**Women in sports**

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The FIFA World Cup in Football for Women held in Australia and New Zealand in August 2023 was a particularly enjoyable event, a watershed in sports, indeed in football for women. It ended last weekend with Spain taking the gold medal on Sunday, winning over England, which became the silver medallist, and on Saturday, Sweden won the bronze medal, winning over Australia. All of the country teams were excellent, although some were certainly better than others, and in addition, as they say, “the football is round”.
The World Cup was entertaining and fun to watch, either we saw the matches as such or preferred the discussions and after-matches talks, all on TV. Although sports events are meant to be games, they are often more serious, and professional sports are now business, too, with money setting much of the agenda and rules. Sponsors and advertisers are behind clubs, individuals and events, but still more so in events for men than women. However, this year’s highly successful and entertaining World Cup in Football for Women has increased the value and importance of sports for women. Perhaps much of the growth in sports will in future precisely be in sports for women, both as from a financial point of view and as seen from the actual sports and entertainment sides.
I discovered this year that football for women can be as fascinating as football for men, sometimes more. But I don’t need to say that to Pakistanis where men and women have already discovered that in cricket, where the Pakistan Women’s National Cricket Team sometimes do better than the men’s team in matches. Well, still I don’t believe that the women will win over the men in sports, in popularity, I mean, because that would also require that more women get interested and passionate about sports in general. Also, it is a fact that facilities and sports grounds are better and more easily available for men than women, for example, with better changing and other facilities. This is not only so in Pakistan, but often also in the West, including in my home country Norway.
Just now Norway has a woman president, the first ever, of its Football Association of Norway, and Lise Klaveness is obviously representing equally both men and women. Unfortunately, Norway dropped out quite early in the World Cup for Women, and Klaveness criticised her country team for not having done better. Well, maybe that was just an emotional reaction, but I think she should have been grateful for how far they had come, since to be in the World Cup is no small thing. But then, Klaveness may be impatient, wanting the women to excel soon, and she may think it is about time because she started playing football some twenty-five years ago, participating in no less than 73 matches for her country’s national team.
I believe that it is important to widen the participation in many sports, and that means more women participants in general and in countries where very few women have been included. Also, it is a fact that certain sports are getting less important, especially if they are not so suitable for TV. I believe that team sports, both for men and women, will grow more than individual sports, but also individual sports, such as tennis, running, and other athletics will still always be fascinating, again both for men and women. Top sports for handicapped will also grow.
Certain winter sports may have less chance of staying popular, such as cross country skiing, taking too long to show on TV. In my childhood, ice skating was very popular, in spite of the reporting only being live on radio, and in the newspapers the day after the event. When TV came, I wonder if that was more negative than positive. That time, speed skating was mainly a men’s sport, but some decades earlier, figure skating for women had been very popular. The Norwegian Sonja Henie was a ten-time world champion, a six-time European champion, and a three-time Olympic Games gold medallist in singles, all in the 1920s and 1930s. She became a film star and her figure skating and ice dancing films became very popular. It is said that she was the best paid actor of all in Hollywood, yes, better than the men, too.
But now I write too much about the competitive elite sports while I actually also believe in the softer sides of it, notably sports as entertainment, with its cultural dimensions, not to forget either that sports competitions are meant to be games, not always to be taken all that seriously. Also, we should remember that sportspeople are today’s gladiators, to compare to the old Roman history, well, that time only for men and sadly, indeed quite violent, as were also aspects of the ancient Greek Olympic games. Today, it is important that we stress the peaceful and friendly aspects of sports and that it has diplomatic aspects, helping in more cooperation between people and countries. Women do certainly have important roles to play.
Everywhere, there have been or are questions about decency and appropriateness of certain sports for women, what dresses to wear and other things, in top sports and exercise sports on the grounds in the neighbourhood. Even in the West, men and women have few joint activities and events, and in some countries, women are banned from certain sports or discouraged from participating in them. That reminds me of the time of the bicycle (or tricycle) becoming common in USA and Europe in the late decades of the 1800s, and many thought women should not use it, or perhaps only use it for exercise in parks, but not for utility in town. The long skirts that women had to wear in those days were also quite awkward. And then I remember when I was young, fifty years ago, it was quite rare that women drove motorcars and certainly tractors.
Sports for exercise and for competitions are certainly important. In Norway, Football President Klaveness says that in the country’s most important sport, there are more girls than boys playing football, most just for fun and friendship, but some also aiming at becoming professionals. In our time, when children and youth, and also adults, spend most of their time sitting on a chair in front of a computer or mobile phone, sports and other physical exercises become important, also with social and psychological benefits. Outdoor sports and enjoying nature become important and fashionable; we go fishing, hiking or strolling in the mountains, or just go for a walk in town.
That makes me end my article today on a note about looking at football for women, competitive or just for fun, as one of many activities. The just ended World Cup in Football for Women gave the sport a great boost, for many reasons. But if it is not football, we can do other things; as long as it is fun and positive to ourselves and others. Again, congratulations to all who were part of making this year’s World Cup in Football for Women a success.