

Training Equity: A Look At Fitness Participation For Women

This month I'm dedicating the entire review, not of the subject in the study, but to the introduction of fitness participation and training for women. There has been little written to date in our sport concerning the woman bowler and any special considerations that need to be addressed. I have taken this month to introduce to you information on past and current fitness and athletic participation of women, concluding with breaking the barrier for bowling-specific training. Ladies, this one's for you. Everyone, including the men, may need to read it twice cause it's kinda deep. But that's what we want. We want you to read each issue of BTM more than once.

As our American government seeks to legislate equality among the nation, the issue of female sport opportunity has risen to the top of the priority list. To compensate for a lack of enforcement of Title IX, many sporting organizations have begun to institutionalize change among the female sporting ranks. Some think the rise in female sport involvement began with the infamous Bobby Riggs vs. Billy Jean King battle of the sexes. Ohhhhh was that a glorious day for the woman athlete. Yet before that occurrence, there are countless references in history of competitive female sports participation. Babe Dedrickson seemed to win everything in every sport before WWII. The Silver Bullets played their way into the hearts and souls of Americans during WWII. Post WWII came the development of the Olympic female athlete. Though many communist block nations used substances to enhance her performance, the rise of the female athlete onto the sporting scene was forever to be remembered. Then there came the restructuring of the NCAA initiating women's collegiate athletics in the 1970's. Unfortunately, many female operated sport organizations were acquired and turned over to the male dominated NCAA for realignment.

Equal Opportunity: Women are Actively Oriented (NSGA, 1998)

**Females now control 60% of U.S. wealth and influence
and initiate more than 80% of all purchases.**

The 25th anniversary of Title IX, the legislation that guaranteed equal opportunity for women in federally funded athletic programs, has brought the growing role of women's athletics into sharper focus. American Sports Data reported 38 million females participated on a "frequent" basis in some sport, fitness, or outdoor activity in 1996, a 20% increase from 1987.

Not surprisingly, from 1987 to 1996, the increase in female physical fitness participation out paced males (+11.8% vs. +2.9%). In 1996, 26.6 million females vs. 20.7 million males participated "frequently" in at least one fitness related activity. **Of those numbers, treadmills (+214.9%) and resistance training exercise (+108.7%) had the highest growth rates.** Beyond those:

- 10.6 million females regularly walk for exercise.
- 6 million ride stationary bicycles.
- 4 million exercise on treadmills.
- 3.6 million use free weights (a growing interest area).

Females account for 56% of the "**core**" market for fitness activities. Girls and young women have also made great strides in sports at various scholastic levels, too. As of 1998, 41% of all high school athletes are girls and 38% of all college athletes are women. It is a joy to see girls and women have progressed so much in athletic participation and fitness related activities.

Men, Women & the Socializing Process

Recently, it has come to my attention a majority of the work done in our bowling industry has, by design, been geared toward the male bowler. Shocking huh. Though the male bowler has annually had the larger membership of the two bowling organizations, these numbers seem to be drawing closer to one another as years pass. And this does not attempt to include the revelation that **the female recreational bowler has become 53% of the total recreational market** according to the BBIA's 1997 National Bowling Participation Study.

The female bowler has been slighted, not in a malicious conscious effort, but rather due to the socialization process of our culture. Stay with me here now, it goes something like this. **A preponderance of literature and research has revealed** males have been conditioned to be rewarded for their masculinity and achievement in life. Conversely, females have been conditioned to be rewarded for their feminine attributes of attractiveness rather than strength, agreeableness rather than competitive success, and relationships with males rather than independence of living. This socializing role has only

recently begun to change, but for centuries, a woman's relative worth was based on her attractiveness and relationships to the male hierarchy (**Sexuality and Leisure, 1997**). Now, not to bore you with sport sociology, an understanding of the socializing process should give insight to the fears and apprehensions women have been conditioned concerning exercise and training for sport. Again, only in the past 10 years has this socio-cultural role evolved to a point where girls and women are becoming more active and competitive.

