



The Power of Resilience

Women in sport and the road to equality



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Editor's Note

When as a little girl, I have told my parents that I was going to be a journalist I knew that all I wanted was to give space to all the voices, especially the underrepresented ones, and create inspirational content based on real life experiences and testimonies.

I have realised quickly enough that the world of media was overloaded with unbalanced, non-inclusive and masculine stories. Every news was just about blood, money and sex, and like my professor back at university would say, "If you don't have one of these words in your article, then your story is worth zero!" Imagine if you wanted to write a story about women rights, empowerment and gender inclusion. Unless you agreed on writing a piece on the increase of the gender gap, how little is the number of women that manage to become CEO, the difference in salaries between men and women or how many women are killed every day.

It was so frustrating for me, as a woman and a journalist, to see how negative and non-inclusive were the news published on mainstream media regarding women. And this is when I have said: "I want to change this situation, I want to change the narrative, and create a magazine that will point out unknown, powerful and inspirational stories!" This is Wempower, a media platform, a magazine and a network of women that want to share their stories and experiences to empower other women, and men, to work towards a diverse and inclusive society.

I believe that every story is a cover story, and in every person, regardless of their gender, religion, culture or political idea, there is the power that will lead to a change.

Sport is one of the most powerful platforms for promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls, and this is why we want to dedicate our first publication to all women in sport.

Amateurs, professionals, sports entrepreneurs, associations, businesses and clubs, that are working to promote and enhance gender inclusion in sports, increase the numbers of female athletes, support them and fight for their rights, retired athlete that are now offering support to their communities or schools, this is for you. To celebrate your resilience and support all your efforts in believing in the power of sports as a vehicle of inclusion and empowerment. •

“It's ok if you can't touch your toes”

Interview with Dezi Olle', yoga, Pilates and mindfulness teacher

By Ilaria Biancacci

Pictures by Zhamila Tampayeva

The first time I have met with Dezi was during the organisation of the International Yoga Day at Decathlon Surrey Quays in 2017. Friend of a friend she came towards me full of positive energy and with a genuine smile. I still remember that I got caught up by the sound of her voice and the delicate way she was moving. I felt immediately at peace and it's like everything around me started to slow down. I had to say that for a tiny moment I thought “maybe it's the yoga” and I immediately felt sorry for my thought, because I sounded exactly like all the people that, unconditionally and superficially, say that if you practice or teach yoga you must be calm and peaceful at all times. You are not allowed to feel angry, upset or anxious.

After more than three years now I have learned that it's in her nature, and yes probably the practice of yoga enhanced this aspect, but it's very rare to find yourself sitting or walking next to someone that can make you realise you are running, stressing, thinking too much, and you can slow down.

Yoga wasn't the first choice for Dezi. She studied Tourism and Business in Hungary and worked for a few years in hotels and wellness centres before realising that this wasn't her path.

« I felt like my job wasn't fulfilling anymore for me. I had the gut feeling that there was a higher purpose in my life, maybe this might sound too cheesy or spiritual, but deep inside me I knew that I needed a change of environment, a new country to explore and so I decided to move to London ». She left the beautiful region of Lake Balaton, with her incredible nature, the thriving streets of Budapest, behind and moved to the UK. *« This city has given me so many opportunities, chances and helped me to build strong relationships and connections that took me where I am now and I will be forever grateful for this decision. Probably if I would have continued to live in Hungary I would not be able to achieve what I did in the past 12 years ».*

Her passion for yoga started with a fortuitous encounter while working at a wellness centre in Budapest. A yoga teacher came in looking for a studio to hire. *« 15 years ago I had no idea of what yoga was and what it was all about, but she said “the first lesson is free if you want to try” and I have thought “why not”. I remember I got immediately hooked ».*



What got me into it was the sensation and feeling that came up when you practice, it wasn't just about my body moving, it was much more. After that I have started attending her classes, following her during her training and workshops. She is my number one teacher and, today, we are still in touch ».

Yoga made her stronger and more aware of her body, and the way she was treating it. *« I was an extremely perfectionist person, I always wanted things to come out perfectly at the first attempt. But yoga made me realise that progress takes time and it's ok. The whole philosophy behind yoga made me reflect on who I was, I stopped beating myself down and I have learned how to befriend myself ».* This new discipline changed her body as well, *“when I was 12 years old I weighed 30 kg, I was very thin and I didn't eat much. I soon developed scoliosis and very strong back pain. Even a simple walk would bring me so much pain. But with yoga I have strengthened my body, and my back ».*

eat much. I soon developed scoliosis and very strong back pain. Even a simple walk would bring me so much pain. But with yoga I have strengthened my body, and my back ».

Bodies are different and certain poses or postures can be more or less difficult for different people. It's the discipline and the practice that will lead your body to a level of flexibility and balance that will allow you to feel great, « *and it's ok if you can't touch your toes or wrap yourself up like a pretzel with your leg around the neck. These pictures published in magazines or on social media are leading to so many stereotypes on yoga and people might think "Oh, I am not flexible enough to do it, I won't try" ».* Yoga is so much more than that, it's not just a fitness routine or a workout as many westerners think. It's a way of living, a philosophy, a relationship with your body that goes beyond pretty poses and sculpted bodies.

Dezi moved to the UK in 2008 and she found it difficult at first to find classes and teachers. And that's when she started thinking that she could share with others what she learned, her experience and approach. She enrolled in a 200 hours teacher training in London and started moving her first steps in the industry. « *I was working in a gym as a receptionist and, even if I haven't completed my training yet, they offered me the opportunity to run some classes. It was great, the clients were great and as time went by and some yoga instructors left I could slowly move from part time to a full time teacher with a growing clientele and workload. In 2013 I finally gave up my full time job at the gym and started working as self-employed ».*

But working as a self-employed person, even if it sounds liberating and the idea of being your own boss sounds super attractive, it can be very hard at times. « *You do have to anticipate the downhill on the roller coaster because your salary, your living is not guaranteed from month to month. You haven't got a fixed amount you can rely on. True, you can have a rough idea depending on the clients and classes you can run in one month, but still it's not stable. Moreover, the fitness industry makes you come to terms with the fact that you will have to work unsocial hours. When people finish work that's when I start work, when people are on their lunch that's when I teach my lunchtime classes. Some clients want to squeeze classes before they start working, usually quite early in the morning so I am always free when other people are not. This aspect didn't come as a surprise. Luckily during my teaching training there was a whole lecture on this and they prepared us, I was aware of it, but still it can backfire on you. You have to make compromises and be very allowing».*



Training it's important for every athlete or fitness instructor. But you can't just train your body, you can also feed your mind. « *I am forever learning, and recently I became a certified mindfulness teacher. Any penny that I had I spent it on training, workshops, books and courses on yoga. My main motivation is to share what I have learned, my experience and help my clients to stay healthy in their bodies and minds ».*

The COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown has impacted the lives of thousands of trainers all over the world, and in the UK, and also Dezi had to adjust the way she used to train and interact with her clients. Moreover, she had to think about a solution that wouldn't leave her without a safe income « *I have lost my job from one day to another. On Monday I was teaching my classes and the next day they said we are closing down, you can't come in to teach, and that was it. I think for freelance instructors it wasn't clear what was going to happen to us, so for the first 2 weeks it was very exhausting mentally to try to get your head around this new situation. I have lost my classes, I have lost some clients too. But then I had to react and as other trainers I have started delivering classes online. This changed completely the way I was used to interacting with clients, the way I would just reach out with my hands to adjust their posture. Now they rely on my words and so I have to be extremely clear and reactive at the same time, to check poses and postures through the screen of my laptop. I am taking this as a learning opportunity, adapting to new circumstances and improving. I am offering 6 classes a week, Monday to Friday, and I also have some private clients. I got into a nice routine and it's working out well so far. What can you do when things are not in your control? You accept your situation and you make the most out of it! ».* •

The Olympic Dream

Interview with Vanessa Chefer Spinola, Brazilian heptathlete

By Ilaria Biancacci

« *I never had an idol, my mum was my inspiration. She works as a police officer, she ran a marathon and she used to run and train a lot. I remember I used to go to follow her training after school and run next to her and the other police officers. I was only 7 years old, and I realised I loved it!*».

Since that day, Vanessa never stopped running and progressing as an athlete, becoming a confirmed heptathlete in Brazil and South America and dreaming about participating in the Olympic Games one day. And guess what? She made it, she realised her dream and participate in Rio 2016.

« *It wasn't easy – says Vanessa – but I had the support of one of the best coaches, my family, and my friends, and all the pain, the anger, and sweat was definitely worth it. I wouldn't achieve it without the help, the encouragement, and support of all of them. The day I entered the stadium in Rio was one of the best days of my life* ».

Vanessa grew up in São Paulo, studied PE at University, and trained 4 hours per day, 6 days a week. After moving her first steps on the track next to her mum, she joined a club when she was 11 years old, and she discovered that athletics was more than just running. « *Here in Brazil people like to run, especially marathons, so I worked really hard on my endurance together with my mum, but once I joined the athletics club I discovered there was much more, many other disciplines. This is the main reason why I decided, supported by my coach, to start training and participating in combined competitions such as heptathlon. I could run fast, I loved the long jumps, and I enjoyed the challenges of the shot put or pole vault* ». Vanessa participated in the Brazilian Championship for the under 15 and won a silver medal. « *I remember I thought...wow...this is amazing, how much I can reach with a little training. I loved the feeling of achievement and the idea of winning a medal* ». And this was just the beginning.

« *I have to admit I was very lucky. Growing up I had the support of my family, access to education and the possibility of training on tracks, even if the standard was very low compared to American or Canadian ones. I felt "protected", I wasn't missing anything. Being gay wasn't a problem and everyone around me was supportive and helpful. After the first records and achievements I have started receiving a government scholarship for athletes. It was amazing for a teenager to receive compensation for the effort, a monetary recognition for the progress in national and international competitions* ». The Brazilian government established the Athlete Scholarship Program, by Law n.10.891/2004, aiming to contribute for athletes economical support, development and permanence in sports



Photo by Wagner de Carmos

and to renew the Brazilian representation in national and international competitive events.

