

## IN MY OPINION

# Grandmas revel in successes of female athletes

A lot has been written about the terrific Galesburg High School girls basketball team, but not from the perspective of a woman about to turn 64. If there is one regret I have in my life, it's that I was born way too early to play in competitive sports in school.

"Femininity" in the 1950s, when I was in high school and college, included not winning contests with boys, pretending to be dumb, frail, helpless females. For a competitive, athletic "tomboy" like me, this was a real struggle.

My husband and I are part of a huge legion of supporters in this community who don't attend games and have no children or grandchildren in the Galesburg school system but don't miss a beat of the games and players. We listen to the radio, watch television sports reports and read the newspaper sports pages. And for this misplaced woman — born 30 years too soon — the girls sports programs have been a source of great pride and excitement.

In basketball, it used to be that a girl was either a forward or guard, playing half court, and while our team's forwards were trying to score on one half of the court, the other

half of the team just waited until the ball came our way. It was ridiculous and it seemed nutty at the time. We couldn't dribble more than two steps at a time, probably because we were supposed to be so fragile. What a joy to see the physical strength of the girls on our sports teams, locally and nationally, and I admit I get a perverse satisfaction seeing photos of men and boys cheering them on. What a different world — and a good one for talented female athletes.

There were three of us in high school who played intramural basketball and we still communicate with each other. We were between 5'7" and 5'8" and were the tallest girls in school. I was a guard because I was scrappy and frankly didn't hit the basket well. My two friends were forwards, but it was certainly an advantage to be taller than everyone else.

Men and women have their own styles of play, no doubt about it. When I was in 6th grade and playing a baseball game with the boys in my neighborhood, I became angry with one of the guys and instead of just hitting him, like we usually did, I slapped him across the face. It was a female moment if

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The author, top right, participated in one of the few activities open to female high school athletes at Kewanee High School a half a century ago — cheerleading.

there ever was one, and my childhood playmates shook their heads in amazement. I was turning into a woman, whether I wanted to or not. I lost interest in playing sports in the neighborhood after that. It just wasn't the "feminine" thing to do.

But it's never too late. I cherish one trophy, which I won at the age of 38 for winning the Galesburg women's singles tennis championship in 1974. That trophy is always displayed in my home because I am so

proud of it, but it is also a sad reminder of what could have been.

Congratulations, Galesburg girls, and thanks for giving some of us old gals the pride and excitement we are now allowed to feel as women. You have validated our faith in ourselves and our abilities.

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