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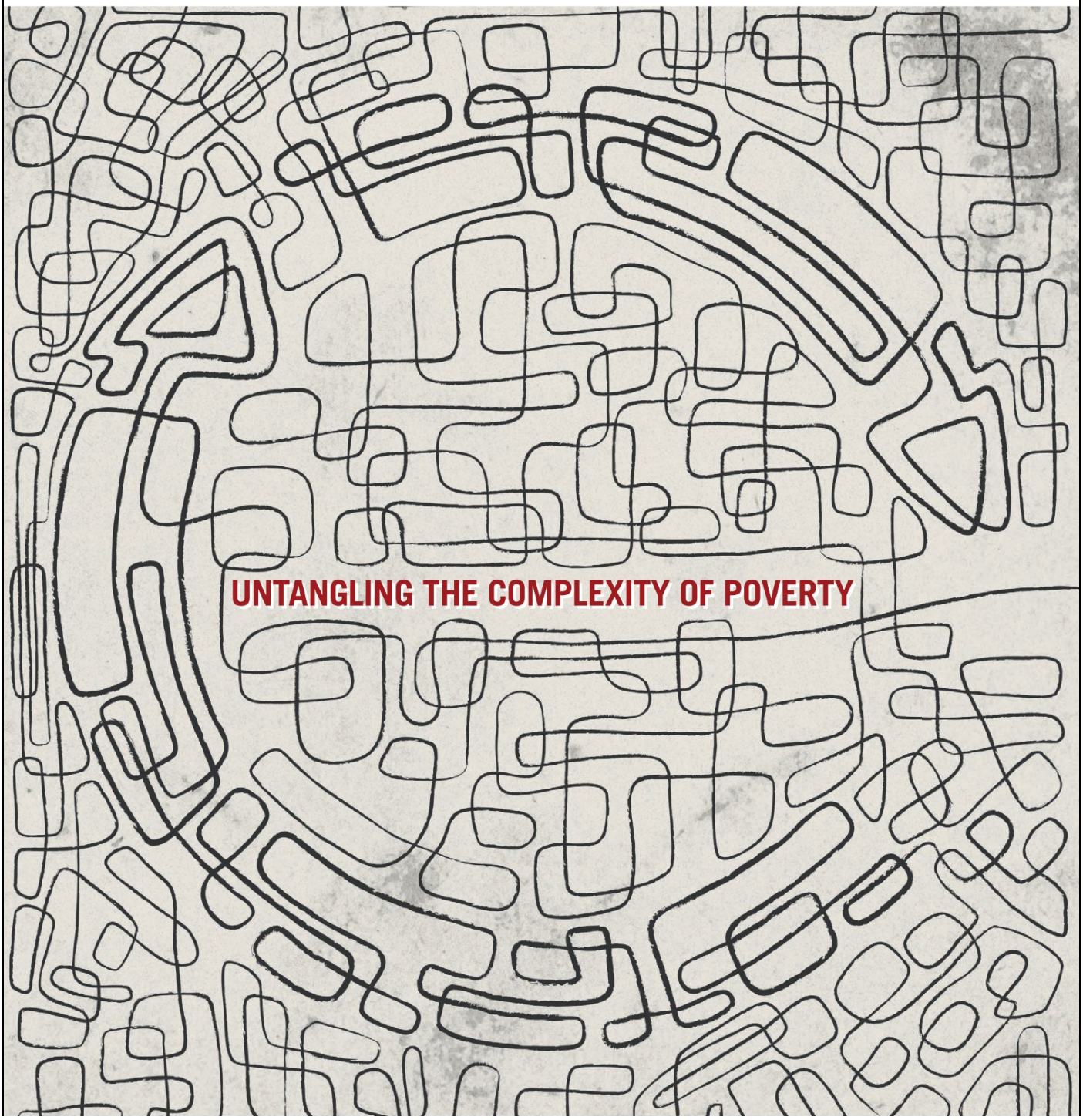

UNTANGLING THE COMPLEXITY OF POVERTY

Clockwise from top left
Mali Kobelja, '14
Rebecca Barry, '15
Becca Wann, '14
Belle Koclanes, '02
Lauren Hines, '13
Genevieve Okoro, '14
Catherine Ostoich, '13

IN PURSUIT OF THAT FLEETING, PERFECT MOMENT

BY CAROLINE KETTLEWELL

Under a featureless gray sky, a biting October wind whips across a playing field shoehorned between buildings and streets on an urban Philadelphia campus where the Spider field hockey team is battling the La Salle College Explorers. The Explorers have tied the score a few minutes into the second half, and now the game races furiously across the turf, the women hurling themselves into the fray, the clack and clatter of hard stick against hard ball mingling with the voices of the players calling to each other.

