

## New Players: The Recruitment and Admission of Women Athletes

VIRGINIA WOOLF's plea, in *A Room of One's Own*, for the celebration of difference notwithstanding, the trends in recruiting and admitting women athletes have moved in the same direction as the one we observed among the men. The 1951 cohort serves as a rather different reference point for the women, however, since most women's intercollegiate athletic programs were so undeveloped in that era that it is difficult even to determine, retrospectively, how many women athletes were playing on teams engaged in intercollegiate competition.<sup>1</sup> By the time of the '76 cohort, more intercollegiate competition was occurring, though certainly not on today's scale. Then, by the late 1980s, the broad changes described in the previous chapter are visibly reflected in both enrollment patterns and the admissions process, including the early identification and active recruitment of athletic talent. More impressionistic evidence suggests that these trends in admissions and enrollment were even more pronounced by the late 1990s. The "arrow" has continued to point upward, and we believe that the pace of change has, if anything, quickened.

### NUMBERS OF WOMEN ATHLETES

In the 1989 cohort, the percentage of women who were athletes (defined, as in the case of men, as all women students who received one or more letters or other athletic awards for participation on intercollegiate teams while they were in college) ranged from a low of 3 percent of all women students at the large Division IA public universities to a high of 19 percent at the Division III coed liberal arts colleges—with 6 percent at the Division IA private universities, 12 percent at the women's colleges, and 15 percent at the Ivies. These percentages are markedly higher than the corresponding figures for the women in the '76 cohort at the Ivies and the coed colleges, slightly higher than the figures for the '76 cohort at the women's colleges, nearly the same as those for the Division IA private universities, and exactly the same as those for the Division IA public universities (Scorecard 6.1).

TABLE 6.1  
Number of 1997-98 Intercollegiate Athletes by Sport (Selected Schools, Female Only)

	University of Michigan	Stanford	Duke	Tulane	Columbia/ Barnard	Princeton	Denison	Williams
Archery	—	—	—	—	34	—	—	—
Basketball	13	16	14	14	13	16	17	15
Fencing	—	14	12	—	20	14	—	—
Field hockey	21	22	20	—	25	24	26	34
Golf	9	8	7	8	—	12	—	—
Gymnastics	15	14	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ice hockey	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ice hockey	—	24	22	—	—	19	—	18
Lacrosse	72	40	—	—	27	28	25	25
Rowing	—	—	—	—	23	34	—	27
Sailing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Skiing	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	16
Soccer	29	24	23	20	24	23	21	21
Softball	19	16	—	—	—	16	15	18
Squash	—	—	—	—	—	15	—	12
Swimming	32	30	16	—	26	42	32	34
Synchronized swimming	—	11	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tennis	11	8	10	12	9	12	12	9
Track-cross-country	61	68	80	29	61	120	59	61
Volleyball	22	15	12	14	12	9	15	14
Water polo	—	23	—	—	—	21	—	—
Total	304	348	216	97	274	405	222	304
As percent of all women	3	10	7	3	6	19	20	32
Number of teams	11	16	10	6	11	15	9	13

Source: Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act filings, 1997-98.

The absolute number of women playing intercollegiate sports varies widely within this universe of institutions, as can be seen from the following 1997–98 figures: 97 at Tulane, around 220 at Duke and Denison, 274 at Columbia/Barnard, about 300 at both Williams College and the University of Michigan, nearly 350 at Stanford, and just over 400 at Princeton (Table 6.1).<sup>2</sup> As the detailed data in the table indicate, almost one-quarter of these women athletes participated in track–cross-country. Women’s basketball, soccer, tennis, and volleyball are the other intercollegiate sports offered at all eight of these schools, but typical squad sizes are much smaller. Women’s field hockey and swimming are offered at seven of the eight schools; lacrosse is offered at six schools; golf, rowing, and softball at five; fencing at four; and then archery, gymnastics, ice hockey, sailing, skiing, squash, synchronized swimming, and water polo at one or two of the schools in this illustrative subsample of the College and Beyond institutions.

#### RECRUITMENT AND THE “ATHLETIC ADVANTAGE” FOR WOMEN

The growing importance of recruitment in women’s intercollegiate sports was brought home to one of the authors when he was interviewing a job candidate a few years ago. The candidate had just graduated from a school in the study, and when asked what had led her to attend the school in question she replied: “Well, I’m a catcher, and I was recruited to come here to play on the softball team.”

