

Huffines Sports Medicine Podcasts

143- Dr. Laurie Priest, Mount Holyoake College

- S1 00:07 Welcome to the Sports Medicine Podcast brought to you by the Sydney and J.L. Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance in the Department of Health and Kinesiology at Texas A&M University. At the Huffines Institute, we're always working to facilitate, apply and bring you the most up-to-date coverage of the wide world that is sports medicine and human performance, all in the language you can understand and share with your friends. And now, here's our host, the Director of the Huffines Institute, Dr. Tim Lightfoot.
- S2 00:36 Hello and welcome to the weekly edition of the Huffines Institute for Sports Medicine and Human Performance weekly podcast. I'm your host, Tim Lightfoot. We're so glad that you took the time to download us, and that you're taking the time to listen. We, every week, strive to bring you another interesting person in the world of sports medicine, human performance, general health and general physical education, a lot of times. Today is no exception. We are pleased to have Dr. Laurie Priest with us today. Welcome to the podcast, Laurie.
- S3 01:00 It's a pleasure to be here, Tim.
- S2 01:01 We're so glad to have you. Let me give the audience a little bit of an introduction and we'll tell them why you're here.
- S2 01:06 We are so glad to have Laurie with us today. She originally has a Master's degree in Exercise Physiology from the University of Maryland at College Park. For many years, she was in athletic administration and was chair of Physical Education. For 24 of those years, she was at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts.
- S2 01:26 She has a large number of honors for her service during those years. For example, she served on the NCAA Women's Committee from 1991 to '94. She was the President of the National Association for Girls and Women in Sport from '89 to '90. She has won many awards along with that. In 2002, she was named the Division III Athletic Administrator of the Year by the National Association for Collegiate Women Athletic Administrators.
- S2 01:51 She currently serves on the Board of Governors and for AAHPERD, the American Alliance of Health, Physical, Recreation, and Dance, which is changing its name - which we'll talk in a minute - and currently serves as the Chair of the Social Justice Committee for that organization, which is about to be known as Society of Health and Physical Educators or Shape America, right?
- S3 02:10 Yes. Yes.
- S2 02:11 It's interesting when one of the larger professional organizations, decides to change its name.
- S3 02:16 Right. Exactly. In fact, I'm not currently serving on the Board. I did serve on the Board of Governors, but just FYI--

S2 02:22 It's still a big deal.

S3 02:22 Yes, it is a big deal.

S2 02:23 That is a big deal. So you're here today because we have a conference here on campus about atmosphere and climate, and you're here to talk-- particularly, one of your research interests is about gender equity in sports. So we're glad to have you.

S3 02:38 Thanks, it's good to be here.

S2 02:39 You're welcome. Where did your passion for women's equality in sport come from? What is the journey? That's what we ask a lot of our guests.

S3 02:47 For me, it came from a young female who, back in the late '60s or early '70s, didn't have opportunities to participate in sport. When I graduated from high school, or went to high school, I had two brothers who played sports in high school and they were no sports for girls.

S3 03:00 I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, area, and I was active and involved in sports, but there were no teams for me overall, so, I was very frustrated by that. But, when I graduated in 1973 from high school and went to college, Title IX had just been passed in 1972, and opportunities were starting to grow for women. And so I participated in intercollegiate athletics at the Division III level. I played volleyball, basketball, and softball there and--

S2 03:28 Multi-sport athlete [laughs].

S3 03:29 Yeah, it was in the day when you could have a multi-sport athlete, even at Division III, which is tough these days. What I did see was women did not have the same opportunities as the men. Even though participation opportunities were added, we weren't supported with transportation, the coaching - those kinds of things overall. I wanted more, I wanted to see it be better, and so I was planning to go into the profession anyway, and I always wanted to teach, coach, and eventually be an athletic director, and so, that really started my journey, and that's where my advocacy came from - really wanting to provide opportunities for girls, but also broad-based opportunities for boys and men, as well, in sports, to provide an educational model of sport.

S2 04:16 Now, Mount Holyoke has primarily a women's institute--

S3 04:18 It's all women. Yes, it's an all women's college.

S2 04:21 And so in those types of institutions, in the past time line, did you see the increase in athletic programs there or were those already established in those types of institutions?