Training for Women: Similarities & Differences

There appears to be substantial differences between the average male and average female in most all aspects of physical performance beyond the age of 12. Yet, recent studies on highly-trained female athletes suggest the female is not appreciably different from her highly trained male counterpart beyond puberty. Some scientists have suggested the differences in athletic performance are largely due to the socializing process of society as young girls are guided toward the playing the piano and social relations whereas boys are guided toward rough "play" and competition. Though only recently has it begun to change, for centuries, girls and women have been warned away from physical training for health and sport. So, what appears to be a dramatic biological difference between the sexes may really be related to the cultural and social restrictions of society.

The fear from most women when considering exercise is that they will look masculine like a man. Yes, women can develop muscular strength and size, but low levels of testosterone prevent the Herculean masculinity they perceive. Some girls say guys will be intimidated by a little exercise training and a sleeker looking physique. On the contrary, many women have found it to their advantage to develop the trimmed-toner look. Even in the 1990's with celebrities like Angela Bassett, Demi Moore, and Vivica Fox showing they can be buff and beautiful - the image of women strength-training can summon fears about losing femininity and sex appeal. Some women's inhibitions come from the anxiety of breaking traditional standards of female training. Yet, fitness experts agree women who incorporate strength training into their exercise regimen notice a boost in self-esteem and gain renewed physical and mental strength along with their new shape. World-renowned exercise physiologist Wayne Westcott articulated the most sensible training today for women over the age of 40 is strength-training.

Training Bowling-Specifically

There is no conclusive scientific evidence determining healthy female bowlers should train for sport and bowling any differently than healthy male bowlers. Let me repeat that for everyone. bowling-specific training for women is no different than that for men. No discrimination here my friends. Because of basic biological similarities and scientific study of the effects of exercise, there is little reason to advocate different training and conditioning on the basis of gender.

The only difference that truly exists between men and women is the difference in initial levels of training. If your current level of physical fitness requires you to start very light compared to another individual, then so be it. That's your starting point and it is nothing to be ashamed of. Each one of us has a different genetically derived level of strength, body composition, VO2 Max., muscular endurance, and flexibility. Your current level of activity also dictates the starting point. The amount of weight you lift or resistance used while strength training depends solely on you. The level of cardiovascular training you train at also depends on you.

Most experts agree women should start small and light, acclimate themselves to a program and their environment, then push themselves by challenging current strength levels. The hardest part, most women acknowledge, is shedding the negative perceptions about strenuous training, and trying it. Regular exercise gives women control, according to experts, over their spirit, body, and mood. Like an artist, you can use *The Bowling-Specific Training Program* to sculpt yourself into the bowler-athlete that you have always dreamed. Take a tip from Kim Adler, professional champion, after she won the 1997 LPBT's Sam's Town Invitational, "*A lot of my success this week had to do with the amount of exercise I'm getting lately. I have room to breathe more because I'm doing a lot of cardiovascular work.*"

Do not let the biological differences between men and women dissuade you from initiating *The Bowling-Specific Training Program*. Yes, there are differences between men and women, but physical training for sport is gender blind. If you are afraid of gaining muscle and losing your feminine beauty, go back over the summer issues and review the strength-training principle of the program and you will see it wasn't designed to add muscular size, but instead muscular strength. If you fear social scrutiny due to a low level of strength or cardiovascular fitness, understand your genetics and current level of activity predetermine your starting point.

This piece was geared to merely break ground for research and writing on women in the sport of bowling and the training variable. Next year, I have decided to do a 2-part series on training for women and special considerations such as osteoporosis, amenorrhea, menstruation, establishing starting points, environmental factors, flexibility, and other related

items. There are many physical differences between men and women all of which affect sport performance. To date though, there has been little scientific evidence to suggest training for sport should differ among the sexes. If you have further questions about women in sport, I suggest you check out the Women's Sport Foundation or the USOC for additional materials. Remember, always consult your doctor or physician before beginning this or any other activity program.

Next month, the study nears completion. How is the subject doing, his bowling, any more honor scores or big paydays. He will talk to us personally in another one-on-one interview.