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The Safe Zone

Joel Smith

University of Maine

Scott H. Brezovsky

University of Maine

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Title IX laziness

The University of Maine's women's basketball team had an unbelievable season. It is undefeated in NAC Conference and is seated first going into the upcoming spring break playoffs. The attention that these women have received because of their achievements has not only moved UMaine into the national spotlight, it has turning the floodlights on Title IX.

It has been over two decades since the passage of Title IX, prohibiting sexual discrimination in federally-funded education and athletics. Though this is a federal law, compliance of this law is left up to individual institutions.

After the initial passage of Title IX, the federal government has not played an active role in seeing its implementation, a major reason why the progression of women in collegiate athletics is moving at a snail's pace.

The twenty years that have passed, however, provided women with many educational and athletic opportunities. There are currently more women in athletics, more funding available, more scholarships, more women coaches and more media coverage than years ago.

Even though these changes are well received and deserved, the playing field is not quite even. Women's sports funding is not up to par with men's.

Currently, women in athletics receive less than 24 percent of all athletic funding. Indicative of this, Athletic Director Suzanne Tyler was quoted at a Women in Curriculum Luncheon as saying she had a better chance of becoming a university president than becoming one of a handful women athletic directors. This is not very progressive.

Because the federal government has taken the back seat on this issue, many universities around the country have decided not to vigorously push for equality.

At the University of Maine, though policy was passed in the 1970s, a plan for agreement with the title was drawn up last May, a snail's pace indeed. As slow as this may seem, UMaine is one of the first educational institutions to draw up such a document.

The women's budget figures in "Realizing the Dream: A Proposal for Achieving Gender

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Equity in Athletics" for the 1995-'96 are dismal, but there is hope on the horizon. According to the document, by the year 1998, women's athletics will be equal if not slightly exceeding most men's sports. With a season like the women's basketball and field hockey teams had this year, the new figures are greatly justified.

UMaine may be progressive when compared to other colleges, but when one looks at the respect and funding women's sports receive here (minus the ever-popular women's basketball team), Maine is far from gender equity.