

Champion of women's athletics

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Friday, 24 January 2014 14:26 -



Jane Wahl recognized for pioneering Title IX at CU.

Jane Wahl's uncle used to bring back cracked and well-worn bats from his Little League teams in Texas.

In the graveled yard of their farm near Eustis, Wahl took the bats, tossed up rocks and swung hard.

"I wanted to see how far and accurately the rock would fly," she said. "It was fun to become good at that."

That was in the 1950s, long before Title IX created equal educational and competitive sports opportunities for women and long before Wahl would be part of that historic time at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

Last March, the 68-year-old received the Sportswomen of Colorado's Dorothy Mauk Pioneer Award for her efforts.

This Sunday, the Gothenburg resident will be the first recipient of the Jane Wahl Legacy Award at the University of Colorado Boulder.

CU associate athletics director Ceal Barry said the award recognizes Wahl for her efforts in the 1970s of implementing Title IX and creating varsity sport programs for generations of women athletes.

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Wahl served as CU's first women's athletic director from 1975-79.

And she had plenty of experiences that helped prepare her for that position.

First and foremost was her love of sports, from running to softball to volleyball and other activities.

"I loved them all," Wahl said.

She played volleyball in high school and coached a community softball team.

At Kearney State College, where she earned a bachelor's degree, she played schedule-limited softball and basketball. She received a master's degree from Colorado State College in Greeley, CO. Both degrees were in health, physical education and recreation.

Hired to teach physical education in a suburb of Chicago, Wahl took on athletic administration duties in addition to her teaching and coaching load, initiating regular, competitive schedules for team sports like volleyball, basketball and softball.

She also started new sports like bowling, badminton, archery, tennis and track.

"It was a great time to coach because everyone was so grateful for the opportunities for girls," Wahl said. "Parents didn't complain about their daughter's playing time because at least she was playing."

After tiring of traffic and cold winters, she applied for associate intramural director at CU but

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ended up as coordinator of women's sports in the recreation department in 1974.

That position was re-titled "director of women's athletics" the following year.

During this time, Wahl worked closely with the early basketball program and arranged the first competition between CU and Nebraska in Cozad's high school gym in 1976.

"My parents hosted the CU team for a brunch, which included farm-raised steaks, before the game," she recalled. "I remember someone saying they were so stuffed they could hardly move."

Wahl wonders with a laugh whether her parents had sabotaged the team because CU lost a close game.

With mentoring from CU's recreation director and others, she skillfully negotiated for more funding for the six women's competitive sports and such things as more fair coach and time compensation (before Title IX implementation, all women coaches were part time) and travel arrangements.

"Here I was, a small-town farm girl from the middle of Nebraska meeting with the CU men's athletic director to work out Title IX," she said.

Before implementation, Wahl said she tried to manage 10 sports on a \$100,000 yearly budget, including her \$9,700 salary and those of the coaches.

At the time, women athletes traveled in vans to compete at different schools while athletes in major men's sports had opportunities to fly.

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What helped Title IX implementation, Wahl said, was the discovery that CU could lose up to \$62 million in federal funding if officials didn't comply with the legislation.

Beginning in the fall of 1978, six competitive women's sports at CU received \$400,000 in yearly funding and other benefits and the programs were placed under the umbrella of the athletic department.

In 1979, a year after Title IX implementation, Wahl resigned.

"It seemed like I didn't have much influence anymore," she said.

She completed a doctoral degree in secondary education with an athletic administration emphasis from CU in 1981.

The next year, Wahl became an associate professor, athletic director and softball coach at Linfield College in McMinnville, OR.

Later, she returned to Nebraska to help her parents in Eustis for a couple of years and headed back to Colorado to work as head housekeeper at a dude ranch near Granby, CO, for five years.

Wahl moved back to Eustis in 1991, five months before her father died, and was back in Colorado the next year working as a secretary to a pastor.

When her mother's health declined, she returned to Eustis in 2001 as a caregiver and later moved to Gothenburg.

These days, the women's sports pioneer is semi-retired, working for the Agency on Aging, doing

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computer troubleshooting, substituting at a therapy clinic and other things.

When asked about the implementation of Title IX while at CU, Wahl is humble about the feat.

"I was blessed to be given the opportunity to be involved with women's athletics at CU," she said. "In a nutshell, I was just doing my my job by following the guidance I received from those I chose to trust for their wisdom, concern for the women's athletics program and for me personally."

Batting rocks with broken bats as a child, Wahl said she never dreamed she would someday have an athletic award named after her.

"And I could never figure out why, just because of different plumbing, girls didn't have the same athletic opportunities as boys," she said.

For Wahl, just feeling her body moving is thrilling.

"If there's any way I can help others experience that same feeling, I'm all in," she said.

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