

NYC Lab School
Women and Sports
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PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS AT NYC LAB SCHOOL ON WOMEN & SPORTS**

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Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much, Sophia. I thought Sophia's statement and the poise that we could see as she delivered it was a real tribute to all of you who are her fellow athletes and to the school, and I think we should give Sophia another hand for doing such a great job.

I am so pleased to be here at the Lab School, and to see all of you out there in the audience in your uniforms, and to hear something about the extraordinary records of your athletic accomplishments here. Yesterday I was in Queens at a school talking about the importance of the arts -- which I believe very strongly because different young people have different talents that they can express and learn about through the arts, but I believe just as strongly in the importance of athletics and sports. And I think that one of the great challenges that we face in our schools across the country is that when budget crunches have come, the arts and sports have been first to be cut. And I think that part of the goal of any well-rounded education is to expose young people to the full range of learning and that includes sports, that includes learning how you can compete in an athletic effort, and we're lucky enough today to be part of this event which is going to highlight women who have dared to compete. And we are going to hear from some of them in just a minute.

We're joined today by Virginia Fields and other elected officials. I am particularly pleased that the two co-founders and directors of the school are here with us, and I want to thank Sheila and Rob for their commitment to public education. You know, they have brought excellence and team work to the classrooms and the playing fields of the Lab School. And it's that kind of team work and that commitment that we need from all of our teachers that is really at the forefront of what education should mean. You know, as we gather here in this gymnasium to talk about the athletic achievements -- not only those on the stage and in the clip we saw from the extraordinary documentary that HBO has done -- we can be grateful that there are so many people in our country and here in this city who are committed to public education. But we still know that we don't have the teachers we need to fill our classrooms to do the job that we expect to be done. In fact, we know right now, members of Congress are back in Washington talking about education. And I am pleased that they are because we should be focused on this most important issue. But I hope that in the course of these congressional debates, that the members of Congress will, in a bipartisan way, make teachers and lowering classroom size their very top priority.

We know that children learn more and better when they get attention -- that is just common sense. And it is very hard to get attention when you are one of 30 or 35 or 40 children

in a classroom. And we know also that we have a commitment that the President made and that the Congress made last year to put 100,000 new, well-prepared teachers into the schools -- so that each student in New York and anywhere in America can have the attention that they need. So as we celebrate athletics in school today, let's also celebrate the teachers and the coaches that make education work in America.

You know, I have to confess I was a little jealous as I listened to Sophia up here with her very eloquent statement because I played basketball in high school -- and that was back in the dark ages and there were different rules. I don't know if anybody in here is old enough to remember that we used to have to play half-court basketball. And that meant that there were six on a team instead of five -- three were offense and three were defense -- and you had to stay on your side of the court; you couldn't cross the center line. And the ball could be thrown across the line, but once you got it you could only do two dribbles. And then if you were really lucky and there was nobody breathing down your neck, you could do what was called in my district a juggle -- which meant you threw the ball up in the air.

Now imagine, if you will, how you could play basketball today if you were restricted to two dribbles and a juggle. It wouldn't have at all the same rhythm or excitement that you could see on the court when the Lady Gators play. But we were told, we were told when we asked, "How come we can't play by the same rules the boys play?" When we used to play out in the playground or in somebody's court with the basket above a garage, we played as hard as we could. But once we were in school we had to play by these other rules, and we were always told that, "Well, we're sorry but we just don't think girls' hearts can take that much exertion." Now that was not very long ago, but it took a lot of brave people breaking down barriers to get us to this point. And the documentary that you heard about and saw a clip from is going to detail that in a lot of stories of a lot of women and men who supported them who were able to break down those barriers.

But one of the most important changes that happened was a law that was passed called Title IX. It was a federal law which basically said that girls deserve to have the same opportunities at sports as boys did. And it was because of that law that, all of a sudden, colleges began giving scholarships to girls, and high schools began opening up the door of opportunity for girls to compete. And it was about the same time that we saw some women who we really could emulate. Just think about what it meant for someone like me who occasionally hit a tennis ball around to learn that Billie Jean King was not only taking on Bobby Riggs, but taking on the stereotypes and discrimination that had plagued women athletes for far too long? Or when I think about what Nikki McCray has meant to basketball. As a child, she refused to give up when her male cousins said she couldn't play with them because she was a girl. And whether she has been playing at the Olympics or leading the Mystics, she has never given up. And every time any of you turned a cart-wheel or became more serious about gymnastics, you can say thank you to someone like Dominique Dawes who has shown boys and girls that they can go for the gold in every aspect of their lives.

I'm really impressed by these three leaders, these three athletes, but I am equally impressed with each of you -- each of you who is willing to put yourself out on the athletic field, willing to compete and work as hard as you can. Because not everyone will be a star athlete, not everyone will win at Wimbledon, or win an Olympic gold medal, but everyone -- young women and men alike -- can benefit from athletics and can be part of that great process of pushing yourself and learning how much it takes to excel, to stay healthy, to do the best that we can at all points in our lives.

Now, no one has brought us to this day more than our next speaker. Billie Jean King's tennis achievements are legendary -- including 20 Wimbledon titles and five #1 rankings. But what is most special about her to many of us who have followed her career is that she has become a true champion not only on the court but off the court as well. It was Billie Jean who first came up with the idea for this documentary about the history of women in sports, and that is only fitting for she has helped to shape that history by standing up and speaking out for women's rights whether it was on the athletic field, in the board room, in the market place, anywhere women are seeking to live up to their God-given potential.

So please join me in welcoming a great athlete and a great leader -- Billie Jean King.