The extent of the change in recruitment patterns for women athletes in the Ivies and the Division III coed liberal arts colleges is revealed dramatically in Figure 6.1, which compares the percentages of male and female athletes in ’76 and ’89 who said that they were recruited to come to their colleges (see also Scorecard 6.2).<sup>3</sup> In 1976, there was considerable recruitment of male athletes, but very few women athletes at any of these schools felt that they had been “recruited” in the sense in which the term is now used. As we saw in the previous chapter, women’s sports received rather low-key institutional support in the late 1970s.

*A member of the '76 cohort at Yale who played soccer and field hockey:*

We didn’t get to go to Cornell because it was too far. Of course our men’s team would have gone, and now they fly them all over the country. [Still] I thought that we had very good treatment [from the school]. The alumni, I think, were a different story. I still play soccer, and I tell my teenagers that

they just don’t appreciate what they grew up with. I can still remember alumni walking across our field in the middle of our game. We were wearing uniforms and everything and they thought “oh, isn’t that cute.” That was before our soccer stadium and everything too. Both teams [soccer and field hockey] started when I was there. Each team just had one coach. Obviously now no team would ever have just one coach. . . . It was a very different approach than today. I think my senior year was the first year that they recruited [for soccer], and people had played their whole lives, you know, from the time they were 6 or 7. Most of us had played for a little bit in high school and then were still able to make the team. . . .

I think that sports is much more serious now but probably because it’s a means to an end. A lot of people see it as a means to get into college now. [In 1976] it was just one more activity on the application. I played it because I loved it but it wasn’t something that you ever thought, especially as a woman at that time, would make or break your chances of getting into a school.

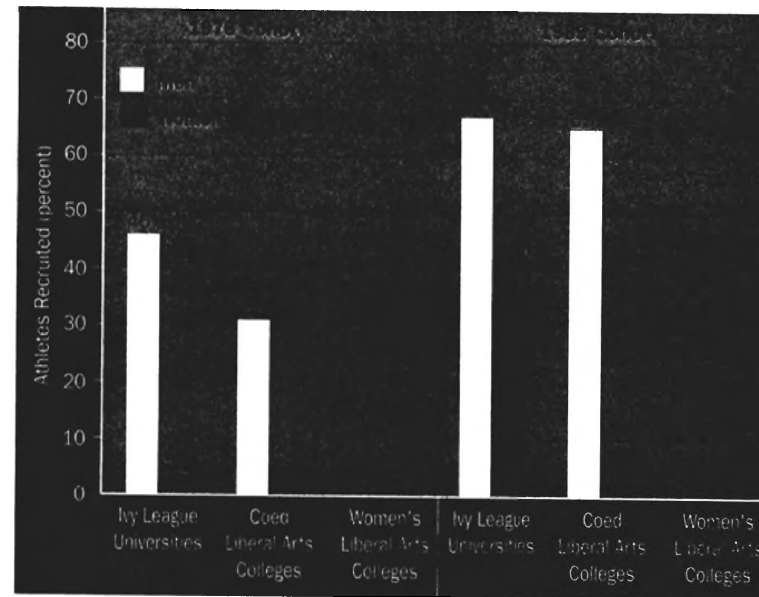


Figure 6.1. Percent of Athletes Reporting That Being “Recruited” Was a “Very Important” Reason for Choosing This Specific College (by Cohort, Gender, and Division)

Source: College and Beyond (see Scorecard 6.2).

The situation was very different in 1989, when over 40 percent of all the women athletes in the Ivies said that they had been recruited (the percentages are even higher at the Division IA universities, but the absolute numbers are too small to justify emphasizing the exact figures). In the coed liberal arts colleges, larger numbers of women athletes felt that having been recruited contributed to their having chosen their college (9 percent, as compared with 5 percent in 1976), but the recruitment of women athletes at the Division III level was obviously still lagging behind recruitment in the Ivies. (In contrast, by 1989 the extent of recruitment of male athletes at the coed liberal arts colleges had essentially caught up with the Ivy League pattern, in spite of different rules concerning off-campus recruiting.) The recruitment of women athletes by the women's colleges, which was almost nonexistent in 1976, was visible (but just barely) in 1989.

