

COACHING THROUGH A GENDER LENS:

MAXIMIZING GIRLS' PLAY & POTENTIAL

**WOMEN'S
SPORTS
FOUNDATION**

**Made
to Play**


KEY FINDINGS

COACHING GIRLS ISN'T THE SAME AS COACHING BOYS

But not for the reasons you might think. When they're between ages 7 and 13, girls aren't more fragile. They aren't less competitive. They don't love sports any less than boys. Maybe all girls want at this age is for you to believe in them. And, of course, to get a chance.

The research behind this Women's Sports Foundation report set out to identify coaching and program-level practices to address major barriers that contribute to the gender gap in sports.

SPECIFICALLY, IT SEEKS TO:



EXAMINE

girls' experiences in sport and the degree to which parent, coaching, and program practices/experiences impact girls' participation, motivation, and retention.



HIGHLIGHT

the major barriers that contribute to the gender gap in sport. These barriers include cultural, environmental, and policy-based barriers centered on gender norming and gender stereotypes that influence girls' socialization into sports.



DETERMINE

the ways in which youth sports organizations serving girls can successfully meet girls' needs and where they still need support.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

THE REPORT'S FINDINGS ARE BASED ON A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL/MULTI-INFORMANT APPROACH WITH THREE MAJOR RESEARCH COMPONENTS.



1 Interviews were conducted with experts in girls' sport and youth development to identify contributors to the gender gap and coaching practices that can either contribute to or counter these barriers.



2 A national survey about girls' experiences in youth sports administered to girls between the ages of 7-13. The survey was also administered to girls' parents. A nationally representative sample of girls (N=1,129) and their parents (N=1,129) participated.



3 A brief assessment was administered to 64 programs that have been identified by the WSF as exemplary for their service in providing quality sports opportunities to underserved girls.

GIRLS' PARTICIPATION RATES LAG BEHIND THOSE OF BOYS AT ALL AGES

GIRLS START SPORTS LATER, END EARLIER AND PLAY LESS. IT'S EVEN WORSE FOR GIRLS OF COLOR OR OTHERWISE DISADVANTAGED GROUPS.

The attrition rate for girls is **two to three times greater** than for boys.



African-American and Hispanic girls enter sport at a later average age and drop out earlier than their counterparts, leaving girls of color with an even narrower window of opportunity.



Age 7-13 is a critical period for predicting future participation in sports for girls. The first major declines in sports participation are observed around ages 12 to 13.



Think girls can just brush it off? It's not that easy. **Girls internalize the negative** societal messages about girls and sports.



Parents place **greater value on sports participation for their sons** than their daughters. That means "pay to play" disproportionately affects girls' ability to get in the game.

“ WE ALSO STILL SEE BROTHERS AS A PRIORITY, AND WHEN THERE IS A CONFLICT THE SISTERS ARE USUALLY THE ONES WHO LOSE OUT. ”

THERE'S A SHORTAGE OF FEMALE COACHES [AND IT MATTERS]

GIRLS NEED ROLE MODELS TO STAY IN THE GAME AND BOTH BOYS AND GIRLS BENEFIT FROM POSITIVE IMAGES OF FEMALE COACHES.

There are **6.5 million youth sports coaches*** in the United States. Only a quarter of them are women.



Female coaches are a confidence booster for girls. Research suggests girls may more readily identify with female coaches, seeing them as mentors or role models for what is possible.



“ GIRLS WHO HAVE FEMALE COACHES HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE THAT 'IF SHE CAN DO THIS, THEN I CAN TOO.' ”

