

Equity for women's intercollegiate sports still is being debated nearly 16 years after the federal guidelines were handed down.

Photos courtesy of OU Sports Information



AFTER TITLE IX

When Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 became law, the wording was quite simple: *No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under*

any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

But nothing is ever as simple as it seems. Seven years of study, discussion, clarification and controversy were

required for the federal government to decide exactly how the nation's colleges and universities were to end sex discrimination in their athletic programs. Finally in December 1979, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare issued its final interpretation of the guidelines for Title

by Debbie Copp

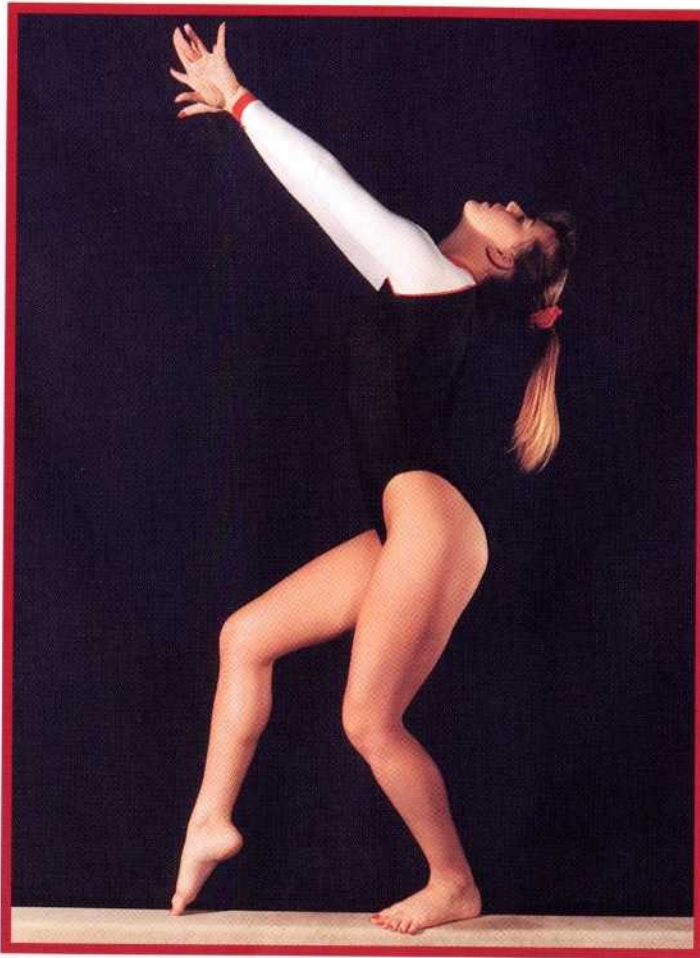
IX. Intercollegiate athletics has never been the same.

The Carter administration's HEW Secretary, Patricia Roberts, proclaimed that colleges must distribute scholarship money in proportion to the number of their male and female athletes, although strictly equal spending for men's and women's programs was not necessarily mandated. Her announcement touched off a firestorm of comment nationwide. Praise came from some quarters, but the HEW declaration left many athletic administrators gravely concerned about how their departments could fund the changes that needed to be made.

Their reactions ranged from "how are we going to do it?" to "we can't cut men's sports to fund women's sports" to "what will they say next, since there have been three different interpretations from each of the last three HEW secretaries" to "this will never stand a legal test or the test of time."

Nearly 16 years later, the discussions continue across the country, but those who predicted that men's sports, particularly football, would cease to exist have been quieted. Men's and women's athletics have learned to coexist and that mutual success adds to the overall experience for all student-athletes.

Funding for women's athletics began at the University of Oklahoma with the 1973-74 school year when \$1,500 was committed to the program. That money primarily paid the membership fees in state and regional athletic organizations as the women students competed in a program that was just a step beyond intercollegiate intramurals. By the next year, the



ABOVE: Olympian Chelle Stack brought international competition experience to the OU women's gymnastics team, which has been coached by Becky Buwick since 1984.

OPPOSITE: In his seventh year as the women's tennis coach, Mark Johnson guided his Sooner team, including junior Anne Covert, pictured here, to a 21-7 season record in 1995, 8-2 in the conference.

budget had increased to \$41,000. OU fielded its first women's intercollegiate teams in basketball, softball, track and field, golf, volleyball, tennis, swimming and field hockey. In subsequent years, field hockey and swimming were dropped, and gymnastics was added.

Initially two coaches, Amy Dahl and Karen Dowd, covered all the women's sports; there were no scholarships. Randy Sontheimer joined the staff in early 1975 and Joan Blumenthal for the 1975-76 season. The following year, money allocated for women's athletics accounted for \$148,000 of a \$3 million budget.

