**The Unfair Advantage**

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History was made when the world’s first transgender athlete participated in the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympic Games. Laurel Hubbard, a New Zealander, became the first-ever openly transgender weightlifter to compete in the Olympics. This progressive development was applauded all over the world. At the same time, her competing in the women’s side of the weightlifting contest was subject to criticism as many considered her biologically male physique giving her an advantage over other cis-gendered women athletes. Tracey Lambrechs, a New Zealander cis-gendered woman athlete, claimed that Hubbard took her spot unfairly in the Olympics weightlifting competition to represent the country.

The International Olympic Committee’s (IOC) guidelines of 2015 allow transgender sportspersons to participate in the games if they fulfil the requirement of hormone therapy. This increasing incorporation of transgendered women athletes in women’s association of sports has fretted many cis-gendered women. Some are irrationally worried that this might be the end of women’s sports.

Various women athletes claim that the transitioned athletes have physical traits of a male, like greater stamina and stature. Most transgendered women are brought up as men and go through all the male-associated aspects of life. On the occasion of their outing, they identify themselves as women. This gives them an unfair advantage over other female athletes. Due to problematic laws of sports, trans women, with male bodies and feminine gender, get to participate in the women-only category of sports and are increasingly winning titles that they consider are reserved for cis-gendered women athletes.

Leia Schneeberger is an athlete of mountain bike racing. She won three championships in a row but lost the fourth title to a transgendered woman biker who formerly competed from the men’s side of the same sport. It is not the winning of titles by trans women that is the determinant of injustice, the very act of their participation is. “Why do I have to compete against a male body?”, she complained.

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Holly Lawford-Smith, an Australia-based philosopher and feminist, says that the idea of one’s gender identity replacing their biological sex for social and legal purposes is vying to dominate. If this has happened, a person who was born biologically male, went through male puberty and has the same bodily features as that of a man, can expect to be included in all female-only spaces, including sports.

Trans women, on the other hand, justify their participation in women’s sports. Joanna Harper, a trans athlete and scientist, says that transgendered athletes fulfil the requirement of strength reduction, therefore, the playing field is fair. Sports federations allow transgendered women to compete in women sports provided they have undergone feminization hormone therapy, which is aimed to reduce their testerostone level.

Despite this therapy, the trans women athletes retain their physical edge, which is basically what decides the victor. Testosterone already develops the body height, muscle content and bone density of trans women while going through male puberty. Hormone therapy cannot undo that. It can reduce a person’s physical strength a little, but mostly it remains above the level of a cis-gendered woman athlete. Besides, hormone therapy is mainly practised to reassign one’s sexual characteristics, which has nothing to do with sports.

According to Emma Hilton, a developmental biologist at the University of Manchester, a male’s body could be as much as 40 per cent stronger than a female’s. The performance gap in weightlifting is over 30 per cent, 50 per cent in throwing baseball and 162 per cent in punching, all in favour of the male.

It must be noted that gender identity is not a time-sensitive entity, and can be determined at any given moment. People could misuse the inclusion policy by identifying themselves with any gender dishonestly to get selected in their prefered sex league. According to World Athletics 2019 ranking, it was revealed that there are over 2000 men ahead of the fastest woman in running by time. Any ‘man’ from those 2000 could wrongly transition their gender and identify as a woman to join a women’s sports event, unfairly compete and, possibly, win it.

It must be duly noted that the controversial rules of the sport do not make the athlete unjust. The inclusion policy is highly flawed. It is at odds with science. But if policies are implemented on the whims of the proponents of anti-trans laws, and trans women are forced to join the men’s league, there will be some more discrepancies to see. For instance, trans persons will feel isolated to be a part of a group that does not correlate to their gender, and there will always be a possibility of harassment that can crush their athletic spirit.

Most sports administrations around the globe follow the IOC guidelines for the inclusion of trans athletes. However, there are many other leagues that not only do not follow this rule but also do not contain a transgender-inclusive plan at all. The mainstream sports leagues like NFL, NBA and football clubs have yet no transgender inclusion policy. In the US, nine states have passed laws to bar transgendered women to participate in women’s sports competitions. Many other states are currently working on it. After decades of activism, transgendered persons are finally getting included in different spaces of society. The sports administrations must devise a more rational inclusion strategy. The transgender community cannot afford a boycott from other spheres at this point when acceptance is only getting started.

The only thing that makes sense is that the existing inclusion system is problematic. Anyone could perceive it as unsporting. The rule of hormone therapy that reduces a person’s strength must be abolished as a requirement for trans athletes. People should be accepted as who they are. The only fair solution to the problem is that trans men and trans women each need a category of their own. Men, women and differently-abled persons have their categories to ensure a level playing field for all athletes. Why not further classify the Olympic and other games categories into trans men and trans women sports, and collectively call it ‘Translympics’? It would provide a fair and square chance of succeeding to all participants and also further the cause of accepting transgendered persons in society.

In the meanwhile, some sports laws need amending. For now, the dichotomy in sports between men and women must be based on biological sex rather than gender. A perfectly healthy person cannot compete in the Paralympics because they ‘feel like differently abled’. Similarly, selection criteria based on an athlete’s physique must be established for all. A person whose biological sex, according to the anatomy of their body, is male should have every right to identify themself with a gender of their choice. But since their anatomy aligns them with men, they must compete on the men’s side of the sport to make it a level playing field. It does not undermine anyone’s gender identity and expression.

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