Something changed in 2012. Brazil won 17 medals at London Olympic Games, two more than its previous best in Beijing, finishing 22nd in the overall count. With only three golds and a general shortage of medals on the athletics tracks, the Brazilian Athletics Confederation decided to focus more on individual events, and athletes, in order to raise the chances of winning more medals at Rio 2016. Brazil had a plan of spending \$700m over the following four years on high performance athletes alone, and investing more in trainers, international competition and infrastructures.

That's when Vanessa met Oleg, the Ukrainian coach. A sixty-year-old man, that competed in the Soviet Union and had very strict discipline. A man from a different culture, with a different approach and a difficulty in accepting and understanding gay people.

« *He really pushed me hard, he made me work on my anger, and told me that if I wanted to participate in the Olympics I had to give up on a lot of things in my life, in order to achieve great results. It was never enough for him, he would always push me out of my comfort zone. And then the results started coming and I have realised that all the anger and frustration he was taking out of me I was investing it on the track. To prove him that I could make it, despite my sexual orientation*

or beliefs. It was really hard and difficult at the beginning because I was used to the positive approach of my family and friends, no one ever judged me ».

Vanessa won the gold medal at the South American under 23 Championships in 2012 but an injury to her knee changed everything. She stayed out of the track for more than 6 months and lost almost 10 kg in the first days after her surgery. But she came back stronger than before, and won the gold medal at the Ibero-American Championships in 2014. « I was depressed but I didn't give up. This experience made me much stronger and more aware of my dream ». With the bronze medal at the Pan American Games in 2015 and the experience of the World Championships in Beijing she was ready for the Olympics.

The day came, and all her family was there to support and celebrate her. Even if she didn't win it was an incredible experience « If it wasn't for Oleg, my coach, I would have never made it. We shared a rough path, but it was worth it ».

After the Olympic Games the Brazilian Athletics Confederation decided to cut again the funding and Oleg went back to Ukraine. « So I started training alone. Then in 2017, my wife was transferred to Poland, and we moved to Europe. Life in Poland, as a gay couple, was not easy. The government would not even allow me to get a spouse visa because they did not recognise our marriage, and we could not live our lives freely like we were used to in Brazil. I kept in touch with Oleg and went to Ukraine to train with him for a whole month in 2018 and 2019, and continued participating in sports events all over the world, but something started changing».

Being an athlete gave Vanessa the opportunity to compete in different competitions, at home and abroad, explore new countries and cultures, and see one of her biggest dreams become reality. Now, after 19 years on the tracks it's time for a new chapter « I wanted to participate in Tokyo 2020 but I wasn't ready enough, and the coronavirus changed the cards on the table. Probably next year will be the last of my career as an athlete.



I am currently studying to become a Personal Trainer and I want to share my passion for sports with other people, inspire them and help them to be healthy and fit ».

LGBT+ Inclusion in Sport

Interview with Vicki Carter, Co-Chair for Out for Sport

By Ilaria Biancacci

Discrimination in sports does not apply only to women. We live in a world where labels can easily rule out an entire group of people and preclude the right to access freely sport at amateur or professional level. If women are already “left out” from the main scene, not enough represented or promoted, imagine what happens if your gender does not fit into the male or the female checkbox.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT+) people are still fighting against homophobia, transphobia and other barriers that are affecting their participation in sports. While some sports’ bodies are taking positive action around equality in general, even if the gap between men and women it’s still impressive, there is still a lot of hesitancy on taking action related to sexual orientation or gender identity.

The first time gay athletes started coming out across the world was as early as the 1920s, and even if a sport is often lauded as a platform to advance human rights, history shows us that for LGBT+ individuals and athletes there is still so much that can and has to be done.

The UK sent its first group of gay athletes at the inaugural Gay Games in San Francisco in 1982. The Gay Games were founded with the aim to give LGBT+ communities a space to compete without fear of harassment or ridicule, which unfortunately was the common grounds of sports events at the time.

Six years later, in 1988, Section 28 of the Local government Act, became law, stating “a local authority shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality”. The consequent reaction of all LGBT+ communities was to raise and organise themselves against this discriminatory law, joining efforts on a national level. Section 28 was repealed on 21 June 2000 in Scotland by the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000, one of the first pieces of legislation enacted by the new Scottish Parliament, and on 18 November 2003 in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Ten years after Ivan Bussens, water polo athlete and member of Out to Swim, decided to establish a grassroots organisation that could act as an umbrella group for the sports clubs and teams, and help them operate in a more inclusive way. Out For Sport (OFS) was the fruit of the experience at the 1998 Gay Games in Amsterdam « *We wanted to bring together all London's sports clubs - said Vicki Carter, Co-Chair for Out for Sport - and promoting participation amongst the LGBT+ community.*



Vicki and her wife at the Gay Games 2018 in Paris

We realised that other countries were more ahead than the UK, we were still very much divided. There was the need to establish a strong and united network ».

Out for Sport works in partnership with 52 sports club across London and the South-East, providing support and training on governance, finance, inclusion and, currently on mental health, due to the COVID-19 outbreak and consequent lockdown. « *Apart from our Assembly and Committee meetings, we have the opportunity to get together as a group when we compete in national and international events, like the Gay Games or the EuroGames ».*

The aim of OFS is to create stronger and united clubs, strengthening the voice of LGBT+ people in sport and increasing their participation, connecting UK's clubs to the rest of the world. A vision for a more inclusive community where LGBT+ sport can flourish.



Vicki at the Sport Awards Ceremony

« To celebrate the 21st Birthday – continue Vicki - we hosted an award ceremony to recognise excellence in sports and reflect on everything great and good in LGBT+ sport in London and the South East. Was the opportunity for all of us to come together, celebrate our achievements and consider what we could improve. One of the awards was dedicated to the most Inclusive Club, and I wanted this to be an opportunity to inspire other clubs to do more and better The Sport Award ceremony was hosted by the Mayor of London at the Greater London Assembly's City Hall. Unfortunately due to the coronavirus outbreak we weren't able to celebrate this year's Awards but it was incredible and we had big participation of groups and teams, especially women ones ». The London Royals Hockey Club team won the award for the "Team of the Year", and Olivia Poole from London Frontrunners was awarded "Sportsperson of the Year". « I want to see Out for Sport growing in this direction and find the time to get together once a year to celebrate and recognise the talents within our community ».

« Some of our groups sometimes experience problems, they are not accepted by their communities, or they are having problems gaining access to clubs, especially the trans group. They need quite specific things when they get into a space, they need privacy, and sometimes it's difficult to find members of the staff that are trained to help them ». While on a higher level things started changing when the International Olympic Committee (IOC), back in 2004, adopted a policy (reviewed and updated at different times) to allow participation by transgender athletes in a manner consistent with their newly assigned sex, in the daily lives of thousands of trans people, things are a little bit more difficult. Nationwide figures show that on average 33% of men and 45% of women are not active enough. When we look at data referring to trans people, numbers double up. 60% of trans people and 64% of those who don't identify as either male or female, are not active.

Women groups face problems mainly related to funding, because there is always less money available, and with the access to resources. « Football is the main sport, even within the LGBT+ community, and this is mainly due to the UK's sports culture, but our biggest groups are the swimmers and runners ». Every member of Out for Sport practices sport. Vicki is a swimmer and she challenged herself crossing the Channel. She raised a thousand pounds and she invested in the association, paying a graphic designer to create the logo and she bought the awards for the Sport Award ceremony. « One of the main obstacles for us is the lack of staff, we are all volunteers, and we would definitely need more people on board in order to create more projects and reach out to more structures, committees and clubs ».

« In a strange sort of way coronavirus outbreak impact has been quite good for Out for Sports. Because of the national lockdown all the clubs are closed and they have more time to think about which resources and training they need. This is giving us the opportunity to deliver different workshops and training and to work closely with external partners, like the LGBTQ Consortium or Sports England, in order to understand the needs and develop resources that will help clubs develop and grow. The LGBTQ Consortium is helping with training on governance and finance, Sports England with everything related to funding. There are more time and space for improvement – concluded Vicki - and to think about future projects. Like the Out and Active, to include elderly people in sports, and the possibility of launching a project that will involve refugees». •

Women, sport and religion

Interview with Anira Khokhar, Muslim Women in Sport Foundation Operational Manager

Religious beliefs and values give meaning to the way people structure every aspect of their life. For Muslim women, Islam is a fundamental aspect of their identity and this affects the way they practice and access sport. Modern Muslim female athletes have achieved success in a variety of sports, including volleyball, tennis, association football, fencing, and basketball. In the 2016 Olympics, fourteen Muslim women won medals, participating in a wide range of sports.

Despite the international successes Muslim women are still underrepresented in sports arena, from school and amateur levels to international competitions. In their daily life, they are still fighting to balance their religious values with the desire of practising sports, without having to give up their beliefs. Cultural and family pressures, lack of suitable facilities and programs still play an important role in women's decision to practice sports, but many Muslim women and associations have used sports to empower women's rights creating a society where health and wellbeing are at the heart of every individual.