That figure increased to \$417,385

for the 1978-79 academic year. The staff grew to seven full-time coaches, and OU began offering athletic scholarships to female student-athletes.

A year later, OU was spending \$200,000 on scholarships for women athletes, and plans were under way to increase the budget by \$250,000 to \$300,000. Under the December 1979 interpretations, OU could have had as many as 106 women in its eight intercollegiate sports on scholarship aid. The Sooners were offering aid to 53, better than many schools at the time, but still far short according to then athletic director Wade Walker.

"We wanted to have the best programs possible," Walker insisted at the time. "Ultimately, we will probably go to the area of \$1 million for scholarships (male and female)."

Walker was not shy about his feelings on Title IX. For him, the interpretations about grants-in-aid were clear; less clear was what was expected in other areas—equity in facilities, coaches' salaries, recruiting

budgets, housing and travel. While his department had been generous toward women's athletics, Walker was criticized for his statements on the evolution of women's sports at the University.

"We got into a women's program because we were forced to," Walker was quoted as saying in a 1980 interview. When asked if OU would have sponsored women's sports if not for Title IX, Walker replied, "Not unless the University's philosophy was different."

Despite his public comments, Walker, a former football letterman, was not going to let his athletes, regardless of gender, fail to keep up the

Sooner tradition for excellence. Under his leadership, women's teams at OU produced seven Big Eight team champions, numerous conference individual champions, national individual champions in the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women and a top-10 finish in the AIAW Indoor Track Championship. (The women joined the NCAA in 1983.)

Walker retired in 1986, but his successor, Donnie Duncan, was committed to strengthening the women's athletic program. For Duncan, athletic opportunities should not be and are not limited by gender. As a result, funding for women's athletics has continued to climb. Scholarships for women athletes are funded at the NCAA limit. The number of coaches that each women's team has is also the maximum allowed by the NCAA. Funding for equipment, travel and recruiting is comparable to other nationally prominent programs.

Additional evidence of this commitment came last January when the OU Board of Regents approved plans for improved facilities that will benefit the women. A new \$1 million softball park should open in fall 1996, and a co-educational sports medicine and strength training area is being developed with a \$700,000 grant from the Sarkeys Foundation of Norman. Evaluation of other facilities is under way.

"Title IX requirements are the minimum expectations, but at the University of Oklahoma, we do not deal in minimums, and I do not deal in minimums in my position as athletic director," Duncan said in an interview with *The Daily Oklahoman*. "I want to be beyond that in our recognition and support of women's athletics. It's a fairness issue. It's one of treating young people on a team properly. That applies if they are male or female."

Times have not always been easy for women athletes at OU, particularly for basketball players. Arguably



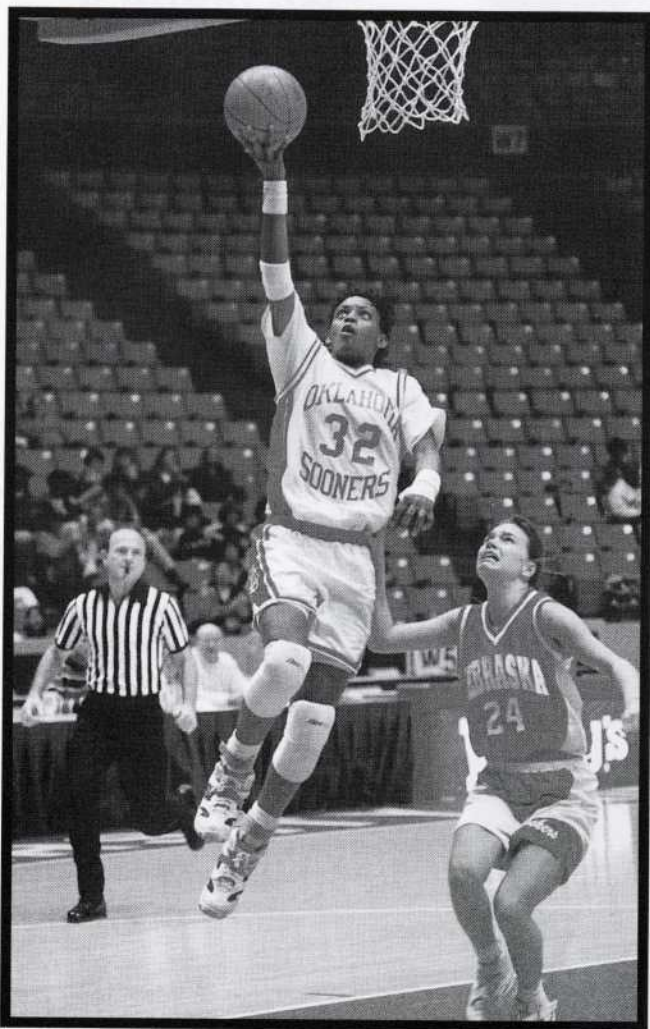
As a senior catcher on Coach Patty Gasso's 1994-95 women's softball team, Cindy Ambrose will miss playing in the Sooners' new softball park, scheduled for completion in the fall of 1996.

