

Transgender athletes split America's high schools

Girls, parents step into growing fight

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More than 20 conservative-leaning states now ban male-born students from girls' scholastic sports, but it's a different story in liberal America, where transgender athletes are not only competing but also thriving.

Male-to-female transgender competitors made a splash this year in high school sports in California, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Washington by winning races and capturing roster spots in sports such as basketball, skiing, and track and field.

June Watterson, a transgender sophomore at Davis Senior High School in California, notched first- and third-place finishes in slalom races at the California Nevada Interscholastic Ski and Snowboard Federation state championships in March.

Not thrilled about it was one California man whose daughter competed at the meet. Each time Watterson raced, he said, female skiers slid down the rankings.

"You've got to think about what this actually means," said the father, who

spoke to The Washington Times on the condition of anonymity. "This person displaced one of our girls, kicked her from third to down to fourth place, off the podium. And it's a cascade effect."

It was the first time he had ever seen a male-to-female transgender competitor in girls' scholastic skiing, but he is confident it won't be the last.

"It's only going to increase. It's not going away," he said. "Even though it goes against Title IX, it goes against common sense. It goes against what's right."

Doggedly tracking the growing number of transgender athletes is the Independent Council on Women's Sports, whose Twitter feed abounds with examples.

In New Hampshire, freshman Maelle Jacques took second place in the 1,600meter race and fifth in the high jump two weeks ago at the state DIII girls' track and field championships.

In Pennsylvania, junior Eris Pil took second place in the shot put and fourth in the discus on May 17 at the Western Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic League girls' 2A track and field championships.

In Washington, Seattle Academy sophomore Aspen Hoffman set a school record last fall in the 5,000-meter race after placing 72nd the previous year on the boys' team. Hoffman followed up

with first- or second-place finishes during the spring season in the 1,600 and the 3,200, the 2,000 steeplechase, and the 4x400 relay.

In California, Lorelei Barrett and Athena Ryan qualified for the state preliminary track-and-field championships in May with top-three finishes in the 1,600.

“Boys are feeling increasingly emboldened and entitled to girls roster spots, awards and records due to disastrous policies that do not recognize fair treatment for girls in sports,” said Marshi Smith, an Independent Council on Women’s Sports co-founder and a former Nevada state swimming champion.

She said adults have a “moral imperative to share the truth when girls are placed in dangerous and unfair situations.”

“We will look back on this as an egregious wrong against women. Neither the girls nor the boys deserve this,” Ms. Smith said. “Adults need to stand up and make it right.”

Despite the concerns, transgender athletes in liberal-leaning states have powerful allies. In Nevada, Senate Democrats added an amendment Friday to a bill that would fine school districts \$5,000 per day if they try to prevent maleborn athletes who identify as female from competing in girls’ sports.

State Sen. Ira Hansen, a Republican, called it the “Bud Light amendment,” and Democrats said it was needed to protect transgender students from discrimination.

“The discrimination of students to participate in school-based activities or restricting access to facilities is not only shocking, it’s inhumane,” tweeted state Sen. Fabian Donate, a Democrat. “The state has an obligation to protect the civil rights of all students, regardless of their background or identity.”

The Assembly removed the amendment to Assembly Bill 423 without comment on Tuesday. Gov. Joe Lombardo, a Republican, has signaled his opposition to adding gender identity to Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in public education.

The California Interscholastic Federation, the state’s governing body for school sports, blasted “discriminatory or harassing behaviors” after the two male-born track and field athletes dropped out of the weekend’s girls’ state championships.

“The CIF is disappointed for two of our student-athletes and their families because due to the actions of others, they found it necessary to withdraw from the State Track and Field Championships out of concern for the student’s wellbeing,” the federation said in a statement to the Los Angeles Times.

The federation's Guidelines for Gender Identity Participation makes clear that students are allowed to compete "in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity, irrespective of the gender listed on a student's records."

March, the Vermont Principals' Association banned a private school in Hartford from state sports events. The Mid Vermont Christian School had refused to compete against a volleyball team with a male-born player.

The association, which sanctions school athletics, said the school violated policies that allow athletes to play on teams "consistent with their gender identity" by forfeiting a match against Long Trail School at the state championships.

Vicky Fogg, the Christian school's head of school, told the Valley News that playing "against an opponent with a biological male jeopardizes the fairness of the game and the safety of our players."

It's a far different story in conservative America. Twenty-one states have enacted laws banning biological males from female scholastic sports. Missouri could become the 22nd with a bill now on the desk of Gov. Mike Parson, a Republican.

Other women's sports bills are under consideration in North Carolina and Ohio, said Paul Dupont, a spokesman for the American Principles Project.

Several of those measures have been challenged in court, but a federal judge upheld West Virginia's law in January.

That's not much comfort for parents of female athletes in states such as California, where Democrats stand firmly with transgender students seeking to play sports based on gender identity.

"As this becomes more prevalent, I can't imagine there won't be pushback," said the California ski dad. "It's just completely sad that this is a partisan issue. You know, Democrats have daughters, too. And it's like, really?"