A crowd numbering barely in the dozens, made up almost entirely of parents and siblings, huddles on the sidelines wrapped in jackets and fleece, shouting encouragement and advice to the players. If the familiar, visible face of Division I sports is packed stadiums, television reporters, roaring fans, March Madness, this game has none of those. But for these young women, being part of this team is central to who they are, driving a passionate determination on the field apparent in the ferocity of their play.

"We don't need ten thousand people watching our game," says Rebecca Barry, a junior midfielder from Limerick, Ireland. "We need our team. We need our coaches. We have our families."

In the waning minutes of the game, Barry, whose nimble stickwork had just that week earned her a fifth-place spot on ESPN SportsCenter's "Top 10 Plays of the Day," scores back-to-back goals to secure a victory for the Spiders.

And then the final whistle blows, and the intensity of the game dissolves into winded chatter, family hugs, and care packages changing hands before the young women board the bus for the five-hour drive back to Richmond. They've been on the road since Friday, played two games in three days, and they're tired and cold and they have to be back in class tomorrow, with reading to be done and assignments due, and no excuses. And that's what they signed up for: Division I play and a demanding academic curriculum and four years of working harder than they've ever worked in their lives.

HISTORY

If we've become accustomed to the sight of ponytailed girls in jerseys and cleats, powerful Olympians with fuchsia-painted toenails, middle-aged moms standing on triathlon podiums—then it might be easy to forget what a cultural sea change all this represents, one that has taken place over decades. And it is impossible to talk about that change without acknowledging the essential role played by the passage of Title IX, the 1972 law that mandated equity for women in a range of areas, including athletics, in educational programs receiving federal funding. As opportunities have grown in the 40 years since, women's and girls' participation in sports has soared at every level, from preschool soccer to professional basketball. When Title IX was passed in 1972, fewer than 32,000 women competed in intercollegiate athletics; today, at colleges and universities across the country, nearly 200,000 women participate in NCAA athletics, more than 78,000 of them at Division I schools alone.

At the University of Richmond, though, a tradition of women and sports goes back well before Title IX. It is a legacy of the University's unique coordinate college history and, in many ways, of one individual in particular, Fanny Graves Crenshaw, who served as Westhampton College's first director of athletics, a position she held for a remarkable 41 years.

A native of Richmond, Crenshaw was a lifelong and impressively versatile athlete herself. She graduated from Bryn Mawr, where she was a member of the basketball, swimming, water polo, tennis, and track (in which sport she would set six world records) teams as well as of the dance and fencing clubs. Crenshaw believed deeply in the value of "physical education" for young women, and when she arrived at Westhampton College in 1914, with no dedicated athletic facilities at her command, she used whatever was at hand, setting her young charges to running and hiking, climbing trees, jumping ditches, even swimming in the lake.

Crenshaw's belief in the importance of athletics was shared by the woman who hired her, Westhampton's first dean, May Lansfield Keller. Keller required four years of physical education for her students, because, as she explained, Westhampton's young women would be serious scholars dedicated to pursuing the highest standards in liberal arts education, and, "The work I'm going to give these girls they can't do unless they get some exercise," she said.

Still, Westhampton's sports programs focused as much on community and participation as on competition. Fifty years after the college's founding, a yearbook entry on the Westhampton Athletic Association would note that "the entire student body makes up the Athletic Association, which is created to foster and maintain sportsmanship, spirit, and cooperation among the students."

