

Embracing Strength Rather Than Being Ashamed of Muscle by Jordan Calladine

For generations, “like a girl” has been an insult to athletes, as this was used against someone that was viewed as weaker, incompetent, uncoordinated and unable to participate in that sport. A male being beaten by a female was seen as a bad thing because females have been viewed as inferior to men for far too long, especially in sport. Being a female in the sports world shouldn’t be viewed negatively, but should be viewed as an honourable individual who has committed to bettering themselves physically, emotionally and mentally. Ashley Steacy is one of the fiercest and toughest athletes I know, playing one of the most physically demanding sports in the world, rugby 7s, all while being a kind-hearted and caring person away from competition. Is winning an Olympic bronze medal something to be ashamed of? Absolutely not. Does the fact that she is female change the way that people see her athletics accomplishments? Sometimes.

I have had the pleasure of growing up playing sports in Southern Alberta and am now fortunate enough to be helping to coach some local teams. One of my players asked me how she could improve her lower body strength to help her break through tackles in a game, so I told her that starting into weight lifting would help improve her leg strength and that I have been doing weight training since I was a pre-teen. Her response shocked me. She said “Wouldn’t that make my muscles too big though? I don’t want to be stronger than [a male]”. I asked her why she didn’t want to be stronger than him and she couldn’t give me an answer. Deep down, I knew why my player had this perception in her mind that muscles on females is ‘bad’. It’s because from the time children start going to school, activities are gendered. There is normal push-ups and “girl push-ups”, how contact sports are for boys and not girls, how girls can’t do math, how girls can’t do this and the list goes on and on of what girls ‘shouldn’t’ be able to do. The only cell-based difference between men and women? A single chromosome. For years, a single chromosome has been providing people with a feeling that females are less than men, in all areas of life including sport.

According to the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS), “only 19% of Canadian women participate in sport compared to 35% of Canadian men” (2018). This is a huge participation gap! If girls don’t participate in physical activity by the time they are ten years old, their chance of being physically active when they are twenty five is only a staggering 10%! (CAAWS, 2018). Participating in physical activities and sports isn’t just beneficial in that it provides greater amounts of equality, but it provides females with all the proven physical, mental and emotional benefits that being physically active provides.

Being strong is not something females should shy away from. Having muscles is not something females should shy away from. Muscular men are praised and idolized in the media, why not praise and idolize muscular women? The human body is a beautiful thing and working on improving the performance of it should be universal across all sports, regardless of gender. Sports and athletic events are not about gender, they are about celebrating a love for sport and for the game itself. That is one of the many reasons why local elite female athletes are coming together on May 26th for a special event, just for girls.

Fast and Female Champ Chats aim to provide girls with the opportunity to socialize in a non-competitive environment; be inspired by female role models; experience varied physical literacy; keep girls happy; healthy and involved in sports, and to have fun while celebrating girls and women in sport! The day starts at 8:30 am at Chinook High School with registrations and check-in, then the real festivities begin at 9am. Throughout the morning, the girls will be divided into groups and participate in a physical activity circuit with the numerous F&F Ambassadors, an inspirational chat and question period with those same

Ambassadors, finishing off with an energetic dance session and autograph/photograph session to conclude the day at 12:30pm. The target age group is girls aged 8-14 years, but older girls are welcome as well! Registration comes with a small fee of \$20 and closes on Thursday, May 24th at 11:59 MDT. Each participant will receive a Fast and Female L. L. Bean Technical T-Shirt, a healthy snack, and a Fast and Female Autographed Poster, as well as valuable face-to-face time with female athlete role models.

It is the strong, elite athletes in our community that are helping to lead the change in the attitude towards women in sport and how they should look. People like Ashley Steacy, Deborah Williams, Carla Pavan, Brittany Orr, Kacie Bosch, Tricia Oshiro and so many others, are showcasing the strength of women on the international stage and are just a few of the people that will tell you, muscle is beautiful. Muscular females are beautiful. It is not something that should be avoided, rather it is something that should be embraced and appreciated worldwide.