

HBO Women in Sports Screening  
The White House  
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PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY  
AT HBO WOMEN IN SPORTS EVENT

The East Room

MRS. CLINTON: Welcome to the East Room of the White House. I want to thank all of you for joining us for the premiere of HBO's "Dare to Compete: The Struggle of Women in Sports."

Now, looking around this room, I don't think I've ever seen a more extraordinary group of athletes -- not just women athletes, but athletes -- ever assembled at the White House. And I want to thank you all for coming.

We're also delighted to be joined by members of Congress -- Senator Specter and Congresswomen Kilpatrick and Morella, Representatives Pelosi and Tauscher. I want to thank Ernestine Miller for lending us her wonderful collection of women's sports memorabilia, which I hope you've had -- (applause) -- is Ernestine here? Ernestine, why don't you stand up and let us thank you. (Applause.)

I hope you've had a chance to see that collection in the foyer. I'm also delighted that we could be joined this evening by Billie Jean King, whom you'll hear from in just a minute. It was her idea to create this documentary, and that's only fitting, because she has literally shaped history by taking on not only Bobby Riggs, as many of us remember, but discrimination; and by doing so, clearing the path for every woman and girl in this country. Thank you very much, Billie Jean. (Applause.)

I also want to thank Jeff Bewkes and all of HBO for once again bringing us the history that defines us as a nation and a people. Last year, some of us were lucky enough to gather in this room to watch the HBO miniseries, "From the Earth to the Moon." Now tonight's documentary focuses on another goal. We all remember when President Kennedy set the goal that America would place a man on the moon. Well, the goal that we're looking at tonight in this documentary actually took longer to achieve than putting anyone on the moon -- (laughter) -- putting a woman on the basketball court, the soccer field, the running track, anywhere and everywhere she wishes to compete.

We were at a school this afternoon, some of us, in New York. And I was amazed by the young women who were the basketball stars of the Lady Gators. And it reminded me of how when I was in high school I played half-court basketball. Some of you, if you're of my vintage, may remember that game -- two dribbles and in certain districts, a juggle afterwards. (Laughter.) But you couldn't cross the center line. And we were told we could not play full court, like the boys, because our

hearts couldn't take that much exertion. (Laughter.)

Well, it's hard to imagine today anyone saying that Lisa Leslie's heart was too weak, or Nikki McCray's heart was too weak. (Applause.) Nikki McCray and Billie Jean King and Dominique Dawes and Seth Abraham of HBO Sports and I saw those young women today at that school, and we could see that not only were their hearts physically strong, but they were also strong and ready to go forward to reach their own dreams. Nikki talked to the students about how when she was growing up her male cousins wouldn't let her play basketball because she was just a girl, after all. And the only hero she could have was someone like Michael Jordan.

Well, today she's a hero to many of the young women who follow basketball, and they buy and proudly wear her jersey with her number on it. I know last year, at the MCI Center, the seats at the WNBA games were filled with children of all ages and races, both boys and girls, and they proudly wore the jerseys of the players and even the signature shoes. And they lined up patiently to get the autographs of the Mystics players.

Well, I know that many of them watched those games praying that they'd be able to follow in the footsteps of the stars on the court. And now it's true for both boys and girls. In large measure, that's because Title IX, a federal law, opened up the gates of opportunity for countless college women and even high school girls. And I want to thank someone who I believe is here this evening, former Senator Birch Bayh, who was the sponsor in the United States Senate for Title IX. (Applause.)

Now, all of a sudden, there are scholarships in order to go to college, to play sports; and parody, even, on campuses. But let's not forget the women who really paved the way before Title IX, before full-court basketball. We ought to be willing to recognize and thank women like Mamie "Peanut" Johnson, who wanted to be a baseball player all her life and saw her wish come true when she played right alongside men in the Negro leagues. Every time a girl breaks another record, she can thank women like Bobbie Gibbs, who became the first woman to unofficially run the Boston Marathon. Back then, women were not allowed to run, so she snuck in, dressed not so conspicuously in a black bathing suit, shorts -- bermuda shorts; but she finished that race and paved the way for all those who followed.

Now, every time a young athlete refuses to give up, even after defeat, she can thank Olympians like Dominique Dawes. This afternoon, we heard her tell the students what she does when she gets discouraged, how she wakes up and looks in the mirror and, you know, when she says to herself, why am I doing this? She uses what she calls the D-3 method -- determination, dedication and desire -- to keep going and to be a champion in any walk of life.

So let's give all of the recognition we can to those who are competing today; but let's remember those who led the way. There are three generations of women pioneers in this room tonight. And I would really like all of those women athletes who have competed on every playing field and every sport to stand and let us recognize you. (Applause.)

Now it's my great honor to introduce HBO's chairman, Jeff Bewkes. He understands the power that television can have to teach us about our past and help us imagine and shape our future. Under his leadership, HBO has addressed some of the most important stories of our time -- from AIDS to civil rights to war.

Please welcome Jeff Bewkes. (Applause.)

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