S3 04:32 Well, some of the first athletic programs for women started at the women's colleges. You know, Wellesley, Vassar, Mount Holyoke, overall is where participation opportunities were, but they were really not that competitive overall. In fact, many of the original physical educators didn't-- women physical educators didn't support competition.

S2 04:47 Really?

S3 04:48 No, there was a small group that did, but many looked at it more as a social aspect overall, didn't want it to become too competitive for women, because

they were concerned about the impact on those women, in many, many ways.

S3 05:01

But as it began to develop overall, women were coming into colleges and wanted those opportunities, so those programs grew and developed. Then, we know when-- originally, programs were organized and overseen by the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, up until that was the initial governing body, up until 1982, when the NCAA said, "Wait a minute, Title IX's been out there for ten years. Women's sports are growing. They're not going to go away." At that point, the NCAA, which had had no interest in women's athletics, said, "Wait a minute. We're going to take you under our wing, and we are going to oversee and govern women's sports." So, that's when the takeover - as we call it - occurred overall. And then, women's sports were housed then under the NCAA, overall.

S2 05:44

But that was an interesting time period that I do remember, to some extent, that it was like a switch was flipped. It was almost overnight. NCAA said, "Wait a minute. We want to get into this ball game, as well." And as you said, the takeover happened. I was at Tennessee during that time, and we watched - especially the women's basketball - suddenly it then became an NCAA institution for women athletics. Was it a controversial takeover?

S3 06:10

Oh, it was because the IAW-- they wanted to continue to manage and run women's intercollegiate athletics overall, but the NCAA saw they offered school's incentives to no additional fees or dues to bring your women's program underneath it, and it was really in the beginning-- I try, when I teach a college athletics course at UMass Amherst in their Sport Management Program, when I talk to my students about the history, these students, all they've ever known was the NCAA. And the NCAA has done many good things in more recent years, I would say overall. But initially, the goal was to, if we can't stop women's athletics from growing, then let's control them overall and bring them under our direction.

S3 06:54

One of the most interesting things for me, career-wise, was before I went to Mount Holyoke, I was at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia. We were a women's institution, but we went co-ed in the early '80s, and so, as an Athletic Director there, I had the opportunity to implement Title IX in reverse, in some way, because we were bringing young men into our institution. Many of my colleagues said to me that, "Make it tough on these guys, like it's been for the women overall." And I said, "I can't. I'm a sport educator. We need to provide equal opportunities for our men and our women overall."

S3 07:29

But at that same time, I was in the state of Virginia, some of my colleagues, some of the male athletic directors that I've worked with - and most of them were male at the time - kept saying, "I just don't understand this Title IX. What do these girls want?" And I said, "Well, they want a good coach. They want uniforms. They want transportation. They want the same opportunities that the men want overall."

S3 07:50

And so, I really used it as an opportunity to establish a program that was fully gender equitable, as we got established. And one of the most interesting things that came of it, Tim, was that the young men in our program that I got to know overall - we had created a program that was a level-playing field - and as I talked with some of our young male athletes, they'd say, "You know, it's just not fair. Our program's not fair." And I'd say, "What's not fair? You've got equal facilities.

We flip-flop game times. We flip-flop practices. You have same access to the trainer." Well, they were used to be coming from high schools where they were on the upper rung of the ladder, and they were privileged. And so when it was equal for them, it was seen as less than overall, but it provided a great teachable moment and an opportunity to really talk about that, and look at where we'd been and where we were going.

S2 08:40 While Title IX has been lauded and has been so important in the development of sports, especially for women, in some quarters there're still bad things associated with Title IX, because some universities have chosen to cut men's sports, and so those athletes in those men's sports say, "Wait a minute. This is not fair for us because we're losing our sport." Would you comment on that for us?

S3 09:02 I would say to you that in the last ten years, for every new dollar spent on women's sports, three dollars have been spent on men's sports--

S2 09:08 So it's still inequitable.