Three-sport athlete Judith Owen Hopkins, W'74, (field hockey, basketball, lacrosse) will tell you that what she remembers most is the joy of competing and the friendships and support that came with being part of a team. But she also recalls the realities of women's athletics before Title IX. She and her teammates paid for their own shoes and, often, uniforms. When they traveled, there were no chartered buses or hotel rooms, so they'd try to get in as many games as possible on a single trip. Sometimes they'd compete against one school on a Friday, a neighboring school on a Saturday, and yet another nearby school on a Sunday. And on the nights between, they'd rely on their opponents to house them. "That definitely promoted good sportsmanship," Hopkins recalls. "You couldn't be a bad sport, because that girl you tripped in the game might be the one you were depending on to share her bed that night."

And when Hopkins sprained her ankle in the middle of a divisional lacrosse playoff (there were no championships at the time, either) her coach had to go to the men's athletic director and beg permission for Hopkins to see one of

NOW STRIP AWAY THE CROWD, THE CHEERLEADERS, THE HIP-HOP MUSIC, THE BUZZERS AND REFS AND EXCITEMENT, AND WHAT YOU'RE LEFT WITH IS THE WORK THAT MAKES THAT HAPPEN, THE DAILINESS OF BEING A COLLEGIATE ATHLETE.

the athletic trainers—the women's teams had none of their own. "I actually got to go to the Robins Center," Hopkins says, "and I actually got to be in the whirlpool, and I actually got treated—and that was unheard of."

Richmond Hall of Famer Margaret Stender, W'78, however, remembers the exact day, only a few years later, when she and her teammates realized that Title IX might make a difference.

Today Stender chairs the board of the WNBA team the Chicago Sky and owns Flow Basketball Academy, a basketball leadership school for girls ages 8 to 18. But in 1976 she was a junior three-sport athlete who, like Hopkins, played for the love of the game. Though she doesn't remember ever giving much thought to how much more support the men's teams received, "for basketball, we got a basic jersey and shorts and that was it," she says. The women played in Keller Hall, never in the Robins Center. After practice they had to sprint to North Court before the dining room closed and hope there was something still left to make a meal from, because there were no special accommodations for athletes.

Then one afternoon at the end of practice, Stender's basketball coach, Kathleen Rohaly—a tenured professor who also managed a full teaching load—told the team that a shoe salesman was there to see them. Hungry, the team protested. They weren't interested in looking at shoes they couldn't afford anyway.

But no, their coach explained. The University was paying. The University was going to give the team new shoes.

"We were stunned," says Stender. "We were amazed. We were giddy. New shoes, and someone else was going to pay for them, which had never happened. Ever."

Hunger forgotten, they trooped to the locker room and sat overwhelmed as the salesman pulled out box after box of shoe samples.

And then he showed a pair of red suede Converse.

Immediately the team agreed: Those were what they wanted.

Lacing up for their first game in their new shoes, "It was the most exhilarating experience any of us had ever had," says Stender. "Such a small thing, but none of us had ever had shoes that matched anyone else's." They went on to win their game, and more after that. "It was like we got this extra confidence just from the fact that we all felt a little bit lighter, a little bit stronger, a little bit jumpier."

COMMITMENT

Nearly 40 years later, the women who play under the Spider banner are supported by a sophisticated 21st-century Division I university athletic program. They enjoy state-of-the-art facilities and professional coaching staffs, trainers who travel with them on chartered bus and by airplane, team uniforms and warm-ups and duffel bags and water bottles. They have opportunities that Keller and Crenshaw and Hopkins and Stender could hardly have imagined, from athletic scholarships to international competition to the possibility of professional sports careers.

How much has changed was evident on a Sunday afternoon as the women's basketball team took the court against the visiting Dayton Flyers. If the playing floor of the Robins Center was once foreign territory for Westhampton's women, today women's basketball rates all the visible trappings of a major college sport: overhead video screens, cheerleaders, a dance team, a booming announcer's voice over the loudspeakers, a press table peopled with sportscasters, a mobile broadcast center humming behind the building, and a retinue of coaches in conservative business attire thronging the sideline. In the stands, a particularly voluble fan heaps abuse on the referees. "When are you going to get one right?" "It hit the rim!" "You're terrible!"

On the court, however, the women seem oblivious to everything but the game. The play is hard and fast, aggressive and determined, sprint and pass and turn and shoot, a smoothly choreographed movement of teammates.

