

# The Columbus Dispatch

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BEXLEY

## Sports legends reflect on 50 years of Title IX at Bexley library event



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The Columbus Dispatch

Published 12:00 p.m. ET June 30, 2022

In the 50 years since Title IX became federal law, the United States has made progress in advancing opportunities for female athletes, but much progress still has not been realized, a panel of legendary female athletes and coaches said during a June 29 discussion at the Bexley Public Library.

Title IX is a 1972 federal civil rights law that prohibits gender-based discrimination in any school or education program that receives federal funding.

Prior to Title IX's passage, "only 7% of high school girls participated in any kind of sports team or club sport, panel moderator Kristin Watt said.

Watt is an attorney, a 1986 women's basketball captain at Ohio State and a longtime analyst for the team's radio broadcasts.

"Since Title IX, the percentages have gone up over 1,000% of girls participating in sports now in K-12 and 614% in colleges," she said.

Other panelists were Stephanie Hightower, 1980 track and field Olympian and the first female scholarship recipient at Ohio State University; Linda Shetina Logan, executive director of the Greater Columbus Sports Commission; and Sue Ramsey, 1974 Bexley High School graduate, first female scholarship recipient at Indiana University, championship-winning coach at the University of Dayton and Ashland University and a member of the Ohio Basketball Hall of Fame.

In addition to winning the 1980 Olympic trials, Hightower is a four-time U.S. champion for 100-meter hurdles and a five-time U.S. indoor champion for 60-meter hurdles. She also was an NCAA and Big 10 champion in the hurdles.

In her four years (1977-80) at Ohio State, she was undefeated in Big 10 competition.

Hightower said Title IX ushered in incremental yet steady progress.

“It was a slow grind, but you could see the intention – we had our own trainers, we had our own locker rooms,” she said. “We had some of the amenities, but we didn’t have all of the amenities that the men had.”

Ramsey said she noticed more opportunities after Title IX was passed during her sophomore year at Bexley High School.

“When I got to high school, they did not allow girls to play any sport except volleyball,” Ramey said. “I played volleyball, and then in my sophomore year, they allowed us to play the rest of the sports.”

Ramsey said Title IX paved the way for her career in basketball. Among her many career accomplishments, Ramsey went on to coach a Division II women’s basketball team at Ashland University. Her teams had a 501-364 record over 20 years, finishing at .500 or better in 16 of them and winning a Division II national championship in 2013.

“My freshman year (in high school), myself and two other teammates, we volunteered to be managers of the (men’s) basketball team,” she said. “The three of us would scrimmage the starting five (players on the men’s basketball team) and beat them. Maybe we should have played. I don’t know.”

Logan said fans – those in central Ohio, in particular – have played a major role in advancing women’s sports since Title IX. She said fan enthusiasm has helped Columbus attract major events such as the 2021 NCAA women’s volleyball championship and the 2018 NCAA Women’s Final Four basketball championship. It also was a factor in the city being named a finalist to host the Final Four at the end of the decade.

“Whether it’s sellout crowds or the (TV) viewerships are up and there’s new leagues that are out there, everybody has played their part,” Logan said. “I think that because of the two or three generations that have come up since Title IX, they’ve seen – you have to see it to believe it – there’s so many more opportunities. We are a great city that really will come out for women’s sports.”

Despite progress over the past 50 years, there is still much work to be done to continue to advance gender equity in sports, the panelists said.

“When you have a daughter, you want her to have an opportunity to play sports, just like you did,” Ramsey said. “Title IX’s just about opening the door for opportunities.”

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