

ATHLETE

EMPOWERMENT



Note the Difference: Girls and Boys Team Cultures and Experiences

by LIZZIE FREEHILL

The Menlo Athletic Department strives to give each Menlo sports team equal opportunities and resources. Certain aspects of all teams receiving equal treatment lie with the Athletic Department, but there are factors out of their hands such as team parents and Sea of Gold promotions.

“What we try to do first and foremost is to provide an opportunity for everybody that they need and want,” Upper School Athletics Director Earl Koberlein said. “I like to say we are providing what our athletes need facility-wise, coaching-wise, equipment-wise, and that is where I need to look to ask if there is a problem where someone is not getting what they need, deserve or require to participate in their sport.”

Despite the Athletic Department’s attempts to create equality for all sports teams, there is still a feeling of inequality, especially from various girls sports. For this reason, juniors Sam Sellers and Eloise Thompson began the Sports Equality Club this year.

Their primary goal at the moment is to bring attention to

inequalities that girls have experienced while playing on Menlo sports teams. They hope the club will continue to help solve sports equality issues, most prominently recognition for all teams’ achievements in the future.

Promotion of games and spectators is another variable that relates to sports equality. The amount of spectators that attend various athletic events depends on the student body’s interest in the sport and how it is promoted both by the Sea of Gold and players themselves, according to Sea of Gold Captain Carolina Espinosa. “[Student spectators are] really situational,” Espinosa said. “I would definitely just like to emphasize that there’s a lot of contributing factors to it, and it fluctuates every year.”

Practice times are one matter as boys and girls teams on both the JV and varsity levels share facilities. This brings up this issue of who gets the earlier practice times and who the later. Neither the Wunderlich nor Cartan fields have lights, so all outdoor practices must occur before the sun sets.

In the last couple of years, the Athletic Department has become better at dividing practice times between boys and girls teams such as water polo and soccer. Senior Alina Hernandez said that the girls water polo team had morning practices while the boys team did not her freshman year; however, they have begun to balance out practices since then.

Finding time to fit in practices for the girls and

boys JV and varsity soccer teams each night before it gets dark is difficult because all four teams are not able to practice on Wunderlich, the field where they all play their games, at the same time. At the beginning of Espinosa’s sophomore season, both varsity and JV girls soccer practiced on Cartan everyday while the boys JV and varsity teams would practice on Wunderlich; halfway through the season the girls and boys teams began to have equal practices on Wunderlich according to Espinosa.

Jerseys are on a three year rotation for each team, according to Koberlein. Practice shirts are a controversial matter as there have been instances where some teams did not receive them while others did. Three seasons ago, JV female soccer players were upset that they did not receive practice shirts while the boys team did.

Practice shirts for each team depend on coaches’ requests during budget meetings with Koberlein. A coach may request practice shirts or other equipment which will be covered by Menlo if it is within the budget. “A coach requests a budget, and I review it with the business office person assigned to Athletics. We make any adjustments and then we put forward the proposed budget to the [Chief Financial Officer] (CFO) for approval,” Koberlein said in an email to The Coat of Arms.

The involvement and participation of team parents has an effect on each team’s experiences. Each team gets a budget allotment for team meals from the Athletic Department as well as team fees instituted by a team parent to provide more experiences. There are guidelines for team parents on the Menlo School website, but parents can take different liberties with their roles, according to Koberlein.

Students Create Clubs to Prioritize the Student-Athlete Experience

by ERICA FENYO

Menlo students created two new clubs this year that target inequality and empowerment in sports.

Juniors Eloise Thompson and Sam Sellers started the Sports Equality Club to target gender inequality in athletics. Juniors Ari Krane and Chris Liao created the Athlete Empowerment club to educate athletes on mental health, the recruiting process and community service involvement. The clubs meet on Mondays, alternating each week.

The Sports Equality Club has four staff advisors: Assistant Athletic Director Buffie Ward Williams, Assistant Director of Sports Performance and Wellness Samantha Leeper, Head Athletic Trainer Aubrey Fennell and Assistant Athletics Trainer Steph Swan.

Sellers and Thompson first approached Ward to be their advisor, who then reached out to Leeper, Fennell and Swan because she knew they were also passionate about the issue of gender equality in sports. “My main role is just to be there to offer guidance and answer any questions I can if needed,” Ward Williams said

in an email to The Coat of Arms. “Depending on the direction our students want to take the club, I can help find speakers or recommend books/articles that might be of interest to raise awareness of inequalities that have been or are still prevalent between male and female athletes and athletes.”

Two of the club’s primary goals are bringing awareness to and increasing attendance at girls’ games through the Sea of Gold and helping to dismantle the culture of focusing on boys sports more than girls sports at Menlo. For example, the hyperfixation on football with major school events such as Homecoming and Valpo Bowl are both centered around football. On the other hand, no girls sport is the center of a big Menlo event.

The club hopes to increase game attendance through sister teams where girls’ teams are paired up with another girls’ team and attend each other’s games.

Krane and Liao also wanted to support student-athletes, so they created the Athlete Empowerment Club at the beginning of the

year with their club advisor, varsity boys lacrosse Head Coach Blakeley Kim.

The Athlete Empowerment Club occasionally brings guest speakers to talk to club members about different aspects of high school sports like recruiting and burnout. “[Krane and I] started the club because we wanted a place where student athletes can give back with community service and educate themselves on things on and off the field, like mental health and the recruiting process,” Liao said.

The club tries to engage its members through group participation and planning future events. “A lot of the topics [of discussion] are directed on a week-by-week basis by members of the club,” Krane said. “[Liao and I] want to organize a gear drive and bring back the girls versus boys lacrosse game with tennis balls, or

just fun co-ed events where we can raise money.”

Both clubs are attempting to give more attention to student-athletes and improve conditions for Menlo athletics teams.

Illustration by Nic Garcia