Now strip away the crowd, the cheerleaders, the hip-hop music, the buzzers and refs and excitement, and what you're left with is the work that makes that happen, the dailiness of being a collegiate athlete: a winter afternoon, the squeak of shoe on wood echoing in the empty space of the Robins Center, a coach drilling the women through the same move over and over and over again. Stop. Reset. Go. Stop. Reset. Go. When the practice finally ends, the women wearily grab towels and water bottles, shoulder duffels, and head for the locker room. In an hour, they need to be ready to board a bus. Tonight, a hotel room. Tomorrow, a game.

No one, least of all the athletes themselves, is going to convene a pity party for the time, effort, energy, and sacrifices it takes to play a Division I intercollegiate sport. This is not hard labor in the salt mines, and it's voluntary, something the students all have chosen.

Still, it's worth appreciating what this path demands of those who choose to travel it.

ANYONE WHO HAS DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO A SPORT, HOWEVER, KNOWS THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT EQUATION. IT IS TO BE PART OF SOMETHING—THE TEAM, THE STRUGGLE, THE QUEST, THE SWEETNESS OF A HARD-FOUGHT WIN.

"We really push them to be excellent in all areas of life," says field hockey head coach Gina Lucido, who notes that during weekend trips, required team study hours are part of every day. "If you want to be a great student and a great athlete here, there are sacrifices you have to make; you can't do much else."

Lauren Hines, '13, a sociology major with a minor in education and Spider swimmer who competed in the 2012 Olympic trials, recalls the grueling daily reality of her in-season schedule: morning practices beginning at 5:30 a.m., followed by a quick breakfast, classes, afternoon practice from 3 to 5:30, dinner, "and then we would do schoolwork until we were too exhausted to work anymore, then go to bed." Freshman year, she says, her hallmates would stop by her room and be surprised to discover her already asleep by 10 p.m.

Michele "Belle" Koclanes, '02, a 5'1" point guard nicknamed the "Itsy Bitsy Spider" and now head coach for the Dartmouth women's basketball team, says she chose Richmond because of the basketball program and the Jepson School of Leadership Studies. "I wanted to find that area where I was challenged on the court and challenged and motivated every day in the classroom," she says. She majored in leadership studies and minored in rhetoric and communication, and also served as a speech consultant at the Speech Center and led a weekly drill class for students in first-year Italian. She counsels her players now that Division I play demands "growing up quickly."

"You need to be prepared for all those tasks and responsibilities. In the classroom or on the playing field, everything we do we want to do well. If you are up all night studying for an exam and then you have a practice at 6:30 in the morning, you have to bring that same energy and attitude to practice, because you are committing to both equally."

Sometimes, too, the cost goes beyond muscle-sore bodies and weary, sleep-deprived minds. A team lineup can look like a parade of the walking wounded, with players splinted, taped, braced, slinged, and bound in casts. Genevieve Okoro, '14, a center forward for the basketball team, tore her ACL, a ligament in the knee, during a game early in the fall of 2012. One game before, she'd racked up a career high 17 rebounds. One game later, and she was out for the season. But if she had to endure the pain and frustration of surgery, rehabilitation, and a season lost, she consoled herself with the knowledge that two of her teammates had, between them, endured a total of nine knee surgeries.

Senior Becca Wann faced an even more painful reality. A rising star nationally in soccer (she won a gold medal at the 2012 FIFA U20 World Cup in Japan as part of the Women's National Team), she also played basketball for the Spiders. Then this August, in a collision with another player during a season-opening soccer tournament, she suffered the latest in a series of concussions going back to a childhood fall from a pogo stick in her garage. Told by her doctors that she couldn't risk another head injury, she was forced to retire for good from both sports.

REWARD

To what end, then, all this work, the toll on body and mind, exactly? Chances are slim that a campuswide celebration will erupt when your field hockey team wins the championship. No dreams of a professional swimming career drag you out of bed for that pre-dawn practice. And no matter how hard you work, no matter what you give up, every game, every playoff, every championship is a chance to lose as much as it is a chance to win: an off day, a bad play, a career-ending injury. Sometimes, like Becca Wann, after years of giving yourself to a sport, you have to graduate and leave it behind with goals unmet and dreams unrealized.