The Muslim Women in Sport Foundation (MWSF) was founded in 2001 with the aim to offer consultancy to sports clubs that wanted to open their doors to Muslim women. MWSF's mission is to create change by using sport as a means for social development and progression for all communities, in order to build a strong, healthy and active society. « *When you talk to Muslim women – said **Anira Khokhar**, MWSF's Operational Manager – they will say “We don't have a safe space where we can play, my family won't allow me, I don't know what to wear...” and this is when MWSF comes into play. We are working alongside different communities in the UK to ensure they have access to all the information and support needed, inside and outside the clubs, to practice sports in the same way their male peers do. We are also setting up another organisation, the Muslim Sport Foundation, to engage with the whole Muslim society, because changes will come when men will be supportive towards women in sports, understanding their barriers and helping to overcome them. It will also help us to reach and engage a wider number of people, especially the youth, and create safe and inclusive sports environments, that will keep them away from gangs and crime. Sport comes hand in hand with wellbeing and health, so should be a priority for everyone, regardless of your gender, religion, social status or culture ».*

Anira was born and raised in Bristol and she is originally from Punjab, Pakistan. « *When I was younger I used to play netball and I loved swimming, but when I went into puberty and my body started to change I was feeling less comfortable, I didn't know what to wear and*



I really wished there was an association like MWSF to help me find a way to persevere in sports, someone that would have known how does it feel to go through these changes and frustration and guide me. Modesty is not just about finding the right clothes to practice sports, it's more than that. But at that time I had to give up!

Growing up as a woman I have always been working with organizations that promote inclusion and empower diversity. One area I never worked before was sport. I realised that there was a lack of representation and I wanted to learn more about what obstacles, difficulties, and barriers were Muslim women facing in sport and how we could help them, changing the narrative and the perception, in order to involve more women and their communities». One area I never worked before was sport. I realised that there was a lack of representation and I wanted to learn more about what obstacles, difficulties, and barriers were Muslim women facing in sport and how we could help them, changing the narrative and the perception, in order to involve more women and their communities».

Back in 2001, when MWSF was founded, the committee wanted to identify elite level talent within the female Muslim community who would represent Britain at the **Women's Islamic Games**. Nineteen years later the foundation is moving to a grassroots direction, trying to identify communities' needs but also working on a six years strategy project to empower the younger generation of women to build a more resilient community. In the past years, while working with young talents « *we had so many women that were feeling afraid to join mainstream opportunities and didn't want to be under the spotlight. I had some girls*

interviewed about their sports careers and the second question would always be related to religion and the use of hijab. Like if the veil was the only thing reflective of Muslim women. Women feel very nervous about this and they are afraid to be judged according to what they choose to wear. Somehow the hijab become representative of Muslim women, and people won't look beyond that. Many sports brand started to be more "inclusive" towards other communities, introducing full-body running or swimming suits, like Nike or Adidas, but there are so many different shades within Islam and these few examples can't be representative of a whole world ».

The lack of representation of Muslim women comes hand in hand with promotion, news and advertise. « There is no much diversity and Asian people are not widely represented, so it's difficult for Muslim women to relate to what they watch on TV and feel empowered and motivated. I am sure that if I ask you, or any of the readers, to name a female Asian athlete they will go "I don't know...!" ».

However, the reality it is very different. Asian women have been participating in many international sports events, and they have won numerous medals and awards.

Kulsoom Abdullah is the first Pakistani female weightlifter to compete in the international weightlifting championship and the first woman to ever take part in the championship fully covered and wearing an hijab. **Hajra Khan**, footballer and captain of the Pakistan women's national football team, was the first Pakistani women footballer to sign an international contract in 2014 with Sun Hotels & Resorts Football Club to play in the Maldives National Women's league. **Mary Kom**, nicknamed *Magnificent Mary*, she is the only Indian woman boxer to have qualified for the 2012 Summer Olympics, competing in the flyweight (51 kg) category and winning the bronze medal. **Saina Nehwal**, an Indian professional badminton singles player, former world no. 1, she has won over 24 international titles, which includes eleven Superseries titles. These are just some of the names that changed the history of Asian women in sports, the list is way longer and mainstream media should definitely start to promote their stories more.

« The whole practice of sports focus on team and unity, but none of these aspects are used to promote sport today – said Anira. Muslim women and women in general, are suffering from a lack of opportunities and fundings. There is not enough promotion of sports culture within their school, community, and family, and a lack of understanding of what sport is. If you look at the Muslim community in the UK it



mostly represents a working-class and girls cannot usually access extra-curricula activities, because families cannot afford to buy uniforms or equipment, therefore they won't participate. Sometimes the problem is that most of the organizations would work on a one or two-years project, offering little funding to communities and clubs and leaving them alone once the project is over. You cannot just encourage someone to practice sport by giving some little pocket money and expect them to sustain themselves in the long run, just like that. It is time for us to give back to the community and invest more to generate a real change. I would love to see in the next five to ten years more and more women coming out of MWSF as coaches, athletes, sportswomen – concluded Anira. They will encourage other women and young girls to get involved and other organizations to come on board. This is what we need, work together as a community, and embrace the change ».

“No one can tell you that you can't!”

Simone Mckoy talks about her career as a basketball player, her experience as a social worker and the role of sports for children and young people

By Ilaria Biancacci

Simone got into basketball almost by accident. «My sport was actually football, however when I was 13 years old I injured my foot and I had to spend a few weeks on crutches so I was hanging around the local leisure centre where my friends used to play basketball, mainly boys at that time. One day the coach threw a ball at me and said “Hey, why don't you make yourself useful while you are here and try to hit that spot on the wall!” Looking down at my foot I answered him “Well, I am kind of injured right now...” and he replied to me “So...?” I have put the crutches down and shot the ball...and I liked it! That is how I started, a sort of collusion! ».

Simone continued practising basketball all these years, persevered in her career, but she had to “give up” the dream of becoming a professional basketball player when she started facing some difficulties related to being a woman in a male-dominated sport. « Even if my team and I used to train 3 to 4 times a week and we played at a professional level, in Division 1 (the highest one at that time) we never received any sort of payment in money. We used to be paid in sponsorship, and that was it. Compared to our male colleagues we could not definitely make a living out of it. We had to work to sustain ourselves. If they had paid me, I would have trained every day of every week. However, when you have a family and rent to pay, it is difficult to do it without remuneration. A male team would have a budget between 10.000 and 12.000 pounds per year to pay the players and invest on advertising. The female team would have a way lower budget, around £2.000 per year. Do you see the difference?

Abroad, they eat and breathe basketball. I especially remember my experience in the Czech Republic when we participated in a training camp, it was another level. The training was really intense. Wake up early, breakfast, training, game at lunch time, then again training and a game. I still remember that we were defeated by the teenagers' team. They definitely have more discipline and regime. Even eating habits were completely different. They were considered 100% athletes ».

Simone played for London Towers and then at her home ground, Crystal Palace. Today she is a coach for the CIA London Ballers, and she train a female basketball team. Simone also works as social worker, after years of experience working for the Council with underprivileged children, a BA in



Psychology and Youth Work and a Master Degree on Addiction, Psychology and Counselling.

« Sports gives you a family. I could not think of going to a game or any basketball court without recognising someone. It gives you a sense of belonging; it keeps young people out of trouble. Sports make you feel recognised and respected, not just physically, but also mentally. That is why when I coach, I noticed that girls, if given the correct opportunities, support, and confidence, to grow their abilities, will stick together as a team. The problem is that there are not enough girl teams in primary or secondary school, not enough promotion and support from PE teachers, so it is very easy for them to just engage in other sports, more female-oriented.

If you have a passion you should be able to try everything and no one should tell you that “No, you can't!” We have to build girls' confidence because they have the right to be there! When they are treated as they deserve, they are given opportunities and support, and that is when they persevere. However, if they feel judged they will leave, if they feel they are less than the boys, they will leave.



Camdem Panthers Vs CIA London Ballers

I want to tell all the girls and women out there to never let anyone suffocate your talent ».

There is a lack of knowledge of women behaviours and nature, especially from coaches and instructors. « They don't really understand which are the barriers that a woman has to face to succeed in sports, especially from a physical and emotional point of view. Women have to prove themselves more, compared to men, and they should not. I have to consider myself lucky because my coaches always treated me and my team us equal, we trained with boys, we played with or against them and we always had their support. We grew together. Today, not so many young people have the same support ».

Schools are also responsible for this. « If you think you can teach students the culture and meaning of basketball in 60 minutes (even less if you consider the time they take to get changed) once a week, you are wrong. Especially in classes where boys that play on a regular basis have to train with girls that never threw a ball. You will create a very unbalanced environment and the girls will feel judged by their classmates and will not even try to learn something more about the sport.

Too many activities squeezed into a very short time does not help to build a strong sports culture at school. It would be better to focus on two, maximum of three sports per term to give children the opportunity to understand the dynamics, like it, and maybe think of practising at a club.

However it is true that teachers cannot do everything, and the problem is inherent in the system. PE teachers are expected to teach all sports, even if they have not practised in years.

The risk is that sometimes they end up just ticking the boxes of the many tasks they have to complete by the end of the term without really understanding if a child is ready to compete or join a tournament. This obviously results in pupils been thrown into sports competitions without either the correct training support or training, and when they fail, they will drop out.

When it comes to school it's all about budget and costs, and if they cut half of it there is not much left to be invested to provide the correct support to young people ». ●

Men empowering women through sports

Angela del Teso, Spanish Basketball player talk about her experience in Spain and the UK

By Ilaria Biancacci

When Angela moved to London couple of years ago she was so surprised she couldn't find a female basketball team.

« Back in Spain I didn't have this problem. My team and I, we always had a place where to train and play. And I have been very lucky because everywhere I played I always had the chance to be part of the first female basketball team in town!

I have started playing basketball almost by accident. When I was very little I used to play tennis, then football, badminton and padel and I enjoyed competing with my brother. Sport was everything to me. Then, when I was 12 years old, a group of coaches wanted to create a sport club, with a female basketball team, and me and my friends decided to join. This is how it all started. We were the first girl team in town and we loved it. The name of the team was Piratas Soto Basket and we trained in Soto de Real, a small town near Madrid.

We never played on a professional level, neither locally or nationally, not because we were not good, but because the aim of the coaches was to educate us to sports, get us all together to play in a safe place, having fun without the pressure of competitions. And if I have to be honest, they were right. This is what really matters to me. I love basketball, I love the feeling that I have when I am playing, it makes me happy. And I love the fact that basketball it's a team sport. Without a team, in any aspect of life, we are nothing. You need them, to support you, to help you and to build your trust ».

