

# A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF INEQUALITIES AND TRIUMPHS FOR WOMEN IN SPORT SINCE THE DAWN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

- The first ever woman to win gold in the Olympic Games was Swiss sailor Helene de Pourtales, in 1900.
- That year, the participation ratio of women to men was 22:975. (Sorry Ruth, no simplification possible.)
- In 1912, women were allowed to take part in aquatic sports in the Olympics, wearing woolen swimsuits that covered a lot more skin than our modern ones. The British team, however, wore silk ones which were obviously way lighter (and way fancier).
- In 1922, there was the first Women's Olympics, but only four of these ever occurred.
- In 1936, the youngest ever Olympic gold medal winner was a thirteen year old Californian girl called Marjorie Gestring, who won in 3m springboard diving.
- In 1976, Nadia Comaneci won the first perfect ten on the uneven bars at age fourteen.
- In 1981, an Irish woman at a golf club was asked by an interviewer why women weren't allowed to be full members of golf clubs. She replied it was maybe because men started playing golf first, it was a sport originally designed for and played by men. Another woman said, "Women didn't play golf. And it has never changed. But I think it will change. I do. It must change, and it will."
- Forty years later, Portmarnock Golf Club ended its male-only membership policy after 127 years. They let in their first female members in May 2021.

- In a 1985 interview with Tom Dowd, president of the LGFA from 1979 - 1982, he spoke about how the funding for the LGFA was practically nonexistent, whereas everything was provided for the men including match expenses and money for a meal afterwards (“a steak”). When asked about the women, he replied, “Ah no, unless the day of the All-Irelands, they would have a meal alright, you know, chicken and chips, all they could afford.”
- He also said the best support for a match he had ever seen was the 1977 Gaelic football between Cavan and Roscommon. It had gotten more publicity than usual because a nun was being let out of a convent in England to play.
- Marian Finucane went on to interview some girls as part of a special segment on women’s football. They insisted they took it more seriously than the male players but they themselves were taken less seriously.
- Marian quotes from two letters objecting to women playing football here.
- In 1998, women's hockey was introduced to the Olympics. Twenty years later, Ireland’s team won the World Cup semi-final and have qualified for the 2021 Olympics in Tokyo this year.
- In the Olympics in Rio in 2016, women’s participation was 45%, so close to perfect equality!
- FIRST

## LGFA & GAA & CAMOGIE ASSOCIATION

- Gaa is unique in Ireland in the fact that it is the only sport to have separate governing bodies for men and women. This has affected equality in the sport in many ways. The Gaa own almost all the pitches in Ireland means that the LGFA and the CA have to rent pitches from the GAA. This means female players are provided

with no security that their matches will be played where and when they have been told the match will be played. A prime example was when Cork and Galway were going to play a football All-Ireland semi-final in Parnell Park. The pitch was switched to Croke Park because Parnell Park was frozen but due to the switch the Galway team arrived late to the match. They were told they had only seven minutes to warm up; the match could not be pushed back because there was a men's match right after. This brings us to the question: would this have happened if the GAA, LGFA and Camogie Association were united? Earlier this year, it was announced that women and men were going to get equal funding from the GAA, which means women's funding will have tripled. Recently, the men and women's Gaelic Players' Association merged with an overwhelming majority. This shows the State and players are willing to make the change, so is it time for the three to become one?

## DRESS CODES

- A 2018 final full of fouls prompted the CA to change some rules, but women still had to wear skorts.
- They made no statements to back this up and neither did they give any reason for it
- Anya Alvarez (an American golfer) was sent home from a golf club for the really stupid reason that her 'shorts were too short'
- The WBA (World Badminton Association, la di da) said that in order to get more publicity and funding they said that all women had to wear dresses or skirts to come across as more 'feminine'

- In a golf association in the US there was a 1,000\$ fine for women wearing tops with plunging necklines
- If the 'offence' is committed again the fine is doubled!
- Female gymnasts can get points taken off if their underwear is even the slightest bit visible even though a lot of leotards have low backs.
- In 1934, the Camogie Association made a statement announcing "the Camogie Association would do all in its power to ensure that no girl would appear on any sports ground in a costume to which any exception could be taken." (Referring to their strict skorts/skirts-only dress code.) That happened over 80 years ago yet only 4 years ago did the Ladies' Professional Golf Association tell players they would be charging a \$1,000 fine for women wearing anything with a "plunging neckline". 80 years later and the content was eerily similar. We live in an advanced world, yet in the world of sport, how much have we really come forward in terms of rules and ideals? We have come a long way but we still have a long way to go.
- THIRD

## COVERAGE & TELEVISION

- One google of the LGFA prompts 780,000 results.
- One google of GAA prompts 36,700,000 results.
- Even when you divide that by three for the GAA's three sports it still means about 12,000,000 results per sport (not that anyone pays attention to handball).
- This is probably because just 6% of sports stories online are about women.

