

Girls and Sports

I was a physical child. Growing up, I loved to play sports. Badminton, Track, High-Jump, Discus, Basketball and Volleyball were my favorite events, all of which I played in school except Badminton, which I played nearly every evening on the road outside my house.

I'm not sure if my parents even knew what all I played at school other than when I brought home some certificate or another from our Annual Sports Day competitions which took place at the National Stadium in New Delhi. Even though it was at such an illustrious venue, it was only our school there on that day- the students and the teachers. No parents were invited or expected to come. None ever did.

The parents only came to the stadium one day in the entire year to see what was referred to as the then famous Lady Irwin School P.T. show. Starting a few months before the event, we sold tickets for it amongst our neighbors. and then for almost an entire month rehearsed for it. The practice sessions started with one hour a day in the mornings at school to ultimately spending entire days at the stadium for at least a week before the show. Sometimes in excitement, we would spot the few famous sports figures of that time show up at the stadium: Always men.

Within school premises we had competitions too. Kho-Kho, Basketball and Volleyball were the big ones, and I regularly made the house teams for all three. Then we entered ninth grade and for the first time I heard about something called the Basketball school team, which would actually play other schools. I remember doing perfect dribbles, making every shot and making it into the team with the highest score. I was however, the only one from my section and even in a school like mine that had a compulsory period

for sports everyday from elementary to senior year, my class teacher retorted: "*No! How can you play? You can't miss classes! We can't teach separately for just you!*" ending in those few indifferent statements all my opportunities and aspirations in sports. I didn't know whom I could go to appeal to, and there were no sports outside of school.

Strangely, I never heard about our basketball team either- either its successes or its losses. They must have played, or maybe they were dismantled too, but no one really cared. Sports were just games, not really important in the large scheme of things, especially for women.

I'm sure I must have been disappointed though because I do remember the incident to this day, but I think the Indian thought process in all such things must have prevailed, and I must have said, Oh Well- can't do anything about it, and moved on. I'm sure I did not bother to tell my parents about it. What could they do anyway? And then I was a girl, what will I do with sports in my future life? It wasn't like Math or Science... It wouldn't help in the senior year board exams, would it?

Two days ago I took my son and daughter to see the Varsity Basketball game at Deering High School across from our home. Along with my two I sat mesmerized and enthralled as girl after amazing girl (they are undefeated after all) ran and controlled and shot the ball into the hoop with supreme certainty. They were fast, they were skilled, and they exuded confidence with their parents and brothers and sisters and grandparents and even friends out there en-masse to support them for the final game.

I wanted my daughter who also loves basketball to see that, and understand that here in America just like these girls who are inspiring her awe today, she herself can be unstoppable, if she works hard and with confidence towards her objectives, may those be

Academics or Soccer or Basketball, or perhaps, all three. No one would consider it unimportant and a waste of her time!