When Angela and her teammates started to promote the sport club within all local schools they were approached mainly by boys. *« Girls were more interested in other kind of sports, like ballet for example. But then they started to come and watch some of our games, they saw that the boys were cheering and supporting us, and that's when they decided to join the team. They realised that we were all playing together, there was no discrimination ».*

Gender inclusion in sports it is still a work in progress in Spain, like in many other countries. *« We used to have a very good female national team, but the problem is, that it is never properly advertised.*



There is no investment in female sports, not only in basketball. If you are a man and you play in a small division you still get a very good salary. But if you are a woman, and you train seven days per week like the men, you need a second job to maintain yourself.

Luckily, in Spain, more and more clubs are recruiting female coaches, athletes and referees and they are promoting gender inclusion. However the road it is still very long. When you go to see a professional game of any female team there is no audience. It is so sad! Most of the time women games are not even properly advertised, you don't even know when and where are they playing ».

In London Angela plays for the **Love Basketball Academy**, a basketball club launched by Jose' Martin, father of two daughters, to create a place where women and girls could practice basketball. A place where his daughters will be able, one day, to play. *« It is amazing to see a man empowering women and girls, making possible for them to play their favourite sport.*

I am grateful for all the coaches I have, because they have always believed in us and they empowered us. We were able to set an example for others and to create a place where girls and women could play.

I want to tell to all the girls out there to never let anyone tell you "this is a boys sport!", play! Because when you are there, in the basketball court, and you are having fun playing that is all that matters! ». ●

Women and Sport in Gaza

Between Ambition and Marginalization

By Mahmod AboEilyan

Founder and Chairman of Generations Youth Center

While sports competitions of various kinds were spreading at a global level, women's participation was very limited, and even more in the Middle East. Men dominated the Arab scene until some female athletes were allowed to participate at the 1990 Olympic Games. Numbers are still very low but the movements for the participation of women (regardless of religion) into the world's sports scene are growing significantly, year after year. A research compiled by UEFA for the years 2016/17 shows that the total number of registered female players is 1.270 million, representing more than 100 countries. More and more young girls are playing football, with the number of registered players under 18 now standing at over 827.000.

Numerous studies on the participation of Arab women into sports life shows that female athletes are making important and significant strides, they are imposing themselves as an essential component, especially during the Olympics. On the other hand the number of women who decide to stay at home waiting, due to customs and traditions, is still too high. Arab women have been absent from international competitions until Nawal Al-Mutawakkil from Morocco won the gold in the 400m hurdles in 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, becoming the first Arab woman to write her name, and the one of her country, in gold letters in the records of world sports history.

Other Arab athletes showed the world their success. Hassiba Boulmerka won a gold medal for Algeria in the 1500 meters at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona and Ghada Shuaa from Syria won a gold medal in the heptathlon at the 1996 Olympics Games in Atlanta. One more time Algeria brought a gold medal back home with Nuria Ben Aida Ramah in the 1500 meters at the Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000. Despite all the difficulties that they would face in their daily lives, Arab women were thriving on the track field and they were shining a light on their talents with international accomplishments and recognition.

Bahrain stepped forward promoting women's participation in international sports events when Fatema Hameed Gerashi and Mariam Mohamed Hadi Al Hilli participated in the Olympic Games in Sydney,



respectively in swimming and athletics. The name of Yasmine Elhely started appearing in the world of motorsport, specifically rallies, representing Bahrain on national and international tracks and in 2013 was the turn of Samira Al-Bitar and Jumana Al-Turaif to raise the flag of the Gulf's reign at the World Swimming Championships in Barcelona.

Qatar was the first Arab country to engage women in the sports administration with Dr. Anisa Al-Hitmi, becoming the first Gulf woman to be appointed member of the Qatar Olympic Committee. This nomination opened the door for women participation in different sports events and especially in the Gulf Shooting Championship.

In countries like Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Jordan, Palestine, and Iraq, women are fighting against the deterioration of ideological, social and economical conditions, therefore the number of women

participating in sports events has started to drop significantly in the past years. The relative underrepresentation of Arab women in international sports event can be explained by a number of variables, such as finance, demography, sporting culture, policy and governance. In Palestine, we also have to add the political conditions that resulted from the Israeli occupation. The number of obstacles that Palestinian athletes had to face, and are still facing, are different and among them, there is the lack of financial and moral support, the shortage of facilities and the travel restrictions.

But despite the obstacles, the burdens of colonialism and occupation, the inherited customs and traditions, women in Palestine have always found the strength to participate in sports, proving their abilities and courage. To better understand the representation and role of women in sport, we can't forget about the Gaza Strip. Here, after being marginalized for the last century, women are now ready to gain their place in the sports scene. A fresh start, especially with a negative societal view that limits the athletic aspiration of women or participation in international championships.

Female sport and its many shades have an ancient history in the Gaza Strip. It flourished in the early 1950s, during the Egyptian rule era. Practicing sports was very popular at that time and encouraged by families and society. Girls were participating in Arab and international championships. Today, women's sport activity is limited to women only clubs or universities, due to societal restrictions.

The researcher and sports activist Nelly Al-Masry attributes the status of the women's sport sector in the Gaza Strip to the attitude of society, that have become *"an obstacle to the girl's practice of sport, where people consider it just a sort of entertainment and in some areas they refuse to see girls practicing any sort of sport when they reach a certain age"*. Despite this climate of restriction there are many initiatives that promote sport for girls and women in the Gaza Strip, especially karate and table tennis clubs. There are women that are challenging obstacles and restrictions imposed by society.

Most of the sports teams formed in Gaza started to focus on demonstrating their talents despite the difficulties and the practices they face at all levels before any local or international participation. The female karate team at Gaza Sports Club it's a strong example, although for every girl over 17 years old, interestingly, it's



mandatory the presence of parents or their companions during training.

Rehab Elayan, one of the members of the Karate team said "We are very ambitious, we have good training and we reach the first positions in different games, but only at a local level". She added "Our bigger problems are the way people perceive our activities and the existing travel restrictions". Rehab Elayan holds first place in Kata and Kumite for the 17+ in the Gaza Sports Club Championship and her fellow champion Maha Karate describes her as "hard and serious in training". The two athletes said that dozens of girls have joined the club to train with them, noting that "many of them are forced to stop training because of family reasons". Rehab and Maha biggest dream is to participate, one day, in Arab and international championships.

Four girls from Al-Jazeera Sports Club in Gaza recently formed a table tennis team. Hadeel Saba, one of the team member, share the same aspiration of Rehab and Maha of participating in local and international championships "after developing my skills and capabilities with the support of the club". Reem Al-Zaeem, another member of the table tennis team, underlined the continuous support and the encouragement that she has always received from her family, since her childhood, and she stresses the need for "women to have an athletic role in Palestinian society". The obstacles that women are facing are many. "Among them – said Mai Muhammed, member of the female athletics team and student in Sport and Physical Education at Al-Aqsa University - there is the separation between the West Bank and Gaza, and the lack of communication between the two entities created by Israel. As for now, women participation in sports is limited to the ones living in the West Bank".

Amer Abu Ramadan, head of the Hilal Gaza Club, announced the establishment of the first football school for girls in Palestine, explaining that will target girls between six to twelve years old in accordance with the customs and traditions of Palestinian society. The training sessions will take place in a closed hall, under the supervision of a group of female coaches only. •

The History of Turkish Women in Sport

by Deniz Erdoğan and Yağmur Güleray

Sports play a vital role in physical, mental, emotional, social and psychological development of its participants without any discrimination of gender. Throughout history, there have been inspirational women that have paved the way for presence and representation of women in sports as well as in all areas of life. Was 1926 when a sport course was launched at **Çapa Girls' School** in Istanbul to enable successful, talented women to participate more in sports. Three years after a group of women in Ankara founded a tennis club and Suphiye Fırat, a female volleyball player, started playing in the men's team and proved how strong and powerful women can be.

The sisters **Nezihe, Fitnat** and **Melek Özdil** were the first female rowers, together with **Vecihe Taşçı**, to compete for the **Fenerbahçe Rowing club** and won multiple times in local and national championships between 1930 and 1942.

In 1936 the fencers **Halet Çambel** and **Suat Fetgeri Aşeni** participated in the Summer Olympics in Berlin. They were the first Muslim women to compete in the Olympics, representing the new republic's young women generation.

Lale Oraloğlu, a theater actress entered the **Galatasaray Girls 4 Single Rowing Team** in 1950 and won the championship.

A group of young women with the slogan "*We can do it as well as men do*" founded the **Dostluk Sports Club** in Istanbul on April 1973. The club was preceded by the **Istanbul Kız Futbol Takımı** (Istanbul Girls' Football Team), formed by 13 women under the personal initiative of coach **Haluk Hekimoğlu** in 1971. The club's success initiated soon the establishment of other women's football teams in İstanbul, İzmir and Ankara. Dostluk Sport women's football team became runner-up in the 1999–2000 season of the Turkish Women's First Football League. Due to the lack of any other women's football teams, Dostluk Spor played



Halet Çambel and **Suat Fetgeri Aşeni** at the Olympics in Berlin, 1936.

demonstration games with men's teams of retired or junior players before some jubilee matches, derbies and season's opening games between 1973 and 1978. The team contributed much to the women's football in Turkey playing in many cities of the country. Their fundraising matches after the 1976 Çaldıran–Muradiye earthquake in Van, in eastern Turkey, helped growing social responsibility. The team's advertisement in the newspapers to recruit women players also found a very positive response.

The military takeover in 1980, struck a blow to associational life developed so far in Turkey. The ensuing junta regime held associational life and their "unlimited freedom" responsible for the chaos Turkey had slipped into in the late 1970s. Consequently, the Dostluk Sports Center, together with many other associations, was shut down. Seven years after, a group of female football players came together again and the team participates in many national and international events.