The general impression conveyed by Figure 6.1 is that the pattern of recruitment of women athletes is indeed emulating the pattern established for the men who play intercollegiate sports, but it is following with a lag. We suspect strongly that if we had data for the 1999 entering cohort, the recruitment of women athletes at all of the schools in the study, including the women's colleges, would be seen to resemble the recruitment of men much more closely than it did in 1989. Conversations with admissions officers and others at these colleges support this interpretation.

There is a more convincing way to document the changing emphasis given to the recruitment of women athletes. In Figure 6.2, we compare (as we did with the men) the admissions "advantage" enjoyed by women who were minorities, legacies, and identified athletes at a non-scholarship school in our study that was able to provide comprehensive data for all applicants.<sup>4</sup> This figure is so important, and conveys so much information, that we should explain again the approach used in creating figures of this kind. We are comparing here the actual admissions probabilities for four groups of students—a reference group of students at large, legacies, minority students, and athletes identified by coaches—after controlling for differences in their SAT scores.<sup>5</sup>

All three of the targeted groups enjoyed a significant admissions advantage in 1976. The advantage of 15 points enjoyed by the women athletes (which means that they had a 15 percent better chance of being admitted than a student at large with the same SAT scores) is noteworthy in light of the very small number of women in that cohort who related their attendance at college to a direct recruitment experience. The point is that admissions officers could—and apparently did—favor candidates with athletic talent even in the absence of the more overt kinds of recruitment now in vogue. By 1989, a woman who was a recruited athlete had a 26 percent better chance of being admitted than a female student at large, af-

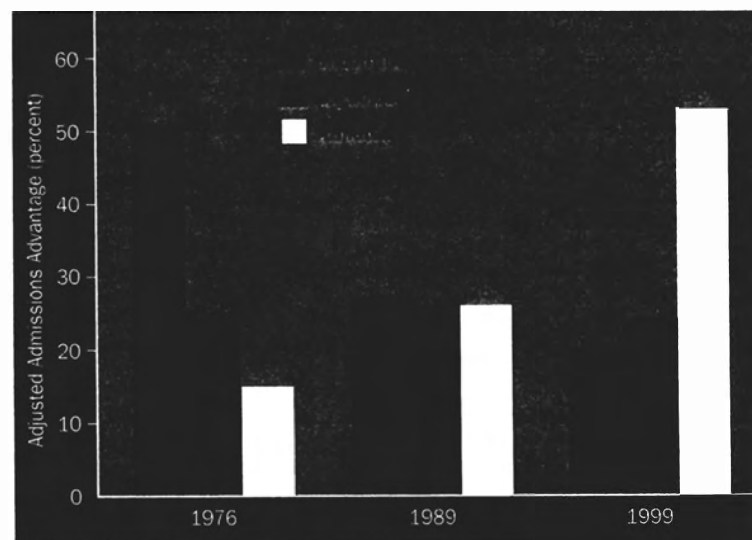


Figure 6.2. Adjusted Admissions Advantage at a Representative Non-Scholarship School, Controlling for Differences in SAT Scores (1976, 1989, and 1999, Female Only)

ter adjusting for differences in SAT scores;<sup>6</sup> women legacies and minorities in the '89 cohort both enjoyed essentially the same admissions advantage as the women athletes. But by far the most striking set of data in this figure are those for the 1999 admissions cohort: in this recent group of applicants, the recruited athletes had an admissions advantage over students at large of 53 percent—now essentially twice the degree of advantage enjoyed by legacies and minority students.<sup>7</sup>

For the 1989 and 1999 cohorts, the pattern of admissions advantage for women is amazingly similar to the pattern for men. To illustrate the degree of similarity, we have reproduced the figures for both the women and the men in Figure 6.3. In the '89 cohort, the male and female athletes enjoyed admissions advantages of 30 and 33 percent, respectively. The admissions advantages enjoyed by both men and women on the coaches' lists had increased markedly by the time the '99 cohort was admitted, both in terms of their absolute values and in relation to the advantages enjoyed by legacies and minority candidates; moreover, the admissions advantage for women athletes has now surpassed (slightly) the advantage enjoyed by their male counterparts.

