

Testimony of Catherine Anne Reddick
Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and
Transportation
On Promotion and Advancement of Women in Sports
February 1, 2006

Thank you Chairman Stevens, Senator Inouye and members of the Committee. My name is Cat Reddick, and I am thrilled to have the opportunity to speak with you today about an issue that means a great deal to me. Today's hearing is very important - not just to me, but to millions of girls and women who deserve the opportunity to play sports. I want you all to know how much I appreciate your leadership in bringing us all together.

I believe very strongly that if it weren't for an important civil rights law we call Title IX, I probably wouldn't be here today. As you know, that's the law that says schools have to provide the same kinds of opportunities to girls that they do to boys in everything they do, including sports.

I grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, and I've been interested in sports for about as long as I can remember. My father played football for Virginia Tech, so my parents always wanted sports to be a part of my life. I've always enjoyed watching the football powerhouses in the South, like Georgia and Florida. And of course, in Alabama, the one question you're always asked is about the football game we call the "Iron Bowl" - are you supporting Alabama or Auburn?

It's no stretch to say that when you're talking about sports in Alabama, you're usually talking about football. And as I said, I'm a big fan, too. However, too often growing up, the story would end there. I wanted to play sports, and I had the support of my parents, but opportunities were limited. I had to play on boys' soccer teams until my freshman year of high school. Being the only girl on my team wasn't always easy. Not all of my teammates wanted me there.

I was so happy to play organized sports with other girls in school because it created so many possibilities for me. I'm very fortunate to have gone on to much success. I've had the chance to go to an outstanding college that I wouldn't have been able to afford without an athletic scholarship. I've been on a national championship team. I've traveled to places that many young girls in Birmingham can only dream about. I've had the support of sponsors like Nike who have taken a strong stand for women's sports and Title IX. I've had the privilege to represent our country in the Olympics and play on a team with women who are already national icons. But the most important experiences to me have nothing to do with championships or medals. The best things I've gained from playing sports are the same things that any girl can gain by simply participating.

I've gained self-confidence. I've embraced a healthy lifestyle. I've gained the experience of being part of a team. I've built friendships that will last forever. And I've learned about hard work, patience, and perseverance from the role models of the generation before me - the first generation of athletes to benefit from Title IX. And just as pioneers such as Coach Erickson and many of the other people you will hear from today have done, it's now my obligation and my passion to ensure the opportunities I had are available to the generation of girls that follow me.

Soccer isn't the only thing in my life, but it's an important part. And the lessons I've learned are things I apply to everything in life. That's why this is so important - while not every girl can have a scholarship, they deserve to learn these lessons and improve their lives.

Please understand that this isn't easy. Even today, I have friends - mostly men - who think that Title IX should be limited. Where I'm from, some people still see football and basketball as the only sports that matter, and see women as somehow not worthy or able to participate in sports. However, I also want to say I'm very proud of the progress we've made. When I was growing up in Alabama, there wasn't much information available for girls' soccer, but now interest in the sport is growing faster there than virtually anywhere in the country. The opportunities created by Title IX have generated enough interest and support in girls' soccer that club teams are in full swing in Alabama today.

The interest in sports that Title IX helped create has also attracted positive involvement from companies. Women's athletics is now big business, and that contributes to a healthy economy. The women's fitness industry alone is worth \$13 billion worldwide today and is growing rapidly.

It also provides a great opportunity for companies to do the right thing. I'm very proud that Nike, one of my sponsors, is one such company.

Throughout its 33-year history, Nike has worked to inspire the spirit of girls and women by championing change and contributing to a level playing field for female sports. Nike has strived to be at the forefront of cultivating the positive relationship between women and sports and the empowerment the powerful combination catalyzes.

Among Nike's earliest female-focused ads, which ran in 1984, was a series of print ads intended to persuade the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to lift its rule prohibiting women from running in races longer than 1,500 meters. The campaign was successful, and Joan Benoit Samuelson became the first woman to win the Olympic marathon in the 1984 Olympics held in Los Angeles.

In 1995, Nike launched its famous television commercial, "If You Let Me Play." The provocative ad featured young girls citing the importance of being allowed

to participate in sports with statistics such as “If you let me play, I will be 60 percent less likely to get breast cancer; I will suffer less depression, if you let me play sports. I will be more likely to leave a man who beats me.” The ad was seen by 73 million viewers.

So that’s what brings me here this morning. I want you to know that without Title IX, I don’t think this would have been possible. I always had the desire to play sports, but I couldn’t learn these important lessons until I had the opportunity. I urge you to fight to keep this important civil rights law strong and make sure it’s enforced. This is not the time to weaken the rule of fair play. Title IX has done so much for so many young girls. Somewhere in Alabama right now, there’s a young girl who has the ability to improve her own life and inspire yet another generation through sports. Please make sure she has the opportunity.

Thank you very much.