



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Press Release

Take it to Court: Olympians, Experts Urge Athletes to Pursue Fairness in Women's Sports During Inaugural ICONS Conference

LAS VEGAS — The **Independent Council on Women's Sports (ICONS)** recently kicked off its inaugural conference in Las Vegas, bringing together world-class athletes, parents, and experts in science, law, and policy all advocating for fairness in women's sports — a quest that has to be addressed in court.

“Women need a network and way to reconnect and put ourselves back into influencing the sports world that we care so much about,” said ICONS co-founder, **Kim Jones**, a Stanford All-American and Pac-10 Champion whose daughter was defeated by a biological male competing in women's collegiate swimming earlier this year. “If we unify our voices, we can harness this energy and actually make a difference.”

The conference — held June 26 through 28 at the Ahern Hotel and streamed live on multiple online platforms — convened after the 50th anniversary of Title IX and the Biden Administration's announcement to overhaul the landmark law by redefining “sex” to mean “gender” and “gender identity.” A nonprofit, ICONS and its supporters seek to achieve *a fair playing field across all women's sports* and defend the original intent of Title IX by **expanding, empowering, and protecting women's sports** and female athletes of the past, present, and future.

“The notion of what a female is is being erased,” said **Donna de Varona**, an ICONS speaker and two-time Olympic gold medalist, Title IX activist, and first president of the Women's Sports Foundation. “This doesn't just have repercussions in the sport marketplace, it of course has repercussions in every arena ... Women use [sports] as a foundation to go on in society and become leaders and productive individuals.”

Several young athletes, including **Riley Gaines** and **Taylor Silverman**, shared their experiences of losing various awards and opportunities to biological males in women's competitions. “It's really hard to put into words the amount of work and sacrifices that it takes to compete at the elite level,” said Gaines, a 12-time All American and four-time Southeastern Conference (SEC) Champion and record holder who began swimming at age four. She tied for fifth place with biological male swimmer Lia Thomas during the women's 200-yard freestyle at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Championships in

March. The NCAA gave Thomas the fifth-place trophy. “Who has taken into account our feelings?” asked Gaines. “And who has taken any sort of accountability since?”

Silverman, a prominent skateboarder with 11 years of experience, echoed similar dismay after recalling back-to-back defeats to biological males in women’s competitions. “I have serious concerns over women’s skateboarding because it is not necessarily something that has been protected by Title IX,” she said, as skateboarding isn’t usually part of school programs that receive funding from the federal government. “I know how painful [unfair competition] is to go through as an adult, I can’t imagine how it would feel as a 13-year-old.”

From the halls of Congress, to classrooms, experts said muddled definitions and interchangeable terminology has created a climate of public confusion, as well as fear of backlash among those — particularly biological women athletes — in opposition of the policies affecting fairness in their sports. In a panel session of doctors examining the science of sport, fair competition, and testosterone, **Dr. Ross Tucker**, PhD in Exercise Physiology and a consultant for World Rugby, said prioritizing the inclusion of biological male competitors in women’s sports ultimately undermines the purpose of the female category by compromising fairness, and, in some sports, athlete safety.

“The women’s category serves a purpose: it excludes the impact of male or androgenizing hormones on performance,” said Dr. Tucker. “Males have advantages that range from 10% in speed and endurance, to 30% in power, and up to 50% in strength, particularly the upper body. He continued, “Documented biological changes with testosterone suppression have shown that most of the physiological systems that are relevant to sports performance are minimally affected.”

In another session on the biology of sex, **Dr. Colin Wright**, PhD in Evolutionary Biology, said “Biological sex is a binary system, because there is no third or intermediate gamete, and therefore, no third type of anatomy can develop to produce it. He explained there are only two sexes in humans due to gametes, the reproductive cells of ova in females and sperm in males. “All the different ways to have sex chromosomes arranged ... are just variations within each sex. They aren’t brand new sexes beyond males and females ... There is a more fundamental attempt to just blur the lines of what males and females are completely.”

A panel of various women’s organizations and advocacy groups explored the policies and politics affecting women’s sports. **Kara Dansky, JD**, president of the U.S. chapter of Women’s Declaration International (WDI), explained how the societal construct of gender isn’t the same as the biology of sex. “The use of the word ‘gender’ has crept into international law at an absolutely astonishing speed and rate,” said Dansky. “All Americans across the political spectrum know how babies are made, so [policy-makers] have persuaded Americans across the political spectrum that ‘transgender’ is a meaningful category of people for whom sex is irrelevant — and it’s not; it’s just a lie.”

“Most of the federal laws are based on sex,” said **Jennifer Braceras, JD**, a Title IX expert and director of the Independent Women’s Forum (IWF). “The Biden regulations ... are so radical and revolutionary, because what they say is that sex and gender and gender identity all mean the same thing.”

ICONS speaker **Martina Navratilova**, an internationally known LGBTQ+ rights activist and highly decorated tennis player with a total 59 Grand Slam titles, emphasized that biological males competing in women’s sports is an undeniable issue of fairness. “I knew [professional tennis] is what I wanted to do,” said Navratilova. “I didn’t know how far it would take me, but that was my dream ... [Male competitors] were better, so it was always understood it was divided by sex ... You cannot take that [male] advantage away no matter what you do; we have categories in sports for a reason and this is the reason.”

Three-time Olympic gold and silver medalist and civil rights lawyer **Nancy Hogshead-Makar, JD**, delivered a presentation outlining other unfair treatment in women's sports, including the significantly lower funding and number of women's teams available at schools nationwide. Experts and athletes agree that public activism and engagement is necessary and critical to preserve Title IX and the protections of biological women. While a comprehensive database isn't available, sites such as savewomenssports.com captures some 80 biological males who defeated females in women's sports in recent years, and SheWon.org lists 156 female athletes who lost to biological males in women's sports.

With 18 states enacting laws to protect and save women's sports for biological women, experts said the real solution is having more high school and collegiate female athletes come forward with litigation against governing sports bodies, such as the NCAA, and their schools. "We need people to speak out and to bring lawsuits," said Braceras of IWF. "[The solution] won't be the left, it won't be the right; it will be women working together," said Dansky of WDI. "Courage begets courage," she said.

To date, one lawsuit addressing trans athletic competition has been filed — by two young track stars from Connecticut who shared their experience during the conference. ICONS co-founder **Marshi Smith**, an NCAA and Pac-10 Champion, encourages more voices and bravery among athletes to bring greater empowerment and pushback. Her [open letter](#) signed by 47 elite athletes and coaches that was sent to the NCAA Board of Governors back in March, asking, *Do women have a voice?* remains unanswered. "With hard work and determination, we can accomplish anything," said Smith. "I was sure someone else would ensure fairness for our athletes, but that didn't happen ... ICONS exploded into what you see today."

ICONS continues to build its network and develop the resources women need to help shape decisions affecting their sports. You can learn more and join this global movement for fairness in women's sports by registering for updates at www.iconswomen.com, and by following the ICONS [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) page (all social handles are @icons_women).

For questions or more information, please contact info@iconswomen.com.