

BACKGROUND

GIRLSCOOUTS AND SPORTS

Why It Matters

Studies show that high school girls who play sports are less likely to be involved in an unwanted pregnancy, less likely to be involved with drugs, and more likely to graduate from high school. In fact, experts say that girls and women who play sports have a more positive body image, higher levels of self-esteem, and lower levels of depression. Recent studies show that sports participation by girls ages 6-11 has increased by 86 percent and that today about 35 percent of all high school athletes are female.

However, despite increased participation by girls, they are still less involved than boys and six times more likely to drop out of sports by the age of 14. Girl Scouts of the USA plays a critical role in combating lack of fitness among youth by encouraging all girls to establish healthy lifestyles and to remain active in sports as part of the Girl Scout program.

Program Activities

Focusing on year-round sports and fitness participation for girls ages 5-17, the **GirlSports** Initiative encompasses a variety of projects that promote health and fitness in girls of all ages, from different geographical regions, and with different interests and abilities, including:

- **GirlSports** 2000, a daily series of Girl Scout sports and fitness events for thousands of girls both here and overseas, ranges from snowshoeing to triathlons, from 2000 meter runs to rock-climbing clinics.
- **GirlSports** Basics, a sports-readiness project for girls ages 5-8, offers girls the chance to develop their skills, confidence, and love of sports at an early age. An annual Sports Leadership Institute allows high school girls to explore career opportunities, ethics, and gender inequity issues in sports. For teens, the National Sports Event provides a multi-sport clinic where Girl Scouts can meet and be coached by professional athletes.
- Sports and Fitness Days are one-day sporting and fitness events coordinated by local councils. Girls interact with each other through sports, developing critical interpersonal skills such as leadership, teamwork, and conflict resolution.

Did you know...

- That twice as many men as women participate frequently in sports?
- That even in the most sports-active age group for girls (ages 12-17), less than half are frequently active in vigorous sports?
- That some of today's top female athletes, like Rebecca Lobo, Shannon MacMillan, and Jackie Joyner-Kersey, were Girl Scouts?

History

Since its early days, Girl Scouting has provided a means for girls to gain the self-confidence, the skills, and the drive to participate in sports and fitness activities. More importantly, through the Girl Scouts' fun and caring all-girl environment, girls learn to develop lifelong health and fitness habits.

Girl Scout founder Juliette Gordon Low was considered avant-garde in 1912 when she encouraged girls to wear bloomers instead of skirts so they could enjoy playing basketball and taking long fitness walks. In a 1913 book for Girl Scout leaders, Low wrote, "To get yourself strong and healthy, it is necessary to begin with your inside, and to get the blood into good order, and the heart to work well. That is the secret of the whole thing, and physical exercise should be taken with that intention."

In 1994, Girl Scouts of the USA began consulting with local Girl Scout offices to assess the feasibility of establishing a national sports initiative. By 1996, Girl Scouts had moved ahead with a national sports/fitness plan for the nation's 3.6 million Girl Scout members, and, today, all girls are welcome to participate.

Who We Are

Girl Scouts is the world's preeminent organization dedicated solely to girls—all girls—where, in an accepting and nurturing environment, girls build character and skills for success in the real world. In partnership with committed adults, girls develop qualities that will serve them all their lives—like strong values, social conscience, and conviction about their own potential and self-worth. In Girl Scouts, girls discover the fun, friendship, and power of girls together. Through the many enriching experiences provided by Girl Scouting, they grow courageous and strong.

Girl Scouts. Where Girls Grow Strong.

Additional Resources

Girls can earn numerous Girl Scout badges and patches including: "Health and Fitness," "On the Court," "Sports Sampler," "Walking for Fitness," "Swimming," "Hiker," "Dance," and "On the Playing Field." Local Girl Scout councils around the country are offering year-round sports programming for all girls. Call your local office to find out about activities, which may include collaborations with groups such as the United States Tennis Association (USTA), Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO), the WNBA, USA Volleyball, Amateur Softball Association/USA Softball, and United States Swimming.

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