- For instance, over the course of six days on a popular Irish newspaper's sports section on their website, there were twenty-two articles on men's rugby and zero on women's.
- In 2018, Sarah Colgan and Heather Thornton founded the 20x20 campaign. Their goal was to increase participation, coverage and attendance (at women's matches etc) by 20% by 2020. In the very first year, six attendance records were broken at the women's Gaelic football final, the camogie final, two Olympic qualifiers for the women's hockey team, a Six Nations match against France and a soccer game against Ukraine. 76 sporting bodies, 28 universities and over 600 clubs of 45 different sports signed the pledge. They hosted events at massive corporations like Twitter, Facebook and Google. In 2019, #20x20 was the second most used social issues hashtag in Ireland (after #ClimateStrike, if you're curious). Many famous sports stars like Brian O'Driscoll (rugby), Martina Navratilova (tennis) and Sonia O'Sullivan (athletics) spoke about the campaign and took the pledge. In the first year, there was a 17% increase in participation, a 34% increase in attendance and a 50% increase in coverage.
- The Irish women's rugby team had to win a Grand Slam before they got their first match televised. As Elaine Buckley says in a 20x20 campaign documentary, women achieve amazing things before they receive good levels of coverage. Take the men's soccer team. We all know they are not very good, but Katie Taylor won five World Championships before she won Olympic gold and became the household name she is now.
- It's a vicious circle; the less coverage there is, the less awareness and interest; the less awareness and interest, the less coverage. Et cetera.
- FOURTH

## DROPPING OUT

- Just 12% of girls at age 12-13 meet the required activity levels
- This drops 7% of girls at age 14-15
- And then drops even lower, to 5%, in girls 16-20
- 70% of girls age 14-16 understand that sport is important and think they could do better with their activity levels
- But only 28% of girls the same age actively play and enjoy sports
- Sports become more competitive as you get older, rising estrogen levels mean that girls lean away from competition towards friendship and camaraderie
- Most girls say this is because they are prevented from playing sports from stereotypes ('it's for boys')
- Fear of failure equates to 50% of the reasons that girls will drop out of sports at puberty
- Some girls say that their parents pressure them into concentrating more on school work as they get older
- Lack of role models and the fact that schools put more emphasis on academics instead of sports prevents 72% of girls around age 12 from exploring new sports or starting sports at all
- 42% of girls say that they feel emotionally vulnerable during puberty due to periods and the general hormonal rollercoaster that happens
- Most depressingly, 42% percent of girls say that they don't want to meet new people and that prevents them from doing sports.
- FIFTH

# PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS

Arlene

- What are your thoughts on skirts? Do they bother you or does it not make a difference to your game?

*"Funny you should ask that, I personally would prefer to wear shorts. Some girls in my club, Na Fianna, did a petition three or four years ago. They got plenty of signatures, but of course some girls like the tradition of it. She sent it in to the association [Camogie Association], but they never did anything about it. You know the skorts, they're sort of like hot pants and a flap. It just doesn't make sense, men have the freedom of shorts. Why shouldn't we get the choice too?"*

- How do you feel about the GAA owning way more pitches than the Camogie Association and the LGFA?

*"Well, the LGFA, Camogie Association and GAA are all linked. The Dublin City Council, for example, owns lots of pitches. They [the three organisations] have more pitches than soccer or rugby. It used to be male priority for pitch use, but that's gotten better in the past few years. Priority is now given to the four senior teams."*

- Why do you think so many girls drop out of sport in their early teens and what made you stay on?

*"Yeah, a lot of girls leave sport at around your age and older. Their social life just becomes more appealing than sports training. Your parents might stop giving you lifts, and you have to get there yourself. Friends drop out too, and girls feel isolated. I started when I was eight, and was playing for Dublin at U14 level. I loved it, I really didn't want to give it up, it was never a consideration. My friends stayed with me too, some of those girls I'd still be friends with. My parents were brilliant, they always gave me lifts and supported me. They'd be driving me up and down the country to play matches all weekend. My dad loved GAA too, so he'd always be at my matches. If he couldn't make it, he'd call me"*

*afterwards and ask how it went. It's hard to go back to sport after giving it up, you lose those skills so quickly. As you get older, it gets harder to stay playing. I had to drop Gaelic football, so I'm just playing camogie now."*

- What are the worst examples of #Discrim?

*"There's not enough exposure. €3,000,000 was given to male intercounty players, to be used as a team, or an individual. €700,000 was granted to female players, to be used as a team only. The men get travel expenses and often sponsored cars, but you'd hardly ever see a female player with one. They also get new gear (hoodies, shorts, jerseys, training tops, the lot) every year. You'd have to pay for the stuff yourself, which just isn't fair. Men generally tend to get more sponsors as well. AIG have been great for sponsoring all four teams [men and women's football, camogie and hurling] and Lidl have really supported the LGFA too. I think the LGFA is ahead of the Camogie Association in the context of equality."*

### People In Our Class

- What do you think about inequalities in sport in general?