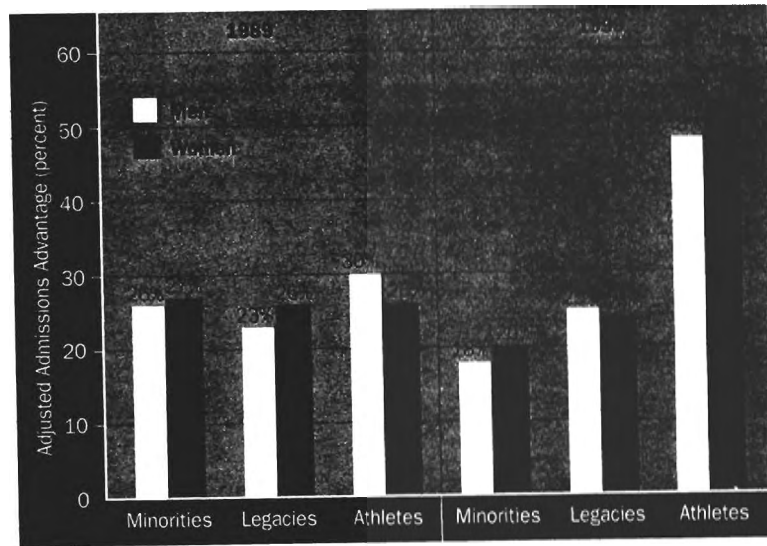


Figure 6.3. Adjusted Admissions Advantages at a Representative Non-Scholarship School, Controlling for Differences in SAT Scores (by Gender, 1989 and 1999)

#### ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

Since the role of athletics in the admissions process for women who play sports has mimicked the pattern shown by the men, measurable differences in academic preparation should begin to be evident in the data for the 1989 cohort. And this is in fact the case. Between the 1976 and 1989 cohorts, average SATs rose by 40 points for female students at large (in the sector composite shown on Scorecard 6.3), while they fell slightly for women who went on to play intercollegiate sports. As one would suspect, the more that another factor (athletic ability) counts in the admissions equation, the less likely it is that those who rank high on that scale will match the SAT scores of those who do extremely well on the standardized tests.

The consistency of this shift across types of schools is shown in Figure 6.4. With the single exception of the women's colleges, every type of college or university in our study exhibited at least a modest SAT deficit for women athletes in 1976. (The women athletes in this cohort at the women's colleges actually had modestly higher test scores than the stu-

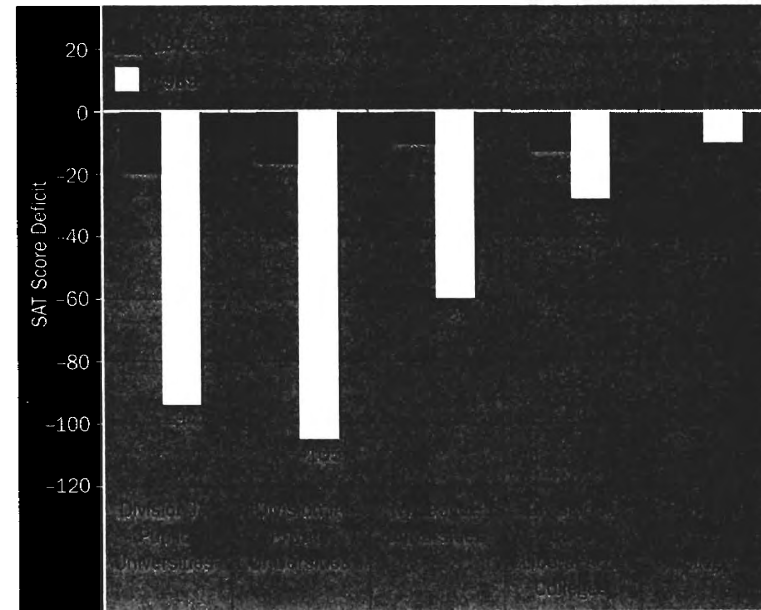


Figure 6.4. Athlete SAT Divergence from Students at Large (by Cohort and Division, Female Only)

Source: College and Beyond.

dents at large.) But in 1989, even the women's colleges reported lower SAT scores for their athletes than for other women students, and at every type of college and university represented in the figure the gap in SAT scores between women athletes and students at large had widened appreciably over this 13-year period. The sizes of the SAT deficits also correlate at least roughly with the different degrees of emphasis placed on athletic recruiting (refer back to Scorecard 6.2); in particular, the women athletes at the Division III colleges (coed and women's) are less likely to have said that they were recruited and, in general, have SAT scores that are closer to those of their fellow students.<sup>8</sup>

