



BEST PRACTICES AROUND GENDER PARTICIPATION FOR YOUTH LACROSSE

The issue of gender classifications in men's lacrosse and women's lacrosse is largely determined on a state-by-state basis, and the particular facts and circumstances of each situation will largely determine the outcome. However, the overarching position of USA Lacrosse with respect to gender classifications in lacrosse is as follows.

Lacrosse as a sport encompasses two separate and distinct games, the women's game and the men's game: the rules of which are distinct and whereas there is not a gender requirement in the rules of play for either game. USA Lacrosse respects and supports the integrity of both the women's game and the men's game and the uniqueness of both games. However female athletes have been historically and remain currently underrepresented in lacrosse and sports as a whole and as such they should be given every opportunity to have access to play lacrosse of either format to redress these inequities. Additionally, it is the position of USA Lacrosse that Title IX and ERA laws along with the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment should be followed and fully understood by leagues and teams in the creation of their eligibility parameters. Prohibitions of eligibility or participation based on gender should be avoided.

Title IX informs an effort to maintain equity for both sexes, with females being the traditionally underserved population in youth sports. Legal precedent reaffirms the government objective of promoting participation of girls in sports through the Title IX legislation. The objectives of Title IX are not served when female athletes are denied opportunity to play on a boys' team even when a school sponsors a comparable team for girls. Opportunity does not designate automatic placement on a team but rather the right to try out or participate in the same manner afforded a male athlete.

- 1) When considering Title IX compliance and equity for female athletes note that Title IX compliance is not limited to the number of program options and roster spots. Equity of resources, equipment, facilities among other factors are also components in the assessment of Title IX compliance.
- 2) All decisions for participation should recognize that the threshold for boys to participate on a girls' team is different than a girl's request to participate on a boys' team within the framework of Title IX. Title IX is a legal commitment to redress the historical and ongoing underrepresentation of females in sports, therefore a boy's request to participate on a girls' team is not based on a historical underrepresentation or redress.
- 3) The Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment affirms and extends the allowance for female athletes in boy's lacrosse as contact-sport, taking legal precedent over the contact sport exemption of Title IX such that females can choose to participate in a

contact sport, in this case boys' lacrosse, when a contact version of that sport is not available for girls.

- 4) Finally, safety concerns are not a reason for exclusion based on gender. Historically, athlete safety has not been a successful defense for excluding students of one gender from participating on teams of the opposite gender. Additionally, there is no data that suggests a correlation between injuries and mixed-gender teams, and, in fact, physical difference among members of one sex are often greater than the average difference between the two sexes.

Acknowledgements

Portions of this document have been adapted from the Women's Sport Foundation resources and in consultation with the Foundation. USA Lacrosse has modified to fit its needs. All registered trademarks and/or copyrights are property of their respective owner

Additional References:

Title IX, <https://www.justice.gov/crt/title-ix-education-amendments-1972>

Equal Rights Amendment, <https://www.equalrightsamendment.org/incongress>

Equal Protection Clause, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equal_Protection_Clause

Women's Sport Foundation Resources:

Title IX History and Overview

https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/advocacy_category/title-ix/

<https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/baseball-and-softball-should-girls-and-women-have-to-choose-the-foundation-position.pdf>

<https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/issues-related-to-girls-and-boys-competing-with-and-against-each-other-in-sports-and-physical-activity-settings-the-foundation-position.pdf>

Updated June 22nd, 2021