S3 09:09 Basically, when we look at the data from 2000 to 2011, there were 44,000 new sport opportunities offered for men. Men are less than by about less than 100 sport opportunities, so they've grown. I've got all the data and statistics - I crunch these numbers every year from the NCAA participation data overall - but what's happened is that, we've got over-- and I should be careful here in Aggie country talking about football, but we've basically increased participation opportunities since 1982 in football by over 25,000. So certain sports - baseball, 13,000 - and these are great sports, but what they've done is, at the expense of gymnastics, wrestling, swimming, some teams overall have been cut. The interesting thing to look at is what the data is when schools cut programs under the auspices of Title IX to say they need to save money, we often see that money funneled back into other sports programs. It's choices by administrators, and not so much Title IX, when you really at the numbers and look at the data.

S2 10:15 It's just Title IX is used as a big boogie man sometimes.

S3 10:17 It is. A number of years ago at Mount Holyoke, I had to cut-- we had 15 sports. I had to cut softball due to-- I had to cut a sport. We had budget cuts. Budgets were tight. We'd cut budgets over time, and you bleed so long and then you have to cut off an arm, and I had to look at it. We used a number of factors. It would've been easier to say, 'This is Title IX.' Well, certainly at our school, it wasn't. It was a budget decision that we had to make and it was a hard one, but we weren't able to raise the flag of Title IX and say that, overall.

S2 10:49 For years, I was at a university where the athletic director-- it was a Division I university, where the athletic director was a woman named Judy Rose. I don't know if you know Judy.

S3 10:56 Yes, I do.

S2 10:57 Great athletic director. And they didn't have football there and they've recently instituted football. I know one of the things they've looked at it is as an opportunity to increase the number of participants in the women's side as well because they're adding some women's sports to offset the huge number that you have with football. So with that logic, if you have football, is that a way to actually increase the number of women's sports?

- S3 11:18 When you look at complaints with Title IX, you've got the three-part test, and the first prong is looking at participation opportunities - how they reflect the undergraduate population. And many people have said-- people who are anti-Title IX have said, "Oh, that's the quota system and that's the only way. That's the only safe harbor."
- S3 11:37 It's really not true, because there are two other ways that schools can show that they have met compliance. And one is through a history of expanding programs, and the third prong is showing that you've completely met the interest of the undergraduate population. If you are going to look at participation opportunities, there is a way for women's sports to increase numbers. What's happened though, Tim, is 15 years ago, the undergraduate population for males and females-- men were about 57% of the population, women were 43%. That's completely flipped today.
- S3 12:11 And what many people say is that, this is not a fair-- that prong one is not a fair way to look at fair compliance with Title IX. But what people don't realize is, it wasn't women advocates years ago who developed the three-part test. In fact, prong one was developed by really male Athletic Directors and football coaches who at the time, women said - when Title IX was implemented - "You give us 50% of the budget, and we'll give you 50% of the budget." They said, "No, no, no, no, no, that won't work." So they looked at undergraduate students. At that time, men were favored. The women said, "Hey, we're going to get more than we got anyway, so let's move forward with the programs." But now, that is completely switched, and so, it's presenting challenges for schools overall - only if they use that prong. But what's interesting is that the majority of schools who do meet compliance with Title IX, typically use prong three to show that they have met the interest on campus overall.
- S2 13:09 It's an interesting political issue, to some extent, and it gets us away from this idea about the reason we did it in the first place. The reason it was done in the first place was to increase opportunities for female athletes that want to play.
- S3 13:22 Well, my concern, to be honest, is that as we move forward-- I'm a sport educator. I believe in broad-based opportunities for men and women. As we move forward and put more and more of our resources into just selected sports, we're kind of chasing the golden goose, when the majority of-- we're putting more and more money into football, more and more money into men's basketball, trying to chase that dream of bringing in revenue when only 22 of the top Division I programs make more than they spend overall, and, in fact, schools, in 2012, it said schools, on average - public universities - subsidize their intercollegiate athletic programs to the tune of \$11.5 million a year. What I worry about is the sports that are being cut because not every young man is meant to play football or men's basketball. We've got wrestlers, we've got swimmers, we've got runners, and so, if we believe, as part of the academy, that sport is an educational opportunity, we're really chasing the entertainment piece when we cut out opportunity. I support broad based opportunities for men and women, really.
- S2 14:34 Along that line - there's so many things we could talk about here - but one of the things that we've asked previous guests is then why have collegiate sports at all? Why not just have intramurals and be done with it?
- S3 14:47 I think there's real value in intercollegiate athletics overall. The opportunities,