We are also able to look at SAT scores separately by sport (see Appendix Table B.6.1). The most consistent pattern that emerges is that women basketball players, especially in the Division IA public and private universities, had SAT scores *far* lower than those of other women students: the gaps are -177 points at the public universities and -240 points at the private universities. In the Ivies, the basketball players had an SAT deficit

of -98 points. This pattern is consistent with the movement of women's basketball toward the High Profile sports category, a trend that is now much more pronounced than it was when these data were collected for the '89 cohort. It should also be noted, however, that *some* SAT gap (or deficit) is found in almost every women's sport within almost every type of school (the clearest exceptions are crew and a few other sports in the Division III coed liberal arts colleges). The important point is that the results shown in the text are not driven by admissions concessions confined to a small number of sports.

Entering students bring with them not only SAT scores and other objective measures of their academic performance in high school but also their own perceptions of how talented they are academically. In Figure 6.5 and Scorecard 6.4 we chart the intellectual self-confidence of the women, as compared with the self-confidence of their male classmates. Since we would expect those with higher SAT scores to have more intellectual self-confidence than those with lower scores, we superimpose average SAT scores on the figure. The first story line, demonstrated so powerfully in the figure and consistent with the findings in many other studies, is that women appear to undervalue (or at least to underreport) their intellectual ability relative to men with comparable SAT scores. The second story line is that women athletes are even less likely than other women to express the highest level of intellectual self-confidence (only 13 percent put themselves in the top decile, as compared with 20 percent of all women students at these schools) and that this differential can be explained only partly by the lower SAT scores of the women athletes. The male High Profile athletes, at the other extreme, exhibit *higher* intellectual self-confidence in relation to their test scores than do other students.<sup>9</sup>

Given time, the women athletes may, like the male athletes in the High Profile sports, learn to feel confident—perhaps even overly confident—about their intellectual prowess, rather than understate it. This could well be the case, especially if our culture ends up bestowing upon young girls who play sports the same sort of approbation showered upon young boys who excel at sports. Such support could go a long way in helping women gain the confidence that men derive from sports—the confidence that Virginia Woolf admired when reading something written by a man: “It was so direct, so straightforward after the writing of women. It indicated such freedom of minds, such liberty of person, such confidence in himself. One had a sense of physical well-being in the presence of this well-nourished, well-educated, free mind, which had never been thwarted or opposed, but had had full liberty from birth to stretch itself in whatever way it liked.” As of 1989, however, there were no signs

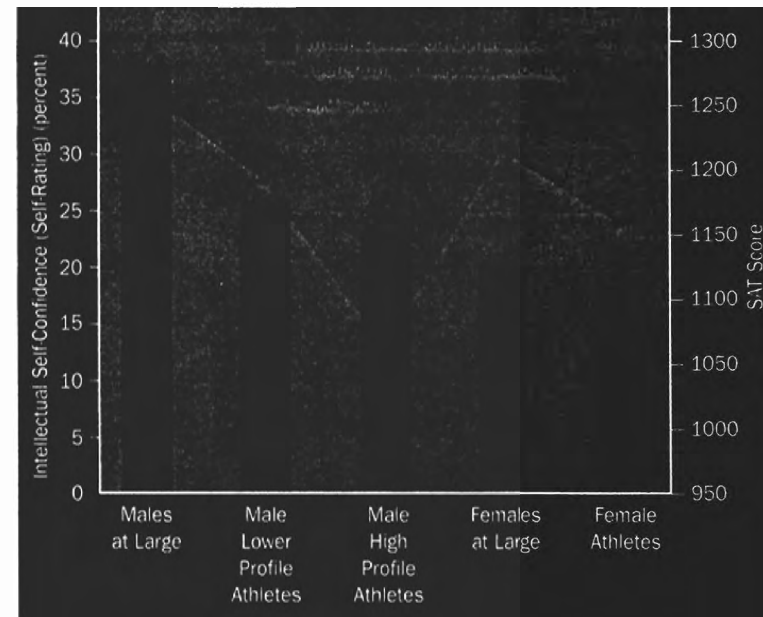


Figure 6.5. Intellectual Self-Confidence and SAT Scores (by Athlete Status and Gender, 1989 Cohort)

Source: College and Beyond (see Scorecard 6.4).

of this happening. In the race to establish a presence in a seminar or in a coed study group, this apparent gap in intellectual self-confidence (undeserved as it appears to be) afflicted women athletes disproportionately.

