

Athletes

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swim teams at College Misericordia. "For the first time, Division I schools were required to offer scholarships to women at the same rate men were receiving them. That really paved the way for a whole generation to enter the world of sports."

Joyce Tinner, the softball coach at Dallas High School, is a Title IX beneficiary who is happy to see the number of opportunities for women in sports has continued to increase. "I went to Penn State on a full ride for softball," she said. "When I got there, I was one of five who received a full athletic scholarship. By the time I left, the softball program was offering 12 full rides every year."

Three current Lake-Lehman seniors have received scholarships to play field hockey at the collegiate level and Jean Lipski, who coaches the Black Knights, said the possibilities are virtually limitless for well-rounded young women. "Just a few years ago, more money was given to field hockey, swimming and basketball," said Lipski. "If you're a solid field hockey player who has good academics you can pick a school. It's really something when you think about how many scholarship opportunities are available, especially, if you're willing to travel out of the area."

"If you're a solid field hockey player who has good academics you can pick a school."

Jean Lipski
Lake-Lehman coach

The influx of money into Division I athletics has had a ripple effect at all levels. "Athletics is just one part of a big puzzle," said Finn. "If you look beyond the Division I universities and Division II schools that can offer athletic scholarships you will notice that female athletes still have advantages when applying to Ivy League schools or Patriot League schools. All the kids trying to get into Brown, Princeton or Stanford have the grades but girls who play a sport or are in the band have something else to offer and schools look for things like that."

Jennifer Buckley, who was recently hired as College Misericordia's track and field coach, has a first-hand knowledge of the opportunities available to scholar athletes. She graduated from Bishop Hoban High School near the top of her class before moving on to Kent University where she was inducted into the school's Hall of Fame following a stellar collegiate career.

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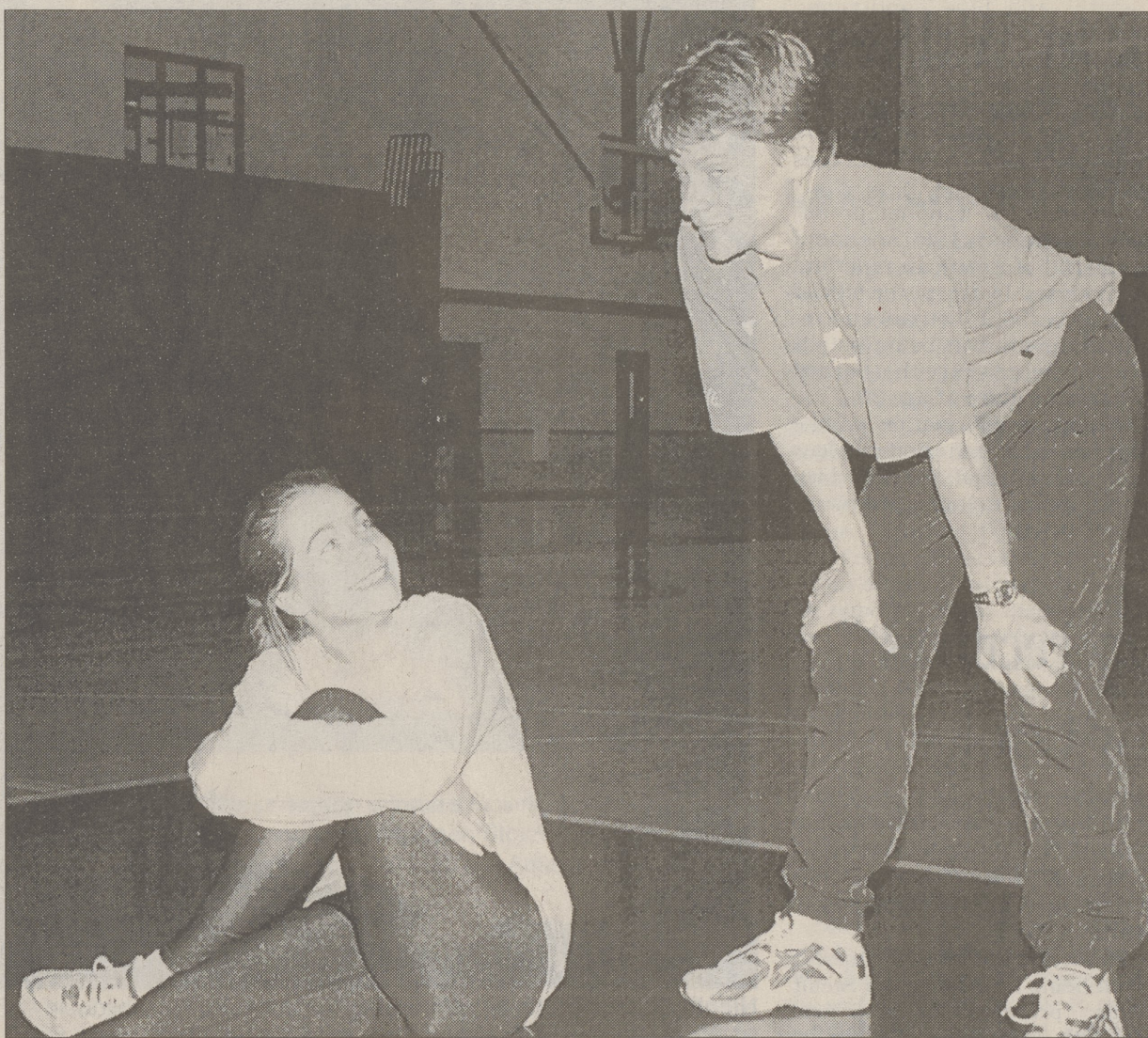
While pursuing a graduate degree she volunteered as an assistant coach at the University of Tennessee, gaining experience which eventually led to a full-time coaching position at Misericordia. "Coaching is something I always hoped I'd be doing," said Buckley. "It's a hard thing to break into at this level because there are so many people who want these jobs and there are so few of them out there. It's still kind of a strange thing to find a woman who is a head coach, especially one who coaches both the men's and women's programs."

