

JULIE FOU DY STILL ADVOCATING FOR TITLE IX

JACQUELINE WILLIAMS

If Julie Foudy could tell her sixteen-year-old self one thing, it would be to surround yourself with people who celebrate differences and who think outside the box. She wishes she could have told her younger self it is okay to think differently. Foudy was just sixteen when she made her debut with the United States women's national soccer team. Four years later, in 1991, the team played in the first Women's World Cup. The U.S. won and it was the start of the world's love affair with the team.

In 1996, Foudy led her team to the first Olympics for women's soccer. They won again. The team went on to win another World Cup in 1999 and a second Olympic gold in 2004. Without knowing it at the time, they were revolutionizing the world of professional sport for women. Foudy is still one of the most recognizable female athletes. She traces her path to becoming a professional athlete back to a scholarship she received from Stanford, enabled by Title IX. It was the first scholarship given to a woman in soccer.

Speaking to a Dartmouth College audience, Foudy said the landmark legislation, passed in 1972 and requiring gender equality for any education program or activity receiving federal funding, is one of the most profound civil rights laws passed last century. The law's application within college athletics requires that for every male athletic scholarship, there must also be a female athletic scholarship. The law's passing increased opportunities for women and girls in sports. Before Title IX, about one in twenty-seven women and girls were participating in high school and college sports. Today, about one in three women and girls participate in sports.

Foudy, along with hundreds of locals, recently celebrated the 40th anniversary of Title IX during Dartmouth's leading voices lecture series. Though Foudy believed the anniversary was an opportunity to reflect on

the great strides the legislation had made for women and sports, she used it to shed light on one reality: A large number of female athletes don't know what Title IX is and, if they do, they have a negative perception of it. The legislation has been criticized for forcing athletic budget cuts. Foudy said it was usually associated with men's sports being cut.

"It really saddens me," Foudy told students, faculty and community members in the Hopkins Center for the Arts' Alumni Hall. "Because the intent of Title IX has been to provide opportunities for women, not at the expense of men. It ends up getting a bad rap, which is unfair."

Foudy worked with Sen. Birch Bayh, "the father" of Title IX, as she put it, when she sat on the Commission on Opportunity in Athletics in 2002, which considered possible changes to Title IX. It was then that he told her how it all began.

"He told me he and his wife, who was an undergraduate with him, applied to the University of Virginia Law School," she said. "He told me how she was much smarter than him, had better grades, test scores, yet she didn't get into law school, but he did. So they decided to do something about it.

"(Title IX) started as an education amendment to get women into colleges and universities. The by-product of it is the sports. There have been so many wonderful things associated with it. One of the reasons why I advocate for it so much is because of all the benefits that are associated with sports."

Foudy was appointed by the George W. Bush administration to serve on the Title IX review panel. It was a defining moment for women's athletics. Her sharply worded report, Dartmouth President Carol Folt said at the event last Tuesday, was really what helped prevent changes that were being contemplated at the time and that could have eroded the power of Title IX. Foudy called it one of her greatest achievements. "I had to step out on the plank and say, 'I'm going to do a minority report and I don't agree with what you're doing,'" she said. "I just felt that the conversation was always focused on blaming women's sports, instead of finding a solution where we could all play." Foudy said the beauty of Title IX for women was that it is both a great enabler and a great leveler. It provides a pathway for American girls to follow their dreams.

Foudy, Mia Hamm and Kristine Lilly, who also received soccer

scholarships enabled by Title IX, were all “feisty young teenagers” when they joined the national team. The team played together for almost two decades, during which time they overcame many obstacles as pioneers for women’s soccer. “Success isn’t a matter of chance; it’s a matter of choice,” Foudy said. One choice the group made was to always work harder. It was “okay to be competitive, okay to go after it,” Foudy said. When she got to the national team, not only was competitiveness embraced, it was celebrated. They also chose to celebrate others and to be courageous.

Another choice the women made was to make a difference because they wanted to leave the game in a better place for the next generation of players. She remembered the days in the mid-1990s when “you’re at your 10th roach hotel for the month and you’re getting \$10 a day.” The group had been playing together for about eight years. It was then that they started to question their situation. “We weren’t asking for millions; we just wanted a fair, decent living,” Foudy said. “That was a huge battle for us. We turned to women like Billy Jean King, who was a great mentor and sounding board for us. We changed a lot of the funding and the structure, not just for our level, but also for younger girls coming through. At the end, we were making a nice living. Now there’s popularity in the sport because it’s being marketed.”

Though people refer to the team as pioneers for women’s soccer, saying they revolutionized professional sports for women, Foudy said they had not been successful in getting women’s professional soccer off the ground. “We set a standard that we hoped would be the norm rather than the exception,” she said. “I think we changed attitudes and acceptance toward women’s sports, but I think the professional frontier is one that’s really hard to tackle. We haven’t done well with that in soccer.

“You can really generate a lot of enthusiasm around national team events, World Cups and Olympics, but trying to replicate that on a weekly basis is hard. Things are changing, you’re seeing progression; it’s part of the Title IX wave of athletes. It just takes time.”

Since hanging up her cleats in 2004, Foudy — a commentator with ESPN and founder of the Julie Foudy Sports Leadership Academy — has gained a reputation as being an outspoken advocate for gender equality in sports. Similar to what the likes of King did for her, Foudy believed it was her duty to mentor young girls on life’s possibilities, show them how

they could strive for something more and provide insight into why it's okay to be different. There is not a girl in America who should grow up with a sense of limitation with Title IX behind her, Foudy said. "I learned by watching all of these women that in choosing to make a difference you don't have to be a CEO, the president of a company or a captain, an Olympic gold medalist or even the most confident or popular person at your school," Foudy said. "You can be the quiet kid who doesn't want to talk or the nerd who thinks they're a little bit different. As long as you believe in something passionately, you can get it done."

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