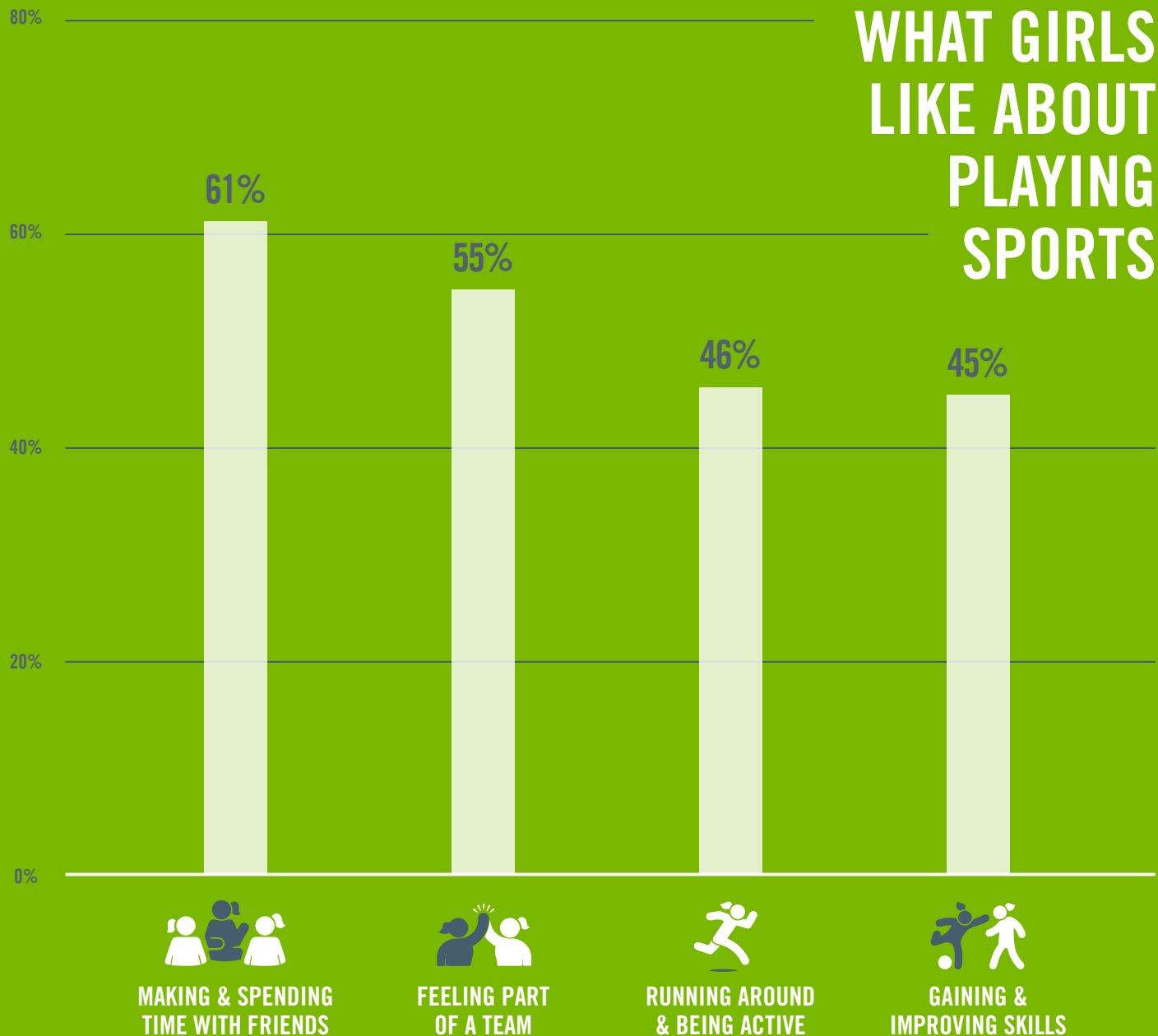
Research has shown the presence of female coaches **challenges the negative cultural messages** girls receive about their participation.



Girls who “really” or “really, really like their coach a lot” were more likely to have **a female head coach** (82% vs. 73%).

THINK YOU KNOW WHAT GIRL ATHLETES WANT?

MOST GIRLS AREN'T THERE TO LOSE WEIGHT OR WEAR CUTE UNIFORMS. IN FACT, THOSE REASONS FOR PLAYING ARE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LIST. GIRLS AREN'T FRAGILE AND THEY AREN'T AFRAID TO GET DIRTY. THE TRUTH IS, THEY PLAY AND THEY PLAY HARD.



“ I WANT TO GET BETTER AND BE ABLE TO PLAY FOR A LONG TIME. I WANT TO PLAY ON MY HIGH SCHOOL TEAM WHEN I GET OLDER. ”

PROGRAMS NEED HELP TO DO BETTER



EVEN THE BEST GIRLS' PROGRAMS NEED A LOT OF SUPPORT TO CREATE BETTER EXPERIENCES FOR GIRLS. THEY WANT MORE RESOURCES AND COACHING TOOLS THAT ARE SPECIFIC TO GIRLS, ALONG WITH HELP WORKING WITH PARENTS.

According to program leaders, **families can be unsupportive of their daughters' participation** due to cultural expectations (girls don't play sports). They rely on girls to take care of family responsibilities or emphasize and prioritize their sons' participation over their daughters'.

Several programs say **recruiting female coaches** is an ongoing challenge.

Programs indicated a **lack of resources, financial challenges and a lack of transportation** as barriers to girls' participation.



Instead of perceiving fun and competitiveness as opposing goals, interviewed experts proposed the need to **redefine perceptions of sports for girls** so that it integrates both.

“WE CAN PROVIDE A GREAT SOCIAL EXPERIENCE WITHOUT MINIMIZING COMPETITIVE OPTIONS.”

SO WHAT CAN COACHES DO?

THERE'S A LOT WE ALREADY KNOW ABOUT WHAT GIRLS ARE LOOKING FOR WHEN IT COMES TO SPORTS. AND BASED ON THE RESEARCH, THERE'S A LOT COACHES CAN DO TO MAKE THE EXPERIENCE GREAT FOR GIRL ATHLETES.



“YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SOFT, JUST NICE. DO NOT INFANTILIZE OR UNDERESTIMATE GIRLS' ABILITY. TREAT GIRLS AS POWERFUL, STRONG, VERY CAPABLE INDIVIDUALS.”

COMBINE COMPETITION WITH FUN

Coaches who focus on challenging girls along with an emphasis on fun and skills appear to be the best combination to foster girls' intentions to continue playing through high school and beyond.



CONNECT WITH PLAYERS

A healthy coach relationship is one in which the coach “treats players as whole people, not just athletes.” They establish genuine trusting relationships with the girls which include “real conversations, real connections.” Coaches are someone with whom the girls feel comfortable talking and can be a source of support.



COMBAT NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES.

The attitudes and values coaches transmit, the goals and priorities they promote, and the nature of their interactions with athletes (and their parents) can markedly influence players' enjoyment of the sport, perceived competence, and motivation and long-term engagement.