In the nineties more women were approaching the sports scene, participating in national and international events. **Hülya Şenyurt** won the women's bronze medal in Judo (under 48Kg) in the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona, becoming Turkey's first female and youngest Olympic medalist. **Nurcan Taylan**, class 1983, broke six European and two World Records in weight lifting, winning a gold medal at the Olympic Games in Athens. She made history



becoming the first Turkish female athlete to achieve such success. Testing positive for the anabolic steroid Methandienone she was banned by the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) for two years starting in 2011.

Women were showing the country and the world, their power and willingness to compete at a professional level in disciplines that were always considered to be men's land. It's the case of **Nur Tatar Askari**, the only female athlete to win a medal in two Olympic Games in taekwondo. Descendent of a Kurdish family she won the silver medal at the 2012 London Olympics and the bronze medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

It's the turn of **Irem Yaman** to break another record and become the first Turkish female athlete to win the gold medal twice in taekwondo. Irem debuted on an international level in 2014 and won a gold medal at the European Under 21 Championship in Innsbruck, Austria. One year later she won the gold medal at different tournaments, including Turkish Open in Antalya, Luxor Open in Egypt, Ukraine Open in Kharkov and Moldova Open in Chisinau. She became world champion at the World Taekwondo Championships in Russia in 2015. In 2018 the World Taekwondo Federation awarded Irem as the most successful female athlete.

Zeliha Ağrıs class 1998 won a gold medal at the 2017 World Taekwondo Championships in the bantamweight category.

The boxer **Busenaz Sürmeneli** represented Turkey at the 2017 Women's European Union Amateur Boxing Championships in Italy, where she won a silver medal.



1. Yasemin Ecem Anagöz, Archer

2. Ipek Soylu, Tennis Player

3. Ayşe Begüm Onbaşı, Aerobic Gymnast

She won the bronze medal at the 2019 Women's European Amateur Boxing Championships in Spain and she became World Champion at the 2019 AIBA Women's World Boxing Championships held in Ulan-Ude, Russia. In February 2020, she won a gold medal in the 69 kg division at the 64th Bocskai István Memorial International Boxing Tournament in Hungary. Another athlete that wrote her name with golden letters in the history of Turkish wrestling is **Yasemin Adar**, four-time European Champion and one time World Champion.

Neslihan Yiğit, badminton player, **Çağla Büyükakçay**, tennis player, **İlke Özyüksel**, pentathlete and **Göksu Üçtaş**, artistic gymnast represented Turkey at the Olympic game for the first time in their respective categories. Çağla Büyükakçay also played a historical championship in the 2016 TEB BNP Paribas Istanbul Cup, becoming the first Turkish athlete to reach the championship in WTA tournaments.

Other female athletes competed and succeeded in national and international fields, achieving great results also in a sport like tennis and badminton. **Ipek Soylu** it's one of the most important names of Turkish tennis. She experienced the most important victory of her career in the 2014 US Open. The badminton player **Özge Bayrak** competed at various international tournaments in singles and doubles with her partner. At the 2013 Mediterranean Games held in Mersin, Turkey, she won the silver medal in the women's singles event and the gold medal in the women's doubles event along with Neslihan Yiğit. Özge also represented Turkey at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

Yasemin Ecem Anagöz was selected as the athlete of 2018 in the women's classic archery thanks to the gold medal won at the 2018 European Championship held in Legnica, Poland.

Ayşe Begüm Onbaşı she is only 19 years old and she gained the nickname "Medal Monster" after winning more than 60 medals in her young career as a gymnast, including 35 golds. Her successes at the World Championships in Mexico in 2015, South Korea in 2016 and at the 2019 Aerobic Gymnastics World Cup in



Irem Yaman, photo from <http://www.worldtaekwondo.org/>

Portugal, are testimonies of her incredible talent, hard work, and dedication.

The youngest one on the list of the best female athlete in Turkey is **Beril Böcekler**. Class 2004 she won the silver medal both in the 800 m freestyle and the 1500 m freestyle events at the 2019 European Junior Swimming Championships in Kazan, Russia. She also broke four Turkish records the 200 m, 400 m, 800 m and 1500 m freestyle events at the 2019 European Youth Summer Olympic Festival (EYOF) in Baku, Azerbaijan, where she won three gold medals. Beril was selected for the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo. ●

I exist as long as I run

Interview to the Turkish athlete Ozlem Orhan

by Yağmur Güleray

Ozlem was only 12 years old when, thanks to her PE teacher, she started participating in athletics competitions. « *I remember there was a competition held at the school between classes and my teacher asked me to participate. I won against all the girls in my class. I had played volleyball and tennis before, but I had never participated in anything related to athletics. Then a second competition was held between classes and I came in first among all the girls of the school. My PE teacher decided that I could participate in an inter-school competition in Ankara and without any sort of professional training I won another medal. That day, one of the national team sprinters' coach approached me and said "I want to train you. Let's talk to your teacher and get permission from your family so that you can start practicing athletics* ». This, was just the beginning of her journey into sport. After 10 years spent on the track field Ozlem decided to follow her passion for sports within the research and academic field, helping and supporting young people in accessing and practicing sports in Turkey.

« *Of course, we are talking about the '90s, it was hard to practice sports in Turkey in those years. Athletics was not a known sport and was a difficult one. The national team coach that initially contacted me, met with my family and my family supported me. I started training at the age of twelve and I become fond of athletics very quickly. The school would start at noon, and my training was starting at 10 am in the morning. I would leave the house at 07:30 am to be ready at the track field at 08:30 am. Even though it was two hours ahead of my training time, it was a special feeling for me to be there in that field and breathe that air. It made me very happy. This routine continued for ten years, and I never get tired*». Competing for the national team was hard, Ozlem had to train 7 days a week and keep studying hard at school to respect the promise made to her parents, that she will never forget about her education because of sports. She participated in her first World Schools Championship in Slovakia in 1993 and she won her first national athlete title in the 200 meters.



« *Athletics was a big part of my life. We had to run under every sort of weather and in the cold winter, while everyone else was sitting in a warm house, we cleaned the track field from the snow and continued training. We never stopped* ».

After high school Ozlem decided to enrol at the Faculty of Sport Sciences at Gazi University in Ankara. She won a scholarship from the Ministry of Education and she continued athletics until the second year of university, and « *at that point I had to make a choice whether I wanted to continue my sport career on track or at an academic level, providing training and support to other athletes. So I decided that this was the right time to change*». Being a professional athlete in Turkey it's not easy. The main reason is economical. Athletes, especially, compared to other sportspeople have lower salaries (in Ozlem case non-existent) and it's really hard to make a living out of it. If then we add gender to the equation, we can see that salaries are even lower.

Was your reason for leaving athletics a financial reason?

Yes, maybe if I had earned more money I could have continued for longer. In fact, I left at a very young age, at the height of my career, I was a national champion. A player playing in the second league in volleyball was receiving a higher salary than mine when I played for the A national team. Unfortunately, spiritual things such as medals are satisfactory and enough only for a while. Then you have to deal with life and responsibilities, and I had to prepare myself for it. My family still had to support me. That's why I turned into the academic field.



The number of Turkish female athletes increases every year. According to an official research realized by the General Directorate of Sports, the number of licensed female athletes in Turkey increased of 25% in the past eighteen years, from 66.356 in 2002 to almost 2 million today. The research was conducted taking in consideration 62 sports federation, and it emerged that the majority of female athletes practices chess with almost 300 thousand registered players. Volleyball counts 192.858 and taekwondo 166.079. On the fourth place, we find athletics, with 91.329 female athletes. In all of these disciplines, including as well as horse riding, ice skating, and gymnastics, women are outnumbering men. The reason for this is that the opportunities are increasing, because Turkish women are becoming stronger.

How did your family react when you decided to practice athletics professionally?

It was in the 90s and they did not look enthusiastic at first. The athletic field was in Ulus. It was away from home and school. However, I promised them that athletics would have never prevented me from going to school. This was their biggest fear. One day my grandmother asked me, "How long will you run for?" I said, "I'll run until I die." She said to me, "No, it's a very long time". When I was travelling abroad for different competitions, my family was very excited. It was difficult even to get out of the city at that time. Of course, my grandmother did not like the fact that a girl was sent alone out of the country. Nevertheless they trusted me, and I have always kept my promises.

When enough opportunities are provided, women athletes arrive. In the past, sports like basketball and volleyball were considered men-only sports. It is not like this anymore. The financial support offered by the National Sports Federation also attracts more women into practising sports on a professional level. The road for women inclusion in sports in Turkey is still long and the support from government and sports association I doubt is sufficient. There is still the idea that certain disciplines can only be practised by men, however, women can practice every sport. As long as they are given the opportunity to do so. Both girls and their families need to be supported and persuaded.

In our country girls are still not welcome in the world of sports, especially in rural areas, where families base their living on agriculture and sheep-farming. Girls have to work in the fields or help with housework.

When Mizgin Ay was only 17 years old, she participated in the World Stars Athletics Championships in Kenya in 2017 and won a gold medal in the 100 meters. Her PE teacher discovered her and she used to train with her older sister's shoes (5 sizes bigger) because the family couldn't afford any sort of sports equipment. The teacher persuaded the family to let her training more, but unfortunately she had to work in the field and couldn't go back to the track field until funds and financial support were provided. Mizgin dreams about Tokyo and the Olympics and she is really a great example for all other girls that want to practice sports.

There are thousands of Mizgins waiting to be discovered in our country. First of all we should give physical education's teachers the opportunities by increasing hours in schools. Then we have to talk to the families and encourage them to support their girls' talents and choices. I think that in the last years, Turkish girls and women have proven their abilities and endurance in sport, not

Training to become a professional athlete requires you to be fully dedicated and committed. « *When I was lying in bed at night, after a long day spent between the track field and the school, the only thing I could think was Yes, I did it! Sometimes I would get scared walking alone across Ankara's streets early in the morning or late in the evening, but I would not discuss my fears with my family because I was scared they would tell me to stop, and I could not. The happiness I felt while I was crossing the finishing line was priceless, I could not risk that feeling. One of the things I love the most about athletics is that is objective. You exist as long as you run, and I never experience such a thing* ».