the competition, the life skills that are learned overall, I think are really critical. Can you learn those through intramurals, club sports? I think in some ways you can, but I think there's a certain structure, there's a commitment, there's a larger commitment that's made overall, and so I truly believe that there's still a place for intercollegiate sport within higher education, but I do believe-- I come from the Division III model overall, philosophically. It's my job was always to do what was in the best interest of the student athletes, and that's how I always approached it. Unfortunately, in some schools with the Division I model, I think we have problems from the basic philosophical basis of Division I, that they are supposed to support their programs financially based on the revenue that they bring in. It's got to be revenue-driven. Your goals and objectives become focused on filling that stadium--

S2 15:47

Making the money.

S3 15:48

Exactly. It's all about money. So in some ways, that push has, I really think, taken it out of the educational sphere. I think eventually-- it's why we see many, many problems today overall. Many great things had happened. But we've got at the larger levels more problems when we try and relate it and connect it to education than we do at the Division III level overall.

S2 16:10

We've had some conversations here with some of our speakers about how athletics really is the front porch of the university. That's the way that many people get to know you're a university. Without football, would we know about University of Miami? Or basketball - would we know about Georgetown? And so, that's an interesting analogy that people use for the importance of sport.

S3 16:29

Right. No, and I think it's really true overall, and that's great until you get a scandal. [laughter] It's wonderful. Your front porch looks good, and it's clean, and it looks nice - it's all painted. But then you have a scandal, and then in some ways it taints it, but unfortunately, sport just has this overwhelming sense of a positive approach overall. People sort of look past that and look at the institution, so it does, I think, get the name out there overall, in very, very positive ways.

S2 17:00

You mentioned a while ago the life skills that the student athletes learn. And it's-- you and I both have been in education for a long time and working in different educational opportunities. And what's interesting to me is that academic units that get along best - faculty - are usually those that are made up of people that have been brought up through sport. They're used to being on teams, they're used to working together, they understand it's not all about them. It's about the greater good. And other academic units where that's not the case, you don't see that kind of unity, you see a lot of divisive in-fighting. Is that what you observed over the years, or am I completely off base with that?

S3 17:37

Well, I have a sense about academics overall. My biggest worry is that some of the academics in the departments were the people that tried out for the team or were the ones picked last in physical education overall, so they really didn't have those opportunities. So not only have they maybe not had opportunities to develop those skills, but they also are a bit tainted towards it, in some ways, as well. But we look at the research and I know that for women in the top Fortune 500 companies - the top women executives - 80% report that they have been athletes, and sport has played an important part in their lives overall. With the ability to teamwork, risk-taking, knowing when you're a lead dog, knowing when

you take your supportive role overall, and so, it's really helped them in their success overall. I really think that there are skills overall that carry over and can help people to be successful in life. I also believe, Tim, that if a coach doesn't approach it, or a program doesn't approach it from trying to develop positive life skills, we say, "Sport develops character." We can also develop characters. [chuckles]

S3 18:47 And if we pamper these athletes, if they're treated in ways that they can do no wrong, that we pass them through school, we maintain their eligibility, we're giving them the wrong message. And we end up with prima donnas too. I think that it doesn't automatically happen when you're an athlete. I think it's got to be-- we talked about our athletic curriculum. What do we try and do at Mount Holyoke? What are we trying to do to help develop these life skills? What opportunities do we give our students?

S3 19:11 Leadership doesn't just happen because you're on a team. You've got to be given literally leadership opportunities and clear expectations on how you grow and develop in those roles overall. So, it's got to be thought out. It doesn't just happen automatically.

S2 19:26 They have to have responsibility. We had Adam Sargent who is an academic adviser at Notre Dame. He's one of the academic advisers for football. He said, "Our biggest difference is we hold them all accountable. They're all responsible for their actions, and they know that if they mess up, then they're going to be held accountable." They've had some big profile cases in the last year where that's been the case. That was his point to our audience here, was that too often our athletics departments don't do that. They don't. They make excuses. They're like, "Oh, they're great athlete. We'll let them slide this time." Unfortunately, many of those kids have been allowed to do that all their life, to this point.

