revenue: football, men's basketball and baseball.

By law, the Athletic Department is required to equally fund both men and women's sports. This applies to both federal funds, as well as to fundraisers and donations.

Not all sports have the same needs. For example, football jerseys are much more expensive than say volleyball's. That doesn't go to say that teams shouldn't get equal opportunity and quality, even if to achieve that, one requires more money.



Title IX encompasses both federal funds and fundraisers. Booster Club handles the fundraising portion, including some sports' concessions and ticket fees.

At press time, the Nation Ford Booster Club, had not responded to The Talon's inquiries for information or comment.

The issue of inequality also applies to facilities and equipment.

"It's complicated," according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office. "Title IX requires equal treatment—in terms of things ranging from equipment and uniforms to coaching and travel opportunities—across all girls' and boys' teams, not necessarily spending."

Coaches, too, are beginning to take notice of the discrepancy.

For example, the softball team has a less than functional practice facility, yet the baseball team's new facility is already under construction. Women's lacrosse battles for practice fields. Even locker rooms have become an issue for

female athletes.

That's not to say that Nation Ford isn't making steady progress. There are processes in place to create equal opportunity.

Take for example, the opportunity to participate, resulting in a female wrestler or a male cheerleader. Both the school and the district take into account funding, facilities and transportation needs.

Though the efforts are heading in the right direction, Fort Mill still has work to do to fulfill Title IX requirements and the promise it represents.

The problem may be awareness, yet it's been inequitable for years. Due to the state of locker rooms (or the lack of locker rooms), female athletes started a game with the goal of changing in every bathroom in the school before the end of their seasons, collecting school bathrooms like trophies.

Physical change won't happen overnight, but attitudes can.

An intentional re-evaluation of policy regarding Fort Mill District sports

would help create positive change; analysis of funding, fields, locker space, and equipment while removing gender from the equation, so that a team is simply a team, is a good start.

A status report on policy and Title IX compliance may even require a third party to further remove bias.

Transparency about the lack of equity is important, because obscuring the differences between teams creates a feeling of injustice and resentment. Acknowledgement might not fix the problem, but it would validate and give hope to female athletes—who then deserve action.

Funding in general is a prevalent issue, as is the lack of transparency around it, but it doesn't have to then create imbalance between athletic teams.

If Title IX was intended to create equal opportunity and remove bias, then that principle remains unrealized even after five decades of law, not only failing the programs, but most importantly, the athletes themselves. -RS