Did you follow any particular routine before the race?

« *Every athlete has different rituals. I would definitely run before the race. My speciality was 100 and 200 meters. Before the competitions, I would picture the race in my mind by breathing regularly in a quiet place. I would plan every single movement of my arms and legs. This would make me very comfortable. Often extreme excitement and stress can pull performances down*».

only in athletics, and I believe that we will overcome these obstacles to girls' participation in sports by providing the necessary training and introductory work to the families, and by providing the necessary financial support.

Female Turkish athletes are now at a level that allows them to compete with the world. As Turkish women take a lot of responsibility in their social life, more support is needed. It is more difficult to discover new talents because they are different from their European colleagues in terms of upbringing. Sports teachers should play a more significant role as well, supporting and encouraging young girls. Nevin Yanık, sprinter, and Süreyya Ayhan, middle distance track runner, were two famous athletes. Unfortunately, they both have been penalised because of doping. Achieving success in athletics requires intensive training and patience. It is really sad for me seeing such valuable athletes out of the sports scene because of doping. It is a major issue, not only in Turkey but at a global level. This process could be stopped if the federation, coach, and athlete triangle had a solid foundation. The reward system should also be revised and athletes should be financially and morally supported, undergoing regular checks, to prevent this from happening.

Are there any Turkish female athletes that inspired you?

« My idol was Marion Jones and I used to watch Florance Joyner with admiration. I also followed the now-retired Turkish shot putter, Filiz Mar. None of them gave up their unique feminine appearance to become an athlete. I loved to see their different hairstyles and the colourful uniforms they were wearing. I am against the prejudice that women who play sports cannot be feminine or attractive ».

Now Ozlem works as an educator and is helping young people getting involved in sport, especially girls. « It is very important to motivate girls. They complain about the oppressive attitudes of the managers and coaches in the clubs. They hear too often, compared to their male counterpart, "*If you can't do that, you can't join the team*".

However despite all the difficulties is possible to see female students competing in every discipline, and this makes me really happy. Women who play sports become more self-confident, their awareness rise.



Although being a female athlete is a bit difficult in our country, Turkish women are very strong. We are the children of very powerful ancestors, and the important thing is to believe, without losing the motivation and to persuading the families to support the new generations. Because prejudices still exist, although female athletes are starting to be supported and represented more across all national media. My coach used to say to me, "*Cover your ears and look ahead!*" The harder you work and train, the faster the success will come. Athletics can be very demanding, but today I earn money thanks to it. In return, I gave athletics all my youth and childhood. My advice to the young generation is to work hard, endure, and understand that this is a long-term job. It requires patience ». •

From volleyball to counseling

The story of Gülsen Şatiroğlu, Turkish former volleyball player

by Deniz Erdoğan

Gülsen was born in Ankara in 1989 and she was a volleyball player for the “Ankaragücü Sport Club”, one of the most popular sports club in Turkey. Now she works as psychological counselor and guidance teacher at a private school in Ankara.

Tell us about your years as a volleyball player.

My childhood and youth went by playing sports. I dedicated the most active, physically and socially, years to sports. I have started playing volleyball when I was 9 years old. I used to wake up at 5:30 am in the morning to attend the training at the club before going to school. Once the lessons were over I would make my way to the club again and after training my friends and I would stay there to complete all the homework before heading back home.

All these sacrifices and extreme discipline were hard for a young girl but it was all worth it, especially when my team and I would participate in tournaments and win. We were one of the most successful adolescent girls team in Ankara.

Being part of a team taught us how to behave as one unique body with different arms, characters and points of views. When you are young you feel like you are immortal and you can do absolutely anything. We felt exactly that way. Unite and diverse at the same time, with a young and active body, experiencing the beauty of playing sport as a team, sharing a feeling of belonging. During those years, I have learned the meaning of sisterhood, the importance of solidarity and team spirit, and it is something that I have carried with me in my adult life. Practicing sports at a very young age always gives you an advantage. If you endure such an effort during your spiritual and physical development age, believe me, it will also affect your adulthood.

Something changed. Why didn't you continue to play volleyball?

There are rare turning points in a person's life: your life exists before and after them as two different states. My past life depended on playing volleyball, until the day I injured myself during a workout. After this episode, it became necessary to choose a different path and give up this profession.

I was only 17 when, during training, I injured my knee. I



I have undergone many surgeries and months of physiotherapy and I had to stay at home for more than 6 months. Hence, also my education was disrupted. This was a very big challenge for me.

Why didn't you decide to continue your career in sports, even as a coach?

It is not that easy. It comes a time in your life where you have to make a choice between passion and reason. As you grow older, you are forced to face reality, which is different from what expected. First of all, sometimes it is complicated to choose a sport as a career for a woman. Being a woman volleyball player brings with it multiple difficulties that go beyond the fatigue, the nature of the games, and its rules. It is fundamental to maintain your condition at a top-level, no matter what. Also because you do not play alone, but you are part of a team that counts on you.

To all of this you have to add the fact that female volleyball players earned less than a male one. It is not surprising that gender inequality exists in sports, as well as it does in every other profession and field. An away game will guarantee millions of dollars to a male player, but not to a female one. You also need to consider your priorities in life and most of the time you need to face traditional expectations and cultural norms. Society expect a woman to get married, have



children, and take care of the house. Definitely, I can tell you that I am not a woman who depends on society's expectations.

As I said before gender inequality exists in sports, mostly because of the biological difference between sexes. A man and a woman have different metabolism, muscle structure and skeletal development system. These are also discriminatory criteria used by sports clubs when they have to choose between a male or female coach. A man can work as a sports trainer in clubs, inheriting this role only because he is born male and not because of his formation. Moreover, some sports clubs apply different age criteria to the two genders, and women are often discriminated against if older 40 years old, and – I must underline this – especially if they were previously injured.

Is sports a men's world?

The world of sports is a world dominated by men, but not their world. Definitely not! Sports is a world where women are extremely successful as they are in every field. It is an undeniable fact that there are differences, but differences represent also “diversity”, differences are what make the world beautiful. The fact that women and men have different biological and physical characteristics is obviously much more visible in sports. However, these differences should not be perceived as inequality. Every person, man or woman, is strong in his/her own way in sports.

This does not mean that men are superior to women. Every living being has its own power within its own field. I disagree with statements such as *“you (as a woman) cannot succeed”*, *“you cannot be as strong as a man”*. Comparing us to the opposite genders is inappropriate. The power and spirit of women are always unique!

Do you have a message you want to share with other young women in sports?

Although I had to face difficulties when I quit volleyball professionally, I always had a passion for sports. I am always been and always will be an active and sporty spirit, although I may not be able to practice sports as a profession at the moment. Our preferences and priorities can change in life. Perhaps what stopped me from becoming a professional volleyball player was giving priority to my health. Nonetheless, I have decided to provide help to young adults, and through my work as psychological counselor and guidance teacher, help them to build their future. I always advise each one of my students to be active, to practice at least one sport in their lives, even if they do not succeed at a professional level.

Sport is a privilege and we, as young women, have tremendous power! No matter what we have experienced, life can sometimes lead us to unexpected places. Discover the power within you when you experience unexpected difficulties, never stop fighting, never give up. ●

“Never give up and always set an higher goal”

Interview with Bebe Vio, Italian Paralympic athlete

by Ilaria Biancacci

Beatrice Vio, better known as Bebe Vio, class 1997, is an Italian fencer. Born in Venice and raised in Mogliano Veneto she started practicing fencing at a very young age. In late 2008, when she was only 11 years old she was affected by a severe meningitis that caused her and infection which led to the amputation of all her limbs. After more than three months of intensive rehabilitation, she was ready to get back to sport and after years of training and competitions she participated in the Paralympic Games in Rio, in 2016, winning a gold medal and achieving her biggest dream.

When and how did you start practicing sport? Why did you choose fencing?

Sports have always been an essential part of my life. I have tried different ones and when I was only five years old, after a volleyball training I came across fencing for the first time. In the gym next door there was a lesson of fencing going on and when I have walked in front of the door I was awestruck from all these white “Zorros”! Was love at first sight!

How did your life change after your illness? Which are the new things you had to learn?

After my illness I had to learn how to do everything from scratch, even the most simple things. One of the most important one, apart from learning how to walk again with my new legs, was to learn how to use my strength with the hands prosthesis and grab any objects without breaking them.

Your father helped design the first prosthetics to help you get back to fencing. How did your life change thanks to technology?

My dad is a missed engineer and when I wanted to get back to training, together with the orthopedic technicians of “Arte Ortopedica” of Budrio, in Bologna, he designed an artificial limb that would allow me to fence again. I am the only athlete in the world that has a prosthesis to hold the foil, fencing from the shoulder.

In the life of a person that underwent the amputation of all her limbs, technology is fundamental. In my daily life, for example, I have



different prosthesis for different tasks and activities. I have myoelectric ones that open and close and allow me to grab objects and bionic prostheses, produced by a company called Ossur, which allow me to move my fingers too! Unfortunately, the only negative aspect of these ones is that they cannot get wet. I also have another prosthesis for lower limbs with adjustable heels. Technology is striving and I hope that it will possible, in the future, to make lives of people without limbs even easier.

Who is your source of inspiration and motivation?

My mum, Teresa. She is my family backbone. She always supports and bears us all, me, my brother Nico, my sister Sole and my dad. Not only, my mum is also the president of Art4sport! My other source of inspiration is all the kids from the art4sport team, their motivation is incredible!

How was Art4sport created? What was the biggest achievement you have reached with the association?