S3 20:03 Well, I agree. I agree. It's one of my concerns when I deal with parents and everything else - the consequences. We don't always have consequences, and it's better to have those consequences when they're younger than wait for the big one later on.

S2 20:15 For the last few minutes we have, I want to switch gears, just a little bit, because this is really interesting, at least to me anyway. It think it will be to everyone else. You have several courses that you have taught in the past and continue to teach, and, as you said, it's the added benefit of your job. Let's put it that way. One of them is dog sledding.

S3 20:31 Yes.

S2 20:32 That is unique. In all my years, I haven't heard of a course in dog sledding. Can you tell us a little bit about that? Because we've interviewed some physiologists that do dog sled work.

S3 20:40 Do you?

S2 20:40 Yeah.

S3 20:40 I'd love to meet them. For eight years, I did teach a dog sledding class. It was interesting. I was on sabbatical in 2003, and my partner and I went across country in a motor home with our kayaks and our hiking boots and our two labs - went up to Alaska - and I love dogs more than people, so, I basically-- we visited a number of kennels up there, but it was summer time - not thinking I

was going to teach this class at all, but I always wanted to dog sled.

- S3 21:06 When I came back, I took a long weekend and I went dog sledding up in upstate New York, because I just said I wanted to do it, it was on my bucket list, and I loved it. And then, I thought I'd love to share this with my students. So basically, what I did was, I got in contact in Northern Maine, with a musher - a woman and her husband - who have over 60 dogs and they do dog sledding trips. I worked out a way that I could take ten students, and my class was always full. It was a January term course, and we would drive up to Maine, and basically we would dogsled for four days and winter camp. Polly had a camp on Lake Umbagog up there, and with the canvas tents, we would sleep out on pine boughs and double sleeping bags, and our water bottles would freeze, and we would pull water out of the lake and make our meals and everything else - and it was a great experience for the students. They absolutely loved it. I'll never forget one day, a student came in on a dog sled, and she had tears in her eyes. And I said, "Gigi, are you having a good day?" She said, "No, I'm having the best day of my life."
- S2 22:12 Wow.
- S3 22:13 So it just really opened them up to the outdoors and gave them an opportunity - most students love dogs - to do this as well. They got to care for the dogs, learn from Polly, who was great. It was really, really great. I loved it. Even the morning we woke up and it was minus 17, [chuckles] I loved it. [laughter]
- S2 22:31 And isn't that what education is about?
- S3 22:32 Yeah.
- S2 22:33 It's about exposing people to new opportunities--
- S3 22:35 Exactly.
- S2 22:35 And showing them new things.
- S3 22:36 I still get notes from those students. When it gets really cold or they get a big snow storm, they'll send me an email and just say, "I'm thinking about you and when we did such and such." It's heart warming and really great.
- S2 22:47 That's neat. Laurie, thank you so much for being with us today. I really enjoyed chatting with you. As we do at the end of every podcast, we ask our guest to give us their take-home message. Do you have a take home message, the one thing that you want people, if they remember nothing else, the one thing they'll remember from this podcast?
- S3 23:04 Well, you know what? I think, today, I'm giving a little presentation here. One of the things, I'm ending with a quote from James Baldwin, who's a novelist, playwright, poet, and social activist, and what I'd like to leave with people is his quote. "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it's faced."
- S2 23:24 Absolutely.
- S3 23:24 Thanks so much, Tim.
- S2 23:25 You're more than welcome, Laurie. It's been great to have you here. And for regular listeners of our podcast, you know that this is the time of the podcast that we always have our podcast question. Here with the podcast question of



the week is our producer, Cheryl.

S4 23:38

What was the NCAA takeover?

S2 23:41

Great, the podcast question. Be the first one to send us the answer to that via email at [huffinespodcast@hlkn.tamu.edu](mailto:huffinespodcast@hlkn.tamu.edu), and you'll win one of our Nifty Podcast T-shirts. So until next week, when we have another interesting person in the world of sports medicine, human performance, physical education, and health, this is Tim Lightfoot, signing off. We hope that you have an active and healthy week.

S1 24:05

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