

Give Girls a Competitive Edge



by Bob Ehlert

Cara “Breakaway” Holloway was not much of a threat to score a three-goal “hat trick” in a hockey game until after attending her first year in the master’s program at The Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire.

Holloway’s hockey potential hadn’t occurred to her until she got on campus last year and discovered it is a tradition for women students in the two-year program to don the pads and chase the puck. Skilled and unskilled, they all play on one of three teams. Losing is not taken lightly—especially if the game goes to other graduate business schools in New England and Canada.

“It’s a chance to get out on the ice, forget about studying, school work, looking for a job—and all the other things you’re dealing with—and have some fun,” says Holloway, who had never played the sport until last year. “And there’s no better way to bond with the other students and find some things out about yourself and your teammates than out here on the ice.”

Most of the students graduate with credentials that will qualify them for high-paying, high-pressure jobs in the business world. Those who have participated in athletics—or who at least have been active—seem able to convert that

Parents need to understand that winning matters for girls.

competitive drive into the professional world with rewarding results. In fact, a University of Virginia study says 86 percent of the senior executive women at Fortune 500 companies were athletes as children.

Encourage Girls to Join Teams

But not all girls are encouraged to nurture athletics along with academics while growing up. And many experts say that is unfortunate.

“Parents still take boys’ sports more seriously than girls’ sports,” says Mariah Burton Nelson, a former professional basketball player and now a speaker on the subject of girls’ sports and author of the book *Embracing Victory: Life Lessons in Competition and Compassion*.

“Parents should know that girls need encouragement and support to join teams, stay on teams, and put up with disappointment and defeat,” says Nelson. “Some still believe girls don’t care as much. Sure, hard work, teamwork, self-discipline, and having fun are important. But winning is important too.”

When she was growing up, Nelson recalls how her mother taught her about competition as the two took recreational swims at a local pool. Even at age 5, Nelson wasn’t allowed to win when the two would race across the pool. Not until

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