Anyone who has devoted themselves to a sport, however, knows the other side of that equation. It is to be part of something—the team, the struggle, the quest, the sweetness of a hard-fought win. There is a pleasure in working yourself to exhaustion in a shared and relentless pursuit of that fleeting, perfect moment when everything comes together. If it's an axiom, it's one borne out by considerable research that participation in team sports confers all manner of benefits, beyond the physical, to players. There is a host of not immediately tangible goods that come of the experience, from learning about teamwork and sacrifice and discipline to knowing how to face and overcome adversity.

Swimming coach Matt Barany says that in the pool, every day is a test, with the pitiless clock the relentless measure of failure or success, yet, "Every day, these brave women try to be better than yesterday, to chase greatness."

"As devoted as you have to be to being an athlete, to your sport, to your teammates, to the people who support you in your sport, it's an incredible experience," adds senior swimmer Mali Kobelja. "It is so enriching. There are things that you learn, not just about yourself, but also about other people, and your role in a bigger picture."

That bigger picture is what alumna Margaret Stender believes is the long-term value of participation in sports. The Women's Sports Foundation argues explicitly that sports develops in girls and young women a set of essential skills for success in the world that can't be learned in the classroom, and Stender's experience, she believes, bears that argument out. After earning an MBA but before helping launch the Chicago Sky, she pursued a long career at Quaker Oats that eventually would find her as the president of the U.S. cereals division. "My whole business career really was supported and encouraged from my athletic experience," she says. "My team experience taught me how to lead, how to work with men, how to find success in the business world."

Basketball player Genevieve Okoro, a redshirt junior who plans to attend medical school and become a surgeon, credits her sport—the demands of teamwork, of travel, of performing under pressure in front of crowds, of interacting with many different people—with transforming her from a bookish introvert to a still-bookish ("I read books like it's my job") but far more outgoing and confident person.

WHEN MARGARET STENDER GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL, SHE POINTS OUT, ONLY ONE IN 34 GIRLS PARTICIPATED IN HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS. TODAY THAT NUMBER IS ONE IN 2.5.

Catherine Ostoich, '13, a field-hockey player, agrees. "I don't think I would be the person I am today had I not played hockey at this level. I became a better student because I was playing a sport. It made me focus when I had to focus. And what I will do with the rest of my life, and all life's essential skills—all that has been shaped by field hockey."

When Margaret Stender graduated from high school, she points out, only one in 34 girls participated in high school sports. Today that number is one in 2.5. "Today almost half of all girls are getting the same benefits I did—learning confidence, leadership, teamwork. So that is going to create a whole group of more confident leaders going forward, a huge cultural change that we are going to see," she says. "Women are still so far behind in our business and political leadership, but over the next 20 years I think that is going to change."

Equally as important, she believes, is the fact that "boys and men are now used to seeing strong, confident women who will and can make their own decisions, are used to supporting girls and women as athletes."

Is it investing sport with too much significance to see it as a force for social change? Perhaps not. When he founded the modern Olympic games in 1896, Baron Pierre de Coubertin stated that "Olympics with women would be incorrect, unpractical, uninteresting and unesthetic." At the 2012 London Olympics, history was made not only by the presence of nearly 5,000 women competing in sports from rowing to marathon to boxing, but also by the moment when Wojdan Ali Seraj Abdulrahim Shahrkhani, defying criticism and disapproval, stepped onto the judo mat to become the first woman from Saudi Arabia—a country where it is still illegal for women to drive—to represent her country at the international competition.

In 1955, when Fanny Crenshaw retired, she was not yet done making her mark at Westhampton College. In 1963, the pool named for her and built to her specifications (one inch longer than Olympic distance so her young women would be accustomed to working that much harder to make their goals) was dedicated. Two years later, and two days after her 75th birthday, Crenshaw became the first person to have swum a cumulative 50 miles in that pool. In an alumni magazine tribute the following year, a student wrote of Crenshaw's legacy: "Encouraged, we reached, and suddenly, in disbelief, we found we could be champions."

Caroline Kettlewell is a freelance writer in Richmond and a competitive open-water distance swimmer. In September, she completed her first 10K swim, the Little Red Lighthouse Swim in New York City.