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"Title IX and 'She' Doctors"

Kathleen J. Wu

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Kathleen J. Wu is a commercial real estate lawyer and managing partner of the Dallas office of Houston's Andrews & Kurth. Her e-mail address is kathleenwu@akllp.com. The views represented here are her own and do not represent those of the firm.

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It's so refreshing when something nice happens for women, and that moment came a few weeks ago when the U.S. women's soccer team defeated China in what was the most-watched soccer game ever on American network TV.

What's so wonderful about America's win isn't that it was a women's team that brought home the World Cup—women have been excelling at sports for centuries—but that the players were treated with the same pomp and ceremony that has been lavished on male athletes.

They had their own Nike ads, which were alternately funny ("I will have two fillings") and touching (the one of the slow motion little girl gazing intensely out at the soccer field gets me every time); they had as many viewers as the NBA finals and almost as many as the Super Bowl; there's even a new Soccer Barbie in the works.

Their victory and the attendant hype is a turning point, not just for women in sports, but for women in all sectors of our society. More importantly, it's a turning point for the little girls who don't even know yet how tough it is to be female. And, even though it's had its share of controversy (much of it deserved), Title IX probably has a lot to do with it.

Winning Title

Without Title IX, which requires that publicly funded schools finance women's and girls' athletics at the same level they do male athletics, it's unlikely that these talented soccer players would have risen so high. We wouldn't have seen Brandi Chastain rip her jersey off in front of a worldwide audience after scoring the winning goal. There wouldn't be confetti parades at Disneyland. There would be no talk of a new era in women's sports.

Not to be overly caught up in the rosy afterglow of the soccer victory, but this is a pretty decent time *not* to have a Y chromosome. Not only did a women's athletic team attract more viewers than the seemingly ubiquitous Stanley Cup playoffs of a month earlier, but a woman, Elizabeth Dole, is a credible candidate for president. Even though Dole's a distant second to our own governor, she's still ahead of the other Republicans, and she's not viewed as the token that Geraldine Ferraro was when she made her 1984 bid for the vice presidency.

Women are excelling in areas that a few decades ago they would have never even been allowed to enter. In the legal profession, there are a measurable number (though still not enough) of women managing partners at major law firms. Women make up about half of every entering associate class. And, though we're still having some difficulty keeping these women around long enough to make partner, our record of retention grows better every year.

Women are becoming so commonplace in the professional world that the next generation won't even realize why having working mothers, female lawyers or professional women athletes is even remotely unusual.

Something my 4-year-old son said the other day really brought this home. As I was telling my husband about a trip to the vet, I referred to the vet as simply "he."

"No, mommy," he said. "It's 'she.' Doctors are 'shes.' "

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I hadn't realized that, to him, doctors *are* shes. It hasn't been a conscious choice, but almost all of our family's physicians—and certainly the only ones my son has been to—are women. So, to him, having a *male* doctor is out of the norm, not the other way around.

I like knowing that he will grow up in a world where doctors are shes and Nike commercials feature female athletic icons alongside Michael Jordan. While I'd like to take all the credit for the fact that he sees women as being every bit as competent as men (if not more so), I can't. I can thank all the women who did more than what was expected of them, and who took advantage of every opportunity available to them.

The soccer victory may even help give women a leg up in the professional world, where our ignorance of sports has sometimes hindered our advancement or at least isolated us when our male colleagues have been caught up in their own football, hockey or golf frenzies. If, as many prognosticators predict, the women's soccer team victory results in a professional women's soccer league, women are likely to get behind it and take our own clients and potential clients on sports outings.

If we really work at it, we can be as annoying about our sports as men are with theirs. We'll have our own fantasy leagues and spend company time keeping track of our players and their stats. We'll spend our weekends glued to WSPN (which I propose as the name of the future all-women's sports network) and neglect the housework and the kids. And we'll paint our faces to support the team and embarrass our spouses when we drink too much during playoffs.

There's a glorious world ahead. I can just feel it.