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50 years since Title IX

Coll, Landerman reflect on evolution of women’s sports since law went into effect

By Jonathan Bailey
 jbailey@ripontpress.com

“I never saw a uterus on the floor ever, in all my years.”

Elaine Coll, who is the founder of the modern-day women’s intercollegiate athletic program at Ripon College, cited one of many reasons she heard regarding why women shouldn’t be able to play sports while growing up.

Pushback such as “their uterus will fall out, so they don’t need to play” was prevalent, Coll said, before and after Title IX was signed into law 50 years ago by President Richard Nixon on June 23, 1972.

Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in education and says, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity.”

In honor of the 50th anniversary of the passage of Title IX this week, the *Commonwealth* caught up with Coll and longtime Ripon High School teacher Tracy Landerman to learn their stories about the law’s impact.

Coll’s memories of Title IX: The challenges and reward following

While Title IX prohibits sex discrimination, Coll noted Congress never realized what it would mean



ELAINE COLL STANDS by the mural in the Willmore Center that recognizes her for being the modern-day founder of women’s athletics at Ripon College. Jonathan Bailey photo

for female sports and that there “was a shock and there was a backlash” once it was enacted.

Coll, who organized competition and coached women’s basketball, volleyball and track and field at Ripon College from 1973 to 1993, noted women had an uphill battle even after the passage of Title IX.

She said the NCAA didn’t recognize women’s sports and that the Midwest Conference also wouldn’t let women join. In 1976, the NCAA challenged the legality of Title IX regarding athletics in a lawsuit that

was dismissed two years later.

The NCAA eventually hosted its first women’s championships in the 1981-82 school year. Shortly after, the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), which Ripon was part of, folded. The AIAW was founded in 1971.

Prior to the Midwest Conference allowing women to join in 1983, Ripon College was a member of the Wisconsin Independent College Women’s Athletic Conference (WIC WAC). The conference was founded in 1975 by Lawrence

University Athletic Director and Football Coach Ron Roberts and Lakeland University Athletic Director Moose Woltzen.

Other WIC WAC schools included Alverno, Beloit, Cardinal Stritch, Edgewood, St. Norbert, Concordia, Milton, Lakeland, Lawrence, Maranatha, Marian, Mount Mary and Marquette.

Despite women having a conference and association to compete in during the early years of Title IX, Coll recalled many challenges women faced, including having

budgets of just \$100 for each sport.

“[When] there’s no way to find out what the men’s team is getting, you know there’s something wrong. But you can’t vent,” she said, noting that she was still happy to coach and the women were happy to play.

When Coll first started, her players’ mothers made the uniforms to help the program with its budget.

Additionally, when her team went to the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay for a tournament,

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Police, school officials detail ‘nightmare event’ training

Schools, emergency services continuously prepare for possible active threat situations

By Joe Schulz
 jschulz@ripontpress.com

In the wake of the tragic elementary school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, the Ripon School Board heard from district and law enforcement officials about the work being done to be ready in case a similar situation occurs in Ripon.

The Ripon Area School District (RASD) Safety Team Monday ran the board through the work it has done since 2017 to prepare for a potential “nightmare event.”

“Each month, we talk about

safety issues in the district,” Superintendent Mary Whitrock said. “A large part of that is preparedness, making sure that we do our annual safety training and drills within the schools, and then really talk through our procedures and protocols, and put those to the test with tabletops and real-life training.”

RASD Director of Pupil Services Emmy Jess outlined the training the safety team has undergone since August 2017 through this year, and looked ahead to future opportunities to review and practice policies and procedures.

Jess was joined by Facilities Director Brian Appleman, In-



RIPON POLICE CHIEF Bill Wallner talks about the relationship between the school district and the police department as School Resource Officer Lindsey Michels listens. Joe Schulz photo

novation & Technology Director Travis Liptow, School Resource Officer Lindsey Michels and Police Chief Bill Wallner.

Beyond the work in Ripon to prepare for potential emergencies, Fond du Lac County also is enhancing its training for active

shooter response.

By September, Fond du Lac County will have 12 active shooter training instructors, which will “by far surpass any other county in the state, when it comes to having instructors available to teach that material,” Wallner noted.

In 2019, the safety team collaborated with the Ripon Police Department, Ripon Area Fire District, Ripon Guardian Ambulance Service and other local emergency services in participating in a city-wide emergency drill.