the athletic department's biggest challenge came in March 1990 when the decision was made to drop women's basketball. Attendance had dwindled, support was minimal, and there were personnel problems as well. The University's announcement prompted a ground swell of support, much of it coming from people who probably never had attended a women's game at OU. It was unconscionable, the basketball proponents reasoned, that the state's preeminent institution of higher education would fail to field a team in Oklahoma's most popular sport for girls. One week later, women's basketball was reinstated.

Amazed by the emotional response to their decision to abandon the sport, Duncan and his staff turned the temporary setback into a learning situation. A change in the coaching staff and a genuine promotional effort brought quick results. Less



Sophomore Paula King, left, receives some advice from the 1995 NCAA co-coach of the year, Carol Ludvigson, a former Sooner golfing great from the Big Eight championship team of 1981.



Junior forward Etta Maytubby goes in for a lay-up against Nebraska as the 1995 Sooner women cap a five-year comeback from impending oblivion, reaching the NCAA tournament.

than five years later, under Coach Burl Plunkett, the Sooners won the 1994 National Women's Invitational Tournament. In 1995, the women's team challenged for the Big Eight title, eventually finished second but earned a trip to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since the 1986 season, when OU also won the Big Eight championship.

Basketball's success story is just one of many recorded by the Sooner women's athletic program over 20 years at OU. While the basketball team was capturing its 1994 NIT title, for instance, the women's gymnastics team duplicated the feat with its own 1994 NIT championship.

The gymnastics team, coached since

1984 by Becky Buwick, has 13 post-season appearances to its credit and produced OU's first female NCAA champion, Kelly Garrison. Garrison also is OU's only Broderick Award winner (for gymnastics), an honor that is comparable to the Heisman Trophy in football. The Sooner program has generated five Big Eight team championships, four national individual championships, 36 conference champions and three All-Americans.

Coach Miles Pabst's Sooners have won one Big Eight volleyball title and finished second six times since he took over from Amy Dahl in 1978. OU has been to the NCAA Tournament twice and the National Invitational once.

The track and cross country teams



Freshman long jumper/hurdler Erin Womack came from Cleveland, Ohio, to join the OU women's track and field team, coached by veteran J. D. Martin, a NCAA title holder who set a world record in the pole vault as a Sooner competitor in 1960.

