

## Title IX and Female Athletes

Federal "Title IX" mandates equal opportunity for male and female athletes at public institutions and includes this provision: if a public high school does not have the female equivalent for a sport (baseball- softball, basketball, etc.) then any girl may opt to try out for the boy's team. (To make the team, girls need to demonstrate the same skills as boys.) This allows girls to represent their schools on the baseball field, the football field, and the wrestling mat.

In May 2012, the Our Lady of Sorrows HS baseball team forfeited the Arizona State Baseball Championship rather than face Paige Sultzbach and her (male) teammates of Mesa Preparatory Academy. In an official statement, Our Lady of Sorrows stated that the school had strict rules against coed sports (and academics). Keeping boys and girls separate is a foundational principle of the branch of Catholicism that is affiliated with Our Lady of Sorrows High School.

This is not the first time religion has been used to defend forfeiting to a team with a female member, but it is the first time in the context of a non-contact sport. In February 2011, Joel Northup forfeited his first match in the Iowa state tournament because he had to wrestle one of two females who qualified for the state championship. He stated, "I have a tremendous amount of respect for Cassy...However, wrestling is a contact sport and it can get violent at times. As a matter of conscience and faith, I do not believe that it is appropriate for a boy to engage a girl in this manner." Also in 2011, Mina Johnson, an eighth-grade football player in North Carolina, chose to sit out a game rather than have her team win by forfeit. Her team's opponents, the Lasker Northeast Academy, had made it clear that if they faced a girl on the field, they would forfeit rather than play.

During the regular season, Paige Sultzbach decided to sit out games against Our Lady of Sorrows. In interviews, she stated that the games were on the Our Lady of Sorrows' home field and she felt she should play by their rules. The championship, however, was to be held on neutral ground, where she felt she should be allowed to play. Our Lady of Sorrows chose not to play and allowed Paige and her teammates to win by default.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Should there be different regulations concerning girls playing on boy's teams based on whether or not it is a contact sport? Should whether or not a team is playing at home be a consideration?
2. Are there any moral justifications for ignoring another group's religious beliefs in order to promote fairness and equality?