#### DIVERSITY

The presence of women has itself represented an enormous increase in diversity at schools that were all male in 1951. By 1989, over half of the population of the schools we are studying was female. Now that women are equal partners in gaining access to the world of selective colleges and universities that was once male-dominated, are women athletes also adding to the racial and socioeconomic diversity of the female campus population?

*Racial Diversity*

Contrary to some popular impressions, more aggressive recruitment of women athletes is not bringing disproportionately larger numbers of African American women to campuses (as it is in the case of the male athletes in the High Profile sports). Only in the Division IA private universities has the presence of women athletes increased the relative number of African American women. In every other set of schools, the share of African American women playing intercollegiate sports is much lower—even half the corresponding percentage of African American women in the student-at-large category (Figure 6.6). Moreover, the percentage of African American women playing sports at these schools, relative to the overall percentage of African American women enrolled, was, if anything, lower in '89 than in '76 (Scorecard 6.5). The explanation presumably lies in the increased number of women's teams, many of which are in traditionally "white" sports such as golf and fencing. There is of course no women's equivalent to football, and sports such as basketball and track

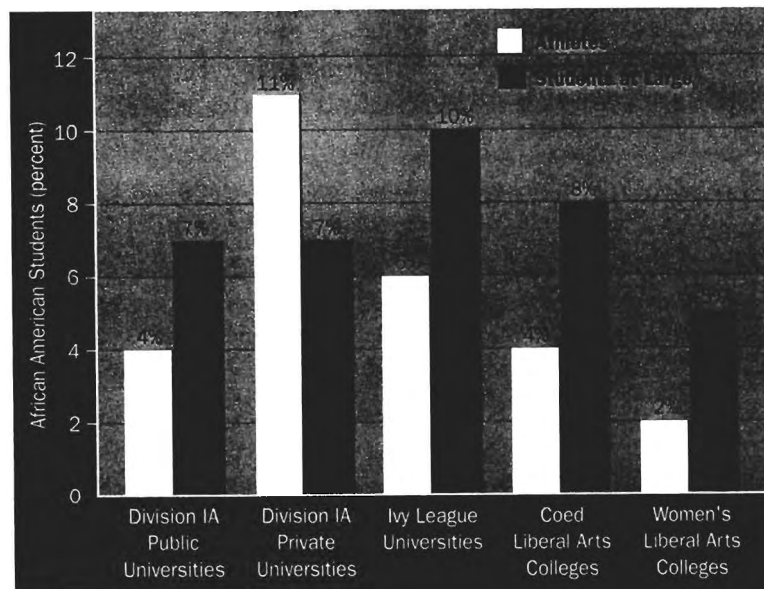


Figure 6.6. African Americans as a Percent of All Female Students (by Athlete Status and Division, 1989 Cohort)

Source: College and Beyond (see Scorecard 6.5).

(which traditionally have been more likely to include minority participants) were already in place in 1976. In any event, the pressure to increase athletic opportunities for women, driven in large part by Title IX, cannot be said to have encouraged a greater degree of racial diversity.

*Socioeconomic Backgrounds*

In 1976, opportunities for girls in secondary school (and for even younger girls) to play many sports were often limited either to those who could develop such interests through clubs or to those who attended private schools or upscale high schools that could afford to provide such opportunities. Thus it is not surprising that women who played sports were more likely than other women to come from private schools and to be children of parents who were college graduates (see Scorecards 6.6 to 6.8). Overall, 28 percent of women athletes in the '76 cohort attended private schools, as compared with 21 percent of all women students attending the colleges in our study; 80 percent of the fathers of the women athletes (and 60 percent of the mothers) had B.A.s, as compared with 73 percent of the fathers of other women students (and 55 percent of the mothers).

By 1989, this had changed, as girls were now playing sports in a much wider array of secondary schools across the country. Thus the "prep school advantage" that is evident in the 1976 cohort had largely disappeared by 1989, when the women athletes and other women students were, for all intents and purposes, equally likely to have parents with college degrees; by 1989, women athletes were actually slightly more likely to come from public schools than were their classmates. Athletics, for women, has ceased to be an activity with leisure class overtones, and if present trends continue we can expect women's athletics to make at least a modest contribution to socioeconomic diversity (if not to racial diversity) on the campus in future years.