Art4sport is an association created with the aim of improving the lives of amputee children



Photo by Augusto Bizzi

and young people. Was launched in 2009, after my illness, when my parents decided to actively do something for me and all the young people that were living a similar situation. Art4sport studies, designs and funds the very expensive sport's prosthesis and all the necessary types equipment for the practice of Paralympic sports. It was a great challenge so far, we grew a lot during the past years, and today we are supporting 35 kids and young people. We are campaigning for the promotion of Paralympic sport in general.

Tell us something about “Giochi senza Barriere” (Games without Barriers) and the idea behind them.

The Games without Barriers are the most important charity event organised by Art4sport. The idea came from a football match, back in 2010, played between the “Nazionale Calcio TV” and a local team from Mogliano Veneto. On this occasion disable people could just watch the game, but from this experience we designed the first edition of the Games, in 2011, where disabled athletes could actively participate. After four edition in the small town in Venice province, we moved to “Arena Civica” of Milan in 2015 and then, in 2016, we landed in Rome, in the incredible frame of “Stadio dei Marmi”. During this event eight mixed teams, composed by adults and kids, disabled and non, they challenge themselves in different games, in the name of inclusion.

Tell us about Rio. What did it mean for you participating in the Paralympic Games and win? What is the most memorable moment of this experience?

For every athlete to compete at the Olympic Games (or Paralympic) is a lifetime dream! I used to dream about this since I was a little girl and when finally it came true, it was an unforgettable emotion. I had a taste of the Paralympic Games in 2012, in London, when I had the chance to be the torchbearer, representing all the future Paralympics athletes. Rio was my first real Paralympic

and I won the gold medal in individual fencing and a bronze medal in the team one. I am very attached to this last medal as we won it together as a team, with my teammates Andrea and Loredana. There are so many memorable moment, and they are all amazing, but this one is definitely the best one!

Do you think that gender discrimination exists in sports? If yes, did it influence your career and experience as an athlete?

I never felt discriminated against as a woman and never experienced that in my career, but I do believe that gender equality in sports is not complete, yet. The world of sports is moving some steps forward, but there is still a long road to go. The athletes of the female national football team are a great example. Last year they qualified to participate in the World Cup, however they aren't considered professional athletes compared to their male peers.

In your opinion, what is the power of sports?

Sports can teach you to never give up and always raise the crossbar, setting higher goals. Sports can help you to understand that alone you are nothing and that without a team that supports and helps you you cannot go too far. I did also learn that you can face every challenge with training! These teachings are fundamental in your daily life too! ●

When sport it is a vehicle of inclusion and equality

Interview to Elisa Penna, Italian Basketball player

by Amina Sofia El-Maghraby

« Basketball amuses me, I love it. Basketball is sharing, it teaches you how to stay with others, to be respectful, and it is a school of life. As my father always said to me».

For Elisa Penna, 25 years old, basketball is all her life. She started playing when she was only six years old *« but my mom often tells me that I was practically born with the ball in my hands ».*

At the age of fifteen, she moved to Rome to play for College Italia, a team created by the Italian Basketball Federation, with whom she played the minor and major league, Series A2, championship. After this experience, Elisa moved to Venice to play with the famous club Reyer Venezia in the major league, Series A1 and A2 championship, until she was nineteen years old. In 2014 she has been accepted at Wake Forest University (USA) where she played for the University Basketball Team and she successfully obtained a degree in Psychology. In 2019 Elisa came back to Italy to play for Reyer Venezia and wear the national team jersey.

Elisa says that she would have never imagined reaching such a high goal in her sport career as she genuinely started this sport to have fun; it was a way to play and compete with her brothers.

« Sure, I used to have secret dreams and I wished that one day, they would come true. I continued to do what I loved, with passion, dedication and joy until the first satisfactions started to arrive, and I began to believe that this sport could become something more in my life ».

During her sports career, and in her life, Elisa admitted having found some obstacles which she had to overcome in order to improve and grow. *« I am convinced – said Elisa - that from any situation, positive or negative, it is always possible to learn something that will allow us to move one step further in this personal path, which is life ».*

Fascinated by Elisa's experience I wanted to know more about the role and the meaning of female basketball players in Italy.

During your career as an athlete, have you ever felt to be treated differently from your male colleagues?

« I have often felt the perception of being treated differently than a male colleague, both in Italy and in the United States, where I lived for four years studying and playing for the college of Wake Forest.

Examples of disparity are the salary the male



Photo by Massimo Ceretti

athletes receive and the sponsor opportunities they have, which are not the same for women. The male basketball world is a profitable business. This is dictated by both the number of sponsors and sports clubs and the popularity that men's basketball has, due to the strong promotion on television, which is missing in female basketball. Therefore, the investments for female basketball are really low, as a consequence, the lack of money affects the salaries resulting in lower wages for the female players.

Apart from this, regarding the individual sponsors, unfortunately there are much more investments in the male world than in the female one. This choice is probably dictated by the fact that men gain more exposure at a media level than women do. In general, in Italy the focus is less on female basketball, compared to the male one, because seen as a greater risk.

Another important factor linked to the gender inequality in the Italian basketball world, is that according to the law 91/1981, men who play at a high level (for example Series A1) are considered as professionals. This means that they are full-fledged workers, so they have paid contributions, a pension fund and all the protections provided by law. However, women, are considered "amateurs", they are not contemplated as real workers, even though their careers are exactly the same as the one of their male colleagues: hours and hours at the gym, the risk of getting injured and a lot of



Photo by Marco Brioschi

sacrifices. Indeed, perhaps in a sense we, as women, often find ourselves sacrificing even more. Just thinking about the desire to start a family and to become mothers. Just think about the desire to start a family and to become mothers. There are things we have to postpone in order to play basketball at a very high level, but it should not be like that ».

Do you think becoming a mother could compromise your career? Do you think, if this will happen, you would still be considered by the sport market an athlete to focus on?

« Becoming a mother could compromise a player's career, even though there are those who had a son and they returned to play at the highest level here in Italy. Examples are the stories of Kathrin Röss and Benedetta Bagnara, both mothers and both women who have played in the top flight of our league and have dressed the National jersey for years. However, these are only a few. Only in October 2019, the government created the "Maternity Fund" for female athletes. It consists of receiving 1000€ per month, for 10 months. Previously, there were not subsidies guaranteed for an athlete who became mother, not from the government nor from the sport club she was playing for.

I believe that becoming a mother and being a top-level athlete is very difficult in general. I think that to get back in shape in such a way as to be considered still an interesting athlete for a sponsor while you are taking care of your baby, requires a huge sacrifice and dedication, desire to get back to the game and passion for the sport you practice. It can be difficult but not impossible and great women like the ones I mentioned before are proof of it.

The "Maternity Fund" for athletes is certainly a beautiful and important achievement for the women's sports world, but there is still a long way to go to and battles to win. For example, very

important would be to amend the law 91/1981, where women are not considered professionals but practitioners "for pleasure". It would be a great step forward in the fight against discrimination and gender inequality in the sport world ».

Elisa is keen to affirm that despite the perception of being treated differently, she has never been considered inferior to a male colleague. Instead, « *since I was a child* », she says, « *I used to play with my brother and friends, or at the pitch, where my older sister and I were the only girls in a boy-team. I was very motivated to show how much I was worth. True, I was a female, but that was not going to affect my basketball and sport skills in general. My male peers always respected me, and it is something I am grateful for* ».

Elisa wants to point out the fact that being a female basketball player in Italy, nowadays can be difficult. This is due to the lack of necessary resources that will make the Italian women's movement shine again and grow as it deserves. However, this does not change the fact that for what it concerns her experience, a woman who does what she loves, which for her is playing basketball, and achieve great results, such as wearing the National uniform and winning medals at an European level representing her own country, can get great satisfaction. « *It also means not to let anyone take you down and, despite the discriminations which are present in our world, go on your way with pride and self-esteem, showing that we, women are not less than men, that we are capable too of great things in sport, in life, at work* ».

When I have asked Elisa what she thinks about "gender inclusion in sports", she replied: « *If I think about "gender inclusion in sports", what comes to my mind is "work in progress". As said before, a small step forward has been taken by obtaining the "Maternity Fund", but there are still many other battles to be won before we can see discrimination and gender disparities in sports permanently collapse.*

I want to be confident that we will not need to wait another 20 years before changing the law 91/1981. I hope that a woman who does sport will no longer be seen as less skilled or that the women's sports world will no longer be considered inferior to men's. I hope there will be a cultural change that starts with us, with families, schools, to positively influence future generations.

I hope my younger sister, who has chosen to play basketball like me, in 10 years will not be here repeating the same things I am telling you right now. I wish, instead, that she will be able to tell how many improvements have been made over the years, that things are different, that she, and her colleagues, will be considered legally professional and that basketball will be her job. Sport is sport, regardless of gender; it must be a vehicle of inclusion and equality. It must be used as an example of unity and respect, equity and parity, in order to then influence our culture and lead to a more open, and less discriminatory mentality towards the female gender». ●



Photo by Massimo Ceretti



Photo by Andrea Gilardi

Business woman of the Month

TheLodge Space, your home for wellness and sport in SE16

By Ilaria Biancacci

On the edge of Southwark Park there is a space where you can practice yoga, enjoy a coffee with a delicious vegan dish, treat yourself to a massage or acupuncture therapy, and discover more about mindfulness. It's theLodge Space, a place where serendipity happens and where you can truly experience the support and love of a local community. When Jane dreamt about this place back in 2016 she was not definitely not expecting this success. Fast forward four years, three kids, a fight against breast cancer and the loss of her parents, sitting on a bench in the back garden of theLodge she admits that « *it was a wonderful, exciting and scaring experience* » from which she had learnt how to be resilient and to adapt to changes in a way that she wouldn't expect.