“It was really looking at an active shooter drill and looking at the collaboration between the fire department and the police,” Whitrock said. “It was the per-

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TITLE IX/Landerman enjoyed opportunities growing up *continued from page 1*

Coll mentioned to UW-Green Bay coach Carol Hammerle that Ripon couldn't afford to stay there. Hammerle told Coll that she could spend the night with her and that Ripon players could stay with UW-Green Bay players to make it possible.

"No men's team wouldn't be having a hotel room," Coll said of the situation the Ripon women found themselves in.

The Ripon women also were forced to shower with their opponents after games as they didn't have a varsity locker room, not to mention two. According to Coll, the first women's locker room in the Storzer Center was installed in 1998. This came 31 years after the Storzer Center was built — 26 years after Title IX was passed into law.

"I had them in the regular old physical education locker room. I asked ..., 'Can you paint the back two rows red and we will use that for the varsity women? That can be our locker room,'" Coll said, noting "it was a start" and "very cozy."

She added that "nobody seemed to care" that you had to shower with your opponent, but "if you lost, you want to kill them and if they lost, they want to kill you."

Another challenge Coll and the Ripon College women faced was getting the word out about their competitions. Coll said no one was able or willing to send out press releases, so she would go to the commons before games and put Xerox copies on tables letting students know about the upcoming contests.

She also did that for tryouts in the early years, before recruiting became a bigger part of collegiate athletics around the time she retired and took off after that and is now a year-round commitment.

In addition, Coll was frustrated at times about the men always having the first choice of when they wanted to practice and even took the issue up with legendary Ripon College basketball coach Doc Weiske.

After asking Weiske if the women's basketball team could start practice at 4 p.m. instead of 6:30 p.m. and that they "need to have it half the time at a decent hour," she was told, "You can ask for things, but you can't demand it."

While Weiske didn't budge, Coll said he was supportive in helping Ripon's first all-American women, Dewi Oleson, make it to California in 1981 for the AIAW national championship. Weiske and radio personality Jack Arnold paid to send Oleson to the West Coast, where she earned All-American recognition.

Despite saying there wasn't much equality between men and women even after the passing of Title IX, Coll noted she cherished the opportunity to be the founder of the modern-day women athletics at Ripon College.

"I was excited; I wanted to do it," she said. "It was an opportunity I couldn't imagine I would ever get. I just loved it. It didn't matter really what was going on and I wasn't afraid because nobody cared much except the girls."

"I was the luckiest woman in the world. I got to do something that wasn't possible."

Coll grew up just happy if she got to play sports at all, noting



ELAINE COLL TALKS to her players during a timeout during her 20-year coaching career at Ripon College. *submitted photo*

she would hang around the Little League field and sometimes the guys would let her play. She said she was "pretty good at basketball" and "could make a layup," which impressed a lot of people as she only got one step, maybe two and had "a nice little move."

When she played basketball, it was six-on-six. Three players per team would be on the defensive side and three would be on the offensive end. They couldn't cross mid-court, with the offensive players being allowed just a dribble or two.

While attending Ohio University, Coll took one semester of volleyball and two semesters of track, which she loved.

After graduating from Ohio University, she took a job at the UW-Oshkosh until 1973, when she saw that Ripon College was looking for a head coach for women's sports following the passage of Title IX.

Her teams won 10 conference championships during her 20-year career in Ripon and compiled a combined basketball and volleyball record of 391-326. In two decades, she coached two all-Americans and 60 all-conference players.

Landerman cherishes opportunity

While Coll experienced the struggles that came along with growing up when women weren't accepted in sports, recently retired Ripon High School physical education teacher and long-time coach Tracy Landerman had a different experience.

Landerman, who estimates she was in fifth or sixth grade when Title IX was passed, doesn't recall any pushback.

"I don't remember any negative feelings or anything," she said.

"Maybe I was just so excited to know that I was going to be able to be playing in a game that was more structured with practices and being able to compete against other teams. ... And I grew up with brothers and we played all the time in the driveway, shooting hoops and one-on-one. I was so gung-ho, it didn't matter. ... I just wanted to play."

Landerman recalls playing in the Girls Athletic Association (GAA) in middle school. She said the GAA, which was formed in the 1890s across high schools and women colleges to foster physical activity among females in a social setting,



TRACY LANDERMAN, LEFT, and her bench react as the Tigers complete a come-from-behind win against Oconto Falls to advance to the state finals match in 1998. Ripon won state. *RCP file photo*

enabled her to be involved somewhat in athletic competition through intramural-style play days.