*Attitudes and Goals*

We recall that the male athletes demonstrated a pattern of shared values, many of which could be considered more conservative than those held by their male classmates. Are these same views shared by women athletes? In some respects they are, but with at least one interesting difference.

Most relevant are the responses of the women to the direct question of how they classify themselves politically (Scorecards 6.9a and 6.9b). In both the '76 and '89 cohorts, women athletes were less likely than other women to put themselves in the "liberal" or "far left" categories: 37 percent of the women athletes versus 47 percent of the other women in '76,



and 39 percent of the athletes versus 46 percent of their classmates in '89. Conversely, more women athletes than other women considered themselves "conservative" or "far right." This is true of women in both the '76 and '89 cohorts, but here we also see a shift over time: whereas women athletes in the '76 cohort were only slightly more likely than other women to classify themselves as conservatives (15 percent versus 13 percent), this gap was considerably larger in the '89 cohort (21 percent of the women athletes classified themselves as conservatives versus 15 percent of the other women).

In this regard, as in so many others, the degree of recruitment matters. The differences in political views between women athletes and other women were much more pronounced in the schools where women were more intensively recruited. For example, in the Division IA private universities, 38 percent of women athletes in the '89 cohort rate themselves as conservative versus 23 percent of students at large (Scorecard 6.9b). In interpreting these CIRP survey data by type of school, we must remember that cell sizes are smaller at the Division IA universities than elsewhere; still, the general pattern seems established, especially when we compare the Ivies with both the coed liberal arts colleges and the women's colleges. Women athletes are significantly more conservative than other women in the Ivies, whereas the differences in political orientation at both the coed liberal arts colleges and the women's colleges are negligible.

Thus it appears as if both male and female athletes (especially recruited athletes) hold political-social views that differ somewhat from those espoused by male and female students at large. But this congruence between men and women who play sports in college disappears when we investigate the importance they attach to making money. Whereas a disproportionate share of male athletes (as compared with other male students) entered college rating the goal "to be very well off financially" as "essential" or "very important" (refer back to Figure 2.9), there is no such difference between women who were and were not athletes (Figure 6.7). Women students who attended the schools included in this study are consistently less inclined than their male peers to aspire to be very well off financially. Those women who played sports at the scholarship-granting schools are only slightly more likely than the students at large to count this as an essential goal, and at the non-scholarship schools there is a clear tendency for women athletes to be less likely to aspire to be very well off financially. In short, the typical woman athlete has not yet assumed the male athlete's view of the goals of the game of life. If this trend continues at the non-scholarship schools, it may be worth pondering what the consequences will be for women who share the politically conservative attitudes of the male athletic culture, but not the concomitant ambition to maximize their earnings potential.

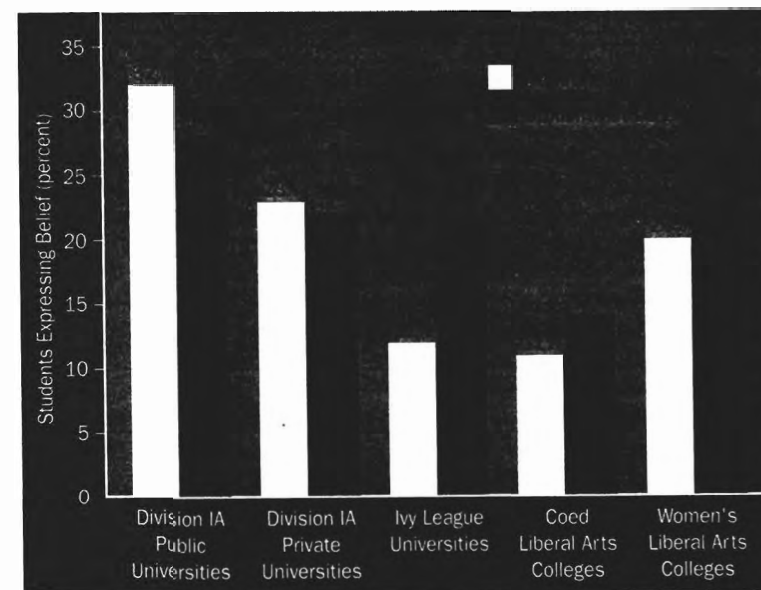


Figure 6.7. Percent of Freshmen Reporting It Is a "Very Important" or "Essential" Goal to "Be Very Well Off Financially" (by Athlete Status and Division, 1989 Cohort)

Source: College and Beyond.