TheLodge was all about the community; friendships and love stories blossomed here. « *There is no showing off here, no ego, nothing like "Look at my body I can do this and you cannot". When I started recruiting yoga teachers and fitness instructors I wanted people that would represent every body type and I wanted customers to feel comfortable to walk in without being judged by their body shape or flexibility. Literally a space for everyone.*

I don't really know what is going to happen to my business in the next six to 9 months, as the lockdown start to ease down, and this is really frightening. However we are coming out very strong and we have decided to restructure completely the space and become a store where you can buy organic food, and support local entrepreneurs and artists by buying their crafts, plants and flowers. We are also offering the opportunity to artists to exhibit their artworks. We are definitely looking forward to reopening our studios and welcome back all the Southwark community. TheLodge will also open soon a cafe inside the Decathlon Surrey Quays branch, and this is really exciting, a new adventure that we can't wait to start! ».



You can follow theLodge store on:

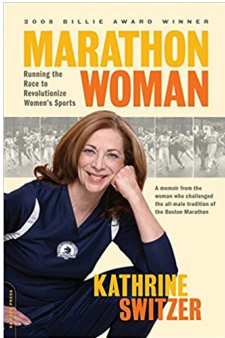
Instagram @thelodge.space
Facebook @theLodge.space

Store Opening times Tues-Fri: 10-4 Sat-Sun: 10-5

For Online Classes Schedule visit
<https://www.thelodge.space/online-classes>

The Book Club

By Davide Tecce



Marathon Woman

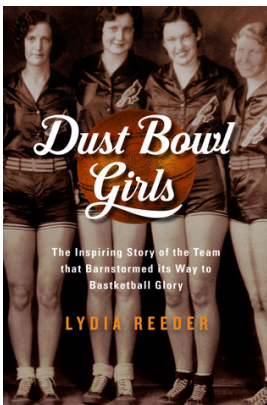
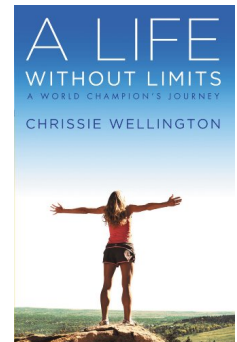
by Kathrine Switzer

American athlete and activist, Kathrine Switzer has been the first woman to run the Marathon in Boston in 1967, leading the path to women's participation in the future competitions (she has won the New York Marathon in 1974). Recalling the author's sporting and human experience, *Marathon Woman* celebrates the women's effort and ability to go beyond the prejudices and achieve their goals.

A Life Without Limits: A World Champion's Journey

by Chrissie Wellington

Chrissie Wellington, multiple Ironman's Champion, has achieved new records, defeating her rivals, women, and men. *A Life Without Limits: A World Champion's Journey*, guides the reader through the life of this extraordinary athlete, capable of marking surprisingly modern sports history.



Dust Bowl Girls: The Inspiring Story of the Team That Barnstormed Its Way to Basketball Glory

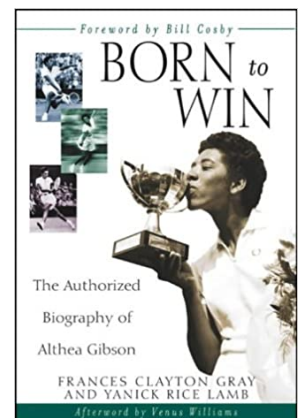
by Lydia Reeder

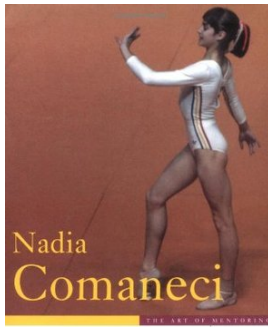
Oklahoma, the 1930s, at the peak of the economic crisis. The coach Samuel Babb rounds up a group of young women, offering them the possibility to enroll free of charge at the university, in exchange for their commitment to play in the basketball team. Destined to become a legendary team, the Cardinals will find in sport an important moment of growth and emancipation.

Born to Win: The Authorized Biography of Althea Gibson

by Frances Clayton Gray

First black Afro-American to win the Grand Slam in 1956 and Wimbledon in 1957 and 1958, Althea Gibson inspired generations of women and athletes, still embodying a unique model of opposition against ethnic and gender discrimination.





Letters to a Young Gymnast

by Nadia Comăneci

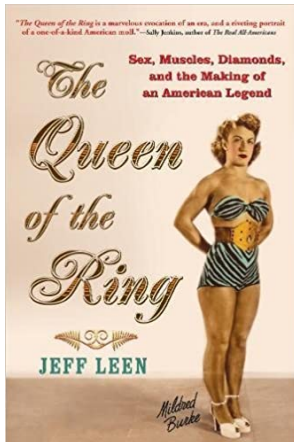
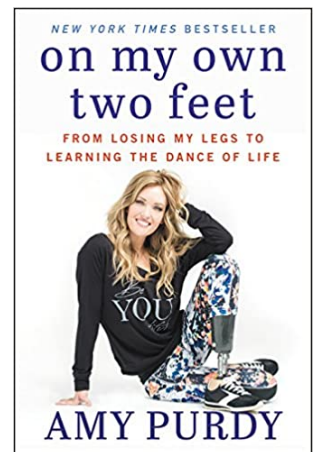
She was considered the greatest gymnast of all time. Nadia Comăneci has been the first and youngest athlete to have obtained the highest score (10) at the Olympic Games, as well as the only one to have received twice the Olympic Order. In *Letters to a Young Gymnast*, Comăneci builds through her memories and experiences a successful path, offering advice and guidance to future athletes.

letters to a young
gymnast

On My Own Two Feet: From Losing My Legs to Learning the Dance of Life

by Amy Purdy

Amy Purdy is an American actress, model, and snowboarder. At 19 years old following an infection of bacterial meningitis, both her legs were amputated. Despite the terrible illness that nearly killed her, Amy Purdy has found the strength to rise up and achieve her goals, from the bronze medal at the Winter Paralympic Games in 2014 to the success as a TV star; she has been an inspiration for the whole nation.



The Queen of the Ring: Sex, Muscles, Diamonds, and the Making of an American Legend

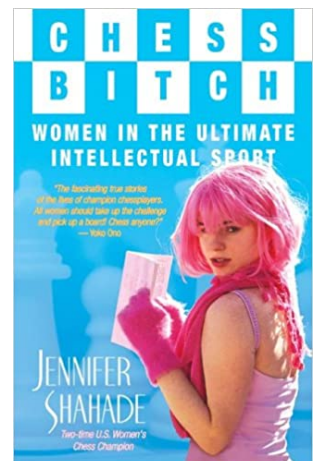
by Jeff Leen

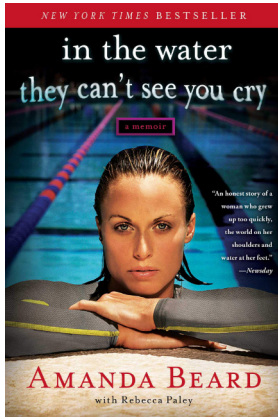
Jeff Leen, a journalist of the Washington Post, presents in this book the personality and story of Mildred Burke, the first and the longest-running champion of the Women's Wrestling League, who was undefeated in the ring for almost 20 years, from 1935 to 1953.

Chess Bitch: Women in the Ultimate Intellectual Sport

by Jennifer Shahade

Twice winner of the U.S. Women's Chess Championship, Jennifer Shahade collects interviews in this smooth and exciting essay, telling the stories of great female chess champions from all over the world, able to rival men and make their way in a sport much more lively and competitive than it may seem.





In the Water They Can't See You Cry: A Memoir

by Amanda Beard

Swimming champion and sex symbol, first classified in three Olympic disciplines, when she was only 14 years old, Amanda Beard fought against the ghosts of her success, overcoming a teenager-hood marked by the abuse of drugs, eating disorders, and self-destructive behaviors. In this book, the athlete speaks as a woman, exposing herself and telling her greatest success, besides the sportive ones: the victory against depression.

Wonder Girl: The Magnificent Sporting Life of Babe Didrikson Zaharias

by Don Van Natta Jr.

Babe Didrikson Zaharias was considered one of the greatest multidisciplinary athletes of all time. She has achieved extraordinary results in several Olympic disciplines, reaching the podium in the javelin throw, hurdle race, and the high jump at the Olympic Games of 1932. As this was not enough, Babe became also an excellent basketball and gold player, proving that women can overcome any difficulties and prejudice.



We would also like to share with you some titles that represent the contribution of the women to the sports world, focusing on the difficulties that several athletes had to face and the successes that they have achieved in various disciplines. Their characters and their stories are still today an example of fundamental inspiration.

Game Changers: The Unsung Heroines of Sports History by Molly Schiot

Women in Sport: Fifty Fearless Athletes Who Played to Win by Rachel Igotofsky

Whatever It Takes: Women on Women's Sport by Joby Winans

Kicking Off: How Women in Sport Are Changing the Game by Sarah Shephard

Rising Above: Inspiring Women in Sports by Gregory Zuckerman

Contributors



Deniz Erdoğan, born and raised in Ankara, she is currently working as a senior consultant in a multi-national consulting company which provides services in various fields such as development, management as well as strategic and financial and IT solutions and infrastructure development. She has more than six years of academic research and intellectual experience in Gender Studies and Journalism.



Yağmur Güleray was born in Ankara in 1997, she studies Sociology at Gazi University in Ankara. She was raised by very strong and independent women and during her childhood she never felt the difference between genders. After her BA she will look to continue her studies with a Master Degree on social psychology and gender studies.



Amina Sofia El-Maghraby was born in Germany from an Italian mother and Egyptian father, however, she lived almost all her life in Venice, Italy. « *I have been raised by a family composed of women only, and I can say that this influenced my way of seeing the whole world* ». She studied Political Sciences, International Relationship and Human Rights she considers herself a feminist, who fights for equal rights between all human beings.



Mahmod Abo Eilyan was born and raised in the Gaza Strip, in Palestine and he is the Founder and Chairman of Generations Youth Center. « There is no better and effective tool for development than the empowerment of women ».



Davide Tecce, born in Rome 35 years ago, passionate about movies, comics and books, started working as bookseller in 2013. « *I consider this not only a job, but a mission, and I would not change it for anything in the world!* ».

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