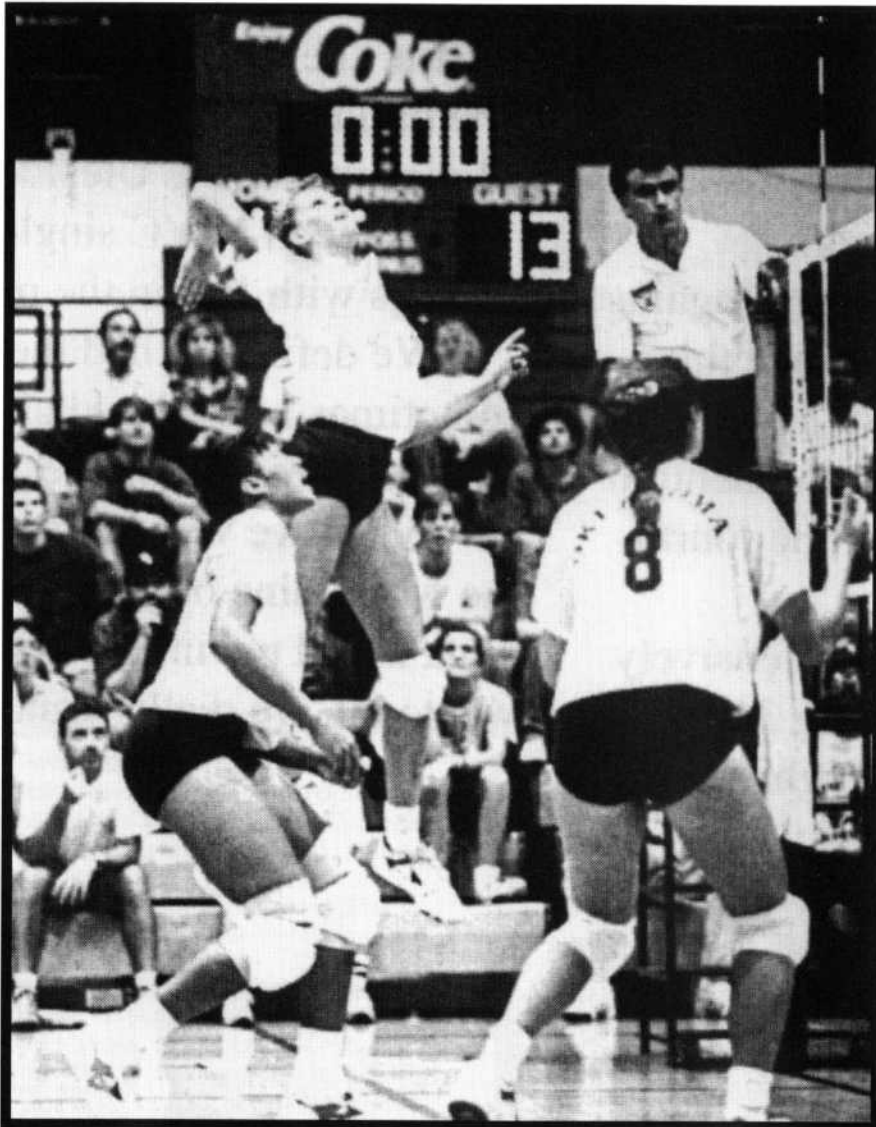


have produced more All-Americans than any other women's sport at OU. The men's coach since 1964, J. D. Martin, added responsibilities for the women's teams in 1978.

The OU softball team has qualified for five post-season competitions, including the last two consecutive NCAA tournaments. Two Sooner women have achieved All-American status on the diamond, both in the last two years. Patty Gasso is the softball coach, building on a foundation laid by longtime coaches Marita Hynes and Michelle Thomas Grost.

The women's golf program, coached by former Sooner great Carol Ludvigson, has produced All-Americans, conference championships and three consecutive trips to the NCAA tournament. A member of the Big Eight championship team in 1981, Ludvigson led her Sooner golfers to a conference title in 1991 and was 1995's NCAA co-coach of the year.

The tennis program, directed by Mark Johnson, has won three Big Eight titles and produced two All-



Senior outside hitter Gretchen Anderson was a four-year standout for volleyball's Coach Miles Pabst, who came to OU in 1978, making him the dean among the Sooner women's sports mentors.

Americans. Big Eight individual champion lists are filled with the names of Sooner players.

Whatever their athletic achievements, success for the Sooner women begins in the classroom. Conference all-academic teams often are full of Sooner names, and the women consistently produce team GPAs above 3.0. Academic All-Americans are also a frequent byproduct of the OU program, and the institution has had its share of Big Eight and NCAA post-graduate scholarship winners.

Very significant progress has been made in women's athletics since 1974, in spite of the lively discussions that Title IX still inspires. Victories for

many of these programs have come through legal challenges, but at OU every effort is made to confine the contests to the playing field, course and classroom—*on* the courts rather than *in* the courts.

"We made a stand quickly," golf coach Ludvigson explains, "and we are almost to the point now where we will no longer have to make changes to comply (to Title IX interpretations)."

"I came to administration from football, so I knew what people were predicting would happen as departments funded women's athletics," says Don Jimerson, the assistant athletic director who oversaw the evolution of the women's teams until the July appoint-

"We made a stand quickly, and we are almost to the point now where we will no longer have to make changes to comply to Title IX."

ment of Marita Hynes as associate athletic director and senior women's administrator.

"I think the last 20 years, at least at OU, have proved those concerns were unfounded," Jimerson contends. "We have made great progress in the last two decades, and the future looks bright.

"Learning to appreciate the effort, desire and talent of the women athletes after working with men has been a privilege for me. Regardless of gender, an athlete puts it on the line every time the game begins, and we are committed to ensuring all OU athletes have the best opportunity to succeed."

But as with everything else in life, success has come at a price. An athletic department is like a family with limited resources available to support its activities. The addition of women's teams for many athletic departments was much like the family that welcomed quintuplets. No matter how proud the family may be, the result is a much tighter budget.

Duncan and his staff will continue to struggle with that eternal problem, while their coaches take consolation and pride in the vastly increased opportunities for women in intercollegiate sports. And little girls will be allowed to dream that they, too, can play for the Sooners, and those dreams can come true.