Though there is clearly at least one important difference in attitudes between the women and men who are serious about college sports, women athletes, and especially those who were recruited, appear to be, in the words of former Northwestern University President Arnold Weber, "following the men down the primrose path." By 1989, the institutions that were recruiting women athletes with the same intensity with which they were recruiting men had largely succeeded in replicating the male model. How thorough will this imitation of the men's model become in the context of continuing efforts to achieve gender equity? We have some evidence that, in the decade since the 1989 cohort was admitted, emulation has continued to occur. As we saw at the coeducational school for which we have complete admissions data for 1999 as well as for 1989, the admissions advantage for women athletes has become very large, and it has even exceeded (slightly) the advantage enjoyed by the

male athletes. Testimony from admissions officers confirms that recruitment of women athletes has become more and more intense, and that the same kinds of special consideration are given to both groups of athletes in the admissions process.

At the women's colleges, where gender equity has never been an issue (for obvious reasons), the imitation of the men's athletic model had not truly begun in 1989. The mean SAT score of the women who played sports at Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Smith, and Wellesley was essentially the same (only 10 points lower) than the mean SAT score of their student-at-large peers. But even though there were no internal institutional pressures to achieve equity with men, external pressures brought about by national trends were unmistakable. "All of a sudden in the early '90s," one athletics administrator at a women's college told us, "we looked up and were going 0–11 or 2–13 in a lot of sports." Whereas the coeducational colleges against whom they competed had geared up their women's programs to keep pace with their men's teams, the seeming insularity from Title IX of women's colleges had allowed them to lag behind. Recent data, however, tell a different story. Having been given access to 1999 admissions data for one of the women's colleges in the study, we learned that recruited athletes in that college's '99 cohort enjoyed a 26-percentage-point admissions advantage when compared with students at large. This level of admissions advantage was comparable to that for underrepresented minorities (30-point advantage) and appreciably higher than for legacies (16 percentage points). Current trends suggest that in another ten years the admissions picture at the women's colleges may well resemble even more closely the picture at the other schools in our study.

In earlier chapters, we have seen the ways in which differences in academic preparation, backgrounds, and goals have played out in college and then over the course of the lives of the male students. How being recruited to college to play intercollegiate sports will affect women's lives is far harder to judge, since the "experiment" is so recent. It is also important to recognize that changes in educational and career opportunities for high-achieving women have by no means reached a steady state. For example, a great deal of debate surrounds the question of whether women are now able to choose their paths—and to play the game of life—by the same rules as men or whether women are now merely free to pile career opportunities and the attendant pressures on top of the old expectations associated with home and family responsibilities. These are questions that can be addressed more knowledgeably after we examine, in the next chapter, the academic outcomes achieved by women in college (including their choices of field of study) and then, in Chapter 8, the post-college experiences of women who did and did not play college sports.

## Women Athletes in College

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER we saw that there have been marked changes, between the 1976 and 1989 cohorts, in the academic and non-academic profiles of the freshmen women who went on to play college sports. Women who played sports in 1989 began to exhibit more—but by no means all—of the characteristics of the men who played college sports: they had lower SAT scores than their classmates, had different perceptions of their own abilities (especially intellectual self-confidence), and shared some of the men's more conservative political and social views, though they did not have the same sense of college as a path to large economic rewards. In this chapter we examine how the women from these two generations fared academically in college.

Even with all the debate over the consequences of Title IX, the experiment of more aggressive development of women's college sports is still young; nevertheless, enough time has passed for us to begin to discern the consequences of the changes that are still unfolding. Have the increased opportunities for women to compete in athletics transplanted the culture of male sports to the women athletes (including effects on academic performance and choices of field of study) or have women who play college sports formulated an alternative model?

### GRADUATION RATES

Patterns of graduation rates are very similar for women and men: women athletes attending these schools have graduated at very high rates in both the '76 and '89 cohorts, and at higher rates than their classmates (Figure 7.1). The athlete's "advantage" in graduation rates has narrowed for the women as it has for the men, but this narrowing of the gap, in both instances, is due to the improvement in the graduation rates of students at large between 1976 and 1989. Women who participated in other time-intensive extracurricular activities were (as was the case with the men) even more likely to graduate than women athletes. The story line here is the same for the women as for the men: athletes and other students heavily engaged in organized activities of one kind or another are more likely to graduate than students at large, who may be more