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Global Voices The Impact of Sports on a Career

In Prof. Michael Messner's book, *Taking the Field: Women, Men and Sports*, the University of Southern California professor of sociology states that laws like Title IX are still essential and that equality helps girls *and* boys. "Boys are growing up in a world where they will have women co-workers and bosses," he says. "They need, as boys, to experience girls and women as physically capable, strong and assertive. When they see women play sports, and especially when they play alongside girls on their athletic teams, boys experience girls in a way that will foster a wider and deeper respect for women."

Based on informal interviews and formal research, there is a strong connection between playing sports – especially team sports – as a girl and young woman and later business success. In 2002, OppenheimerFunds, a leading mutual fund company and its parent, the MassMutual Financial Group, a global, diversified commercial services organization, commissioned a report entitled, "From the Locker Room to the Boardroom: A Survey on Sports in the Lives of Women Business Executives." The findings on females in the US were clear: four out of five executive businesswomen played sports growing up – and the vast majority say lessons learned on the playing field contributed to their success in business.

Specifics of the survey include that of the 401 women surveyed, 327 – or 82% – reported playing organized sports after grammar school, including school teams, intramurals or recreational leagues. Basketball was the most popular sport, cited by 23% of the women who played sports. It was followed by volleyball (22%), softball (17%), tennis (15%), track and field (10%) and soccer (10%).

Of women who played organized sports after grade school, 86% responded that sports helped them to be more disciplined, 81% said sports helped them to function better as part of a team, 69% replied sports helped them to develop leadership skills that contributed to their professional success, 68% stated sports helped them deal with failure, and 59% indicated that sports gave them a competitive edge over others.

To take a pulse on the role of sports in women's lives around the world, *Shattered* invited top women executives to describe how playing sports is a positive influence on a business career. The thoughts below of women from Nepal, Singapore, and Australia are part of a global chorus encouraging girls and young women to engage in athletics for future success.

Ambica Shrestha sends her thoughts from Kathmandu, Nepal, a landlocked country located off the usual travel paths in the Himalayas in South Asia that is bordered by Tibet and

China in the north and India in the south. Shrestha is a government and business leader whose volunteer activities include serving as the Regional Coordinator Asia-Pacific for the International Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPWI).

“Sports gives you discipline and a goal. These two things are the main issues which make you successful in your career and work,” states the active leader. “To run your business or institute, you need to have discipline. Disciplined time management, work management and approach to setting an example for your staff. Thus you need sports to succeed. The other issue is one of setting a goal. If you do not set your focus on what you wish to achieve, you will drift. You play a game with the aim of winning.”

Shrestha, who travels the world for her job, shares that, “I found that sports will give you that basic training of perseverance, fellowship/sportsmanship, and goal setting. I feel that every youth in schools and colleges should be made to be involved in some sports.” Nepal, she makes clear, is a male dominated society and that it is only during the past decade that women athletes and sports have developed noticeably. “Girls until quite late were not allowed schooling and any other activities. Now the girls are coming up in various sports such as martial arts, Taekwondo, table tennis, marathons, etc. The girls are now very good in martial arts and have been winning medals in international games.”

According to Ann Phua, President/Founder of Hemispheres Foundation and an Outdoor Consultant in Singapore, “Sports has been an important curriculum in our school system and all students are encouraged to participate unless there are health or religious reasons.” She participated in inter-school competition and played net ball (volleyball) and ran short running relays.

Phua, who also holds the position of Chair-United Nations Status of Women for BPWI, notes that women have an equal opportunity to play sports. “We have a Women Sports Division within our National Sports Council to encourage women to participate in sporting activities as a form of exercise for healthy living and not necessarily as a competitive sport.”

When asked, “Has playing sports contributed to your success in business?” Phua answered: “Sporting activities take many forms – competitive, extreme, and recreation sports. As a result of my participation in extreme and recreation sports it has helped in my outdoor adventure business, to be able to provide these sporting activities to children and young adults.”

Barbara Warren is passionate about what she calls “a really interesting and important topic – good for *Shattered* for giving it exposure”. A swimmer, surfer, and marathon runner, she is also Head of Corporate Performance at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), Australia’s national training center for theater, film, and television.

In response to one question, “How has playing sports contributed to your success in business,” her thoughts filled a four-page document. She starts off, “Much has been written about sport and business and its analogous relationship but most of the writing has been from a male perspective. Everything I have read usually recounts the ‘team’ metaphor in aggressive or exclusive terms. ‘Mateship’ is historically explored as a masculine concept. Often the writing hypes up the ‘Rah, Rah’ factor rather than investigating the positive and authentic influence sport can have on building genuine relationships, engendering pride in being part of something or extolling the virtues of analysis and reflection.”

Further along in her document, Warren states that there is another component of how playing sports can motivate an individual. She declares, “If you have tasted success and you know how fabulous that feels, then you are definitely going to go back for more. Conversely you also see that losing isn’t much fun so you tend to avoid that at all costs! So has sport contributed to my business success? Absolutely!”