Coaching is field which has remained predominantly male, despite advances in nearly every other area of women's athletics. "I think change has been slower in coaching both at the high school and college levels," said Buckley. "Misericordia is different because there are a lot of women on staff and it's a school that was founded by women so there is a different attitude here; it's more accepting I think than some other schools."

Buckley said she doesn't think women have been deliberately kept from the coaching ranks but instead attributes the high percentage of male coaches to human nature. "I think the coaching situation has a lot to do with the fact that people tend to hire their friends," she said. "Men are most comfortable working with other men so they tend to hire them. There are a lot of women teaching in high schools and at universities but many of the veteran teachers are a part of a generation that didn't get involved with coaching sports. We're just now starting to see younger women get into coaching more."

As the number of women coaching and playing sports has grown, schools and community recreation programs have begun offering more choices. "I grew up in a fairly large city, and there wasn't a girls' soccer team at my high school," said Edkins. "Now, every neighborhood has an organized soccer league and a lot of times you'll find moms coaching the teams. There is just so much more out there than there was even just 10 years ago."

The evolution of women's athletics is starting to reach its full potential as a generation of girls are growing up with female athletes as role models. "Teenagers look at people like Mia Hamm and they see an athletic looking woman as an ideal," said Edkins. "It's not just the tall skinny mod-



Jennifer Buckley, head coach of track & field at College Misericordia, discusses the results of a weekend road race with Kelly Nye.

els who are considered beautiful, which is so healthy."

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Jen Buckley
Misericordia track coach

Muscles are chic and physical fitness is a priority in the lives of many young women. "My daughter's high school soccer team has been lifting weights since the fall in preparation for their spring season," said Edkins. "That was unheard of a few years ago. Now if you're not involved in some kind of strength training regimen you're the exception. The reality has gone from 'wow, you're lifting weights - that's strange' to 'wow,



Nancy Edkins on the pool deck at College Misericordia. Edkins is shown leaning over a starting block as she chats with a lap swimmer.

you're not lifting weights that's strange."

Increased emphasis on conditioning has led to changes in other areas. "We have a better understanding of the science of sport," said Buckley. "We know more about the physiological limits of the body and we have learned some things about conditions unique to women athletes. For example it was recently discovered a lot of female long-distance runners suffer from iron deficiencies."

This new base of knowledge has led to improvements in the way sporting goods companies manufacture products for women.

"Women's sneakers used to be a smaller version of men's shoes and maybe they changed the color or something," said Buckley. "But now Nike and some other companies have discovered this whole new market is opening up and there is a demand for products designed to meet the needs of the woman athlete."

"We've reached a point where you hardly hear people say 'well, she's pretty good for a girl'. Women are now respected for their talents."

Flossie Finn
Long-time women's coach

The mania surrounding the U.S. women's soccer team during last summer's World Cup was a powerful example of this new market. "With the media coverage expanding and women's sports receiving more attention, people have started to realize girls can be great athletes," said Lipski. "That realization has led to changes, not just in professional or collegiate sports but all over. It has brought more fathers out to watch their daughters participate in sports. As a coach, I look up and down the sideline and it's filled with fathers who are there to watch girls' field hockey."

Flossie Finn, the former field hockey, basketball and softball coach, is amazed by the pace of progress. "I just get teary eyed when I'm watching a WNBA game or something like that on t.v.," she said. "Last year when my husband and I were watching the women's soccer team play, I said, 'can you believe all these people paid money to watch women play soccer?'. We've reached a point where you hardly hear people say 'well, she's pretty good for a girl'. Women are now respected for their talents."

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