*"Mixed gender teams don't work as girls and boys abide by different rules in sports so you have to change the rules for it to work."*

*"I think there shouldn't be mixed teams, it wouldn't be fair. I don't agree with the argument that women's sport isn't televised as much."*

*"I don't care very much, genuinely."*

*"I don't really pay attention to sports. I wouldn't agree with inequalities of course, but I don't know a lot about them in the context of sport."*

*"Sport is good."*

*"It's stupid."*



*"In some sports the inequalities are overstated. In camogie, though, THEY NEED TO GET RID OF THE SKIRTS!!"*

*"I think it's sickening, how men's sport is viewed by millions and advertised all over the place and women's sport is barely televised."*

*"It's bad. I don't think it should exist. I think it's unfair, you know, men and women should be equal."*

*"I find it unfair that women can't do the same things [in sport] as men."*

*"I think sport should be even. Women and men should be treated the same."*

*"I think it's a system that's very unfair to women. The way it is portrayed in the media is very skewed."*

*"It's unfair. On TV, you don't see women's sporting events advertised."*

*"Men's sport is more viewed. The advertisement and general coverage is just not on the same level for women's sport compared to men's."*

*"Women are less advertised. Men were sort of playing sports first, so they are more represented. Not many sports are even, though I think tennis isn't too bad."*

*"I don't think there's anything sexist, is there? Do you mean transgender inclusion? The non-binary issue [making those who identify as non-binary play sport in a gendered category] is SO unfair, I mean, they don't identify as any gender and yet they're forced to play under in gendered team/tournament."*

*"I don't think there should be stereotypes."*

*"I feel that attention should be brought to women's sport and the pay gap should be closed."*

*"I think advertising should be more inclusive. Mean, in ads for sporting events etc, you hardly ever see women."*

*"I think it escalates through less funding = less television = less viewing = less funding"*

*"It's not very good because women get paid less because there is not as much television... because it's bad."*

*"I don't know"*

*"It's improvable. It's not even yet."*

*"I think advertising should be more inclusive. Mean, in ads for sporting events etc, you hardly ever see women."*

*"It's not good. In sport, it just shouldn't matter about someone's race or gender or ethnicity."*

*"It SUCKS. I don't think it's fair because it's mostly affecting women. Of course, men are on the receiving end sometimes too, but it is mostly women."*

- **Have you encountered much sexism while playing sports?**

*"Coaches favour girls because they're 'weaker' which is untrue and unfair."*

*"Yes, special treatment to girls while playing soccer; goals scored by girls were worth more [than goals scored by boys]."*

*"No."*

*"I haven't personally, but I know it happens all the time."*

*"No."*

*"I don't think so."*

*"No."*

*"No."*

*"Not to me but I know it happens."*

*"No."*

*"I haven't."*

*"No."*

*"Not to me but I've met the type."*

*"No."*

*"No."*

*"My friend was playing football with some boys, and they kept kicking her when the ref wasn't watching. My dad told her to kick them, and she did!"*

*"I was training with some boys and they would say things like, "oh, you were beaten by a girl" as if that was the height of shame, like it wouldn't take much to beat a girl."*

*"A boy at a GAA camp said that "girls can't throw balls hard".*

*"Yes, a girl told me that she couldn't play football because she was a girl."*

*"In rugby, they tell us "don't play like girls"; "you're acting like girls".*

*"Coaches would say a bad pass was a 'girl pass'."*

*"People will just make the occasional snide comment."*

*"Playing tag, being caught by a girl was considered the lowest of the low."*

- **How could they be resolved?**

*"We need to get the idiot managers out of the way!!"*

*"You need to have the option to wear shorts or a skirt or a skort."*

*"They could do lots of things. I don't actually know. It's tricky."*

*"I don't really know."*

*"I don't know much about what the problems are."*

*"Education. We need it to be talked about in schools, maybe show the clubs and things in the area... sport is open. Open to everyone."*

*"The head of Sport Ireland should make equality a priority."*

*"People should be exposed to everyone playing sports."*

*"The reason people don't watch women's sports as much is that it's just not advertised, so they could fix that."*

*"We need to spread awareness, not everybody knows about the issue [the inequalities]. For instance, a lot of people in poverty wouldn't know about stuff like that."*

*"In school, in PE, there should be sanctions for sexism; it should be called out."*

*"Equal broadcasting and encouragement."*

*"I think women should be paid as much as men and advertising should be more representative."*

*"They should make proper rules for trans and non-binary people.+"*

*"They could get television and coverage."*

*"We need to talk about it."*

*"Women face a lot of solvable problems like periods and unfair dress codes."*

*"It needs to be advertised."*

*"Girls need to be listened to and represented!"*