Just having that opportunity to play basketball and track was really important for Landerman. The longtime Ripon Tiger volleyball coach said she was one of the kids who wanted to do everything she could with athletics and to be as involved as possible because she liked that atmosphere and enjoyed competing.

While Landerman is grateful that the GAA gave her the ability to participate in sports at a competitive level, she noted additional opportunities were provided after Title IX. Practices became more structured and games were played more consistently.

"I was very excited to go to high school because there was more of that in a structured atmosphere like it is now, versus at the younger level it was just getting that opportunity to compete," Landerman said, noting she competed in volleyball, basketball and track and field while at Wild Rose High School in Wisconsin.

She remembers always wanting more, but didn't know if there was even a thought of that happening.

"I don't remember even a conversation about Title IX until all of a sudden it passed," Landerman said. "It might have just been because of the age I was at and that wasn't something that I was looking at or invested in."

She also doesn't recall that there was a barrier when she attended the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point in the fall of 1979 and remembers competing in the NCAA championships in field hockey in 1981, which was one of two years in a row that her team qualified. They went to Maine one year and

Pennsylvania the next for nationals.

After graduating from UW-Stevens Point in 1983, she was hired at Ripon High School in 1984 and taught physical education there up until she retired earlier this month. During that time, she coached volleyball for all 38 years — 37 years as the head coach — and had stints coaching girls' basketball and track and field.

Throughout her career, Landerman thought Ripon, other area districts and those she's had experiences at have done a "great job" making sure they provided opportunities for all school-aged kids to participate.

"That's always been a pretty good situation across the board as far as what I've seen," she said. "Maybe something wasn't exactly equal, but it may have been because of just knowing that the numbers weren't there."

The biggest difference she sees from 1985 to 2022 is all the options that are available across the board.

"There's just so much more out there, but I don't think it's one gender over another gender," Landerman said, referring to the club and AAUs teams that are available. "It's pretty equal in the opportunities that are out there."

Title IX now and moving forward

Landerman believes schools have made a point to provide opportunities for all students to be actively involved in athletics and participate since the passage of Title IX. She has seen that in her 38 years at Ripon High School with the addition of new sports such as soccer.

Coll also noticed a major change in women's athletics since retiring in 1993. She said coaches are more qualified than they were when she

was coaching; women get "really good referees; people pay to come and see women play; and there are equal locker rooms for both males and females" after not having one when she was coaching.

"Everything in here [the Willmore Center] is all really past Title IX; this is what actually came out of it," Coll said.

She added the gap between men and women is "getting very close" to being even and is moving in the right direction.

Coll still wants to see more people come out and support women athletics like they do for the men. Much like the early days, she said, "not so many people go; not so many care," which is evident in the crowd size for the men and women.

Coll credited a lot of the progress that Ripon College made in gender equality to the late Julie Johnson. Johnson replaced Coll as the head women's basketball coach in 1993 and coached for more than 20 years, while also serving as the athletic director from 2010 until her passing in 2019. She spearheaded the fundraising for the Willmore Center.

"She was driven and her motto was do what has to be done, when it has to be done, as well as it can be done and that's what she did all the time," Coll said of Johnson. "She was fierce. She was on task. She knew what she was doing. ... She deserved to be the athletic [director], that's for sure. She raised everything. She showed that a woman can do this."

While Coll is fairly happy with where women's sports are today, she said people still are trying to get rid of Title IX.

Even if that would happen, Coll is confident that the equal opportunity for females in athletics won't go anywhere as "you're going to see so many fathers furious" about their daughters not having a chance to be a star in their sport.

One issue that has caused Coll, along with many others across the country, to be nervous is the effect that transgender athletes could have on Title IX. This comes after Penn University swimmer Lia Thomas became the first openly transgender athlete to win a NCAA Division I national championship this past season, doing so in the 500-yard freestyle.

"I don't even know what that's going to do," Coll said, adding that a woman who becomes a man "might make the team, but will never get to play. On the other hand, a guy turns and gets to be a woman, he's still a guy's built. I don't care; he's got lots of muscles on him. There's not that much hormone that you can get out of him."

The issue figures to be a hot-button topic in the near future as the *Associated Press* reports that at least 19 states, which do not currently include Wisconsin, now either bar or limit participation by transgender athletes. That is despite the *Associated Press* reporting only a fraction of America's 8.5 million high school and college athletes are transgender.

The transgender athlete bans are being challenged in court with both sides using Title IX in their cases.

While those rulings figure to have an impact on the future of women's sports, Coll is pleased with the progress that has been made since Title IX was signed into law 50 years ago and hopes that it continues to move in the right direction.