

Some lockerroom doors are still closed

Stephanie Salter, a sportswriter for the San Francisco Examiner, will never forget the reactions she received her first few times inside a lockerroom.

One prankster flicked off the light switch, and Stephanie froze while the players whooped and cheered in the pitch dark. Another time, she couldn't avoid watching an obnoxious, undressed athlete do a snake dance.

I talked with Stephanie and many more writers about three years ago when I was doing an article on female sports reporters for a journalism class at Indiana University.

They all chuckled at those embarrassing recollections, but what was surprising is that each one said entering lockerrooms is past the awkward stage — and this was back in 1980.

Keep in mind, these sources work in major cities where social changes tend to take place faster.

Over here in the Midwest in a small city called Bloomington, Ind., the idea of a female sports reporter entering a men's lockerroom is preposterous.

If you'll recall, I found that out when I went to cover an Indiana University football game last month and wasn't permitted into the post-game press conference be-

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cause it was conducted in the lockerroom.

That surprised me, because I wasn't asking to do player interviews in the lockerroom. I wanted to be able to walk through the lockerroom to the coach's press conference which wouldn't require any one-on-one confrontations between me and a player.

IU's reaction to the problem was quick. At the next home game, the press conference was moved outside where everyone, not just me, is at a disadvantage. There are distractions out there, like the band's loud playing and the questions from the crowd of fans which always gathers.

Still, after the coach's conference is over and the others bombard the players in the lockerroom, I wait outside. This means an extra wait and it means the players have al-

ready been interrogated and may not feel like repeating everything for me.

I'll take IU's setup for now, because I honestly believe next year there will be a separate interview room where all reporters have equal access to the players and coaches.

The issue

My reaction to the whole mess of my being barred from the press conference was one of acute embarrassment. Reporters would much rather write the news, not be the news.

At any rate, I got interested in the issue of equal access and did some research. I found out my problem was nothing.

Women covering pro baseball in the late 1970's had ungodly problems. They were ridiculed by the players; but worse, they were made to feel like perverts by the teams' public relation personnel and they weren't accepted as legitimate reporters by many of their male colleagues.

The best account I've read concerning these times was a piece called "Sharing the Beat" by Roger Angell, a lover of baseball and a writer for the New Yorker.

Angell recalls meeting a reporter named B.J. Phillips of Time Maga-

zine in the hallway adjoining the Yankee and Dodger lockerrooms at the 1976 World Series. B.J. was crying because she had just been humiliated by two officials, who told her she had been mailed the wrong press credentials.

The federal district court had just ruled it was unconstitutional to bar women reporters from the Yankee clubhouse. This was Dodger Stadium, B.J. knew it and she had no intention of entering the lockerrooms. Thus, she refused to relinquish her press credentials.

While she was relating this to Angell, the television cameraman joined the huddle. That even further perturbed B.J.

Solution

Angell offers the alternatives. 1. Give the players 15 minutes to dress, then let everyone inside for player interviews. 2. Establish a separate press conference area where coaches and players will meet with all reporters. 3. Let the women and men reporters stampede the lockerrooms at will.

In many major cities, the third solution has been instituted and the majority has adjusted, except for a few athletes.

Those who reject Solution No.3 say women in the lockerroom impair the players' rights to privacy.

Tracy Dodds, an IU grad now working at the Los Angeles Times, had an interesting answer to that. "You don't go in there and gawk. You get real good at keeping your eyes on your notebook. I think people picture a humble, naked athlete standing there being embarrassed by a woman reporter. That just doesn't happen. Players care little about their privacy."

Angell says: "It is my own belief that the players' privacy has already been fatally compromised by the presence of scrambling, questioning, rumor-hunting male reporters."

And to those bird-brained males who say: "OK, when do I get to do a lockerroom interview with Chris Evert?!" — the answer is that separate interview areas have always been provided for women's athletic contests.

Admission

I confess I have been in one lockerroom — the Cubs'. Angell is correct. The players are unmercifully hounded by mobs. In the frenzied mass, no one noticed me and I wasn't the only female there. It didn't bother me to be there because no one else cared.

I think the story changes at universities. I don't think college ath-

letes are mature enough to handle that kind of situation. Certainly, no one has been socialized to feel comfortable in that sort of setting, and I don't think it should be thrust upon college athletes.

Let the women in the professional athletes' lockerrooms where people should keep everyone out. Separate press areas work fine in college football coverage where coaches' and key players' quotes are enough.

I would expect IU would adopt Solution No.2 next year. It's just that they were caught off-guard this year and had to come up with a hasty solution.

There will come a time when it is unconstitutional to bar women from any lockerroom anywhere, but for now, I believe it's smart to just think about my story. Tracy Dodds' advice was "If you can get your story by waiting outside and avoiding a hassle, do it because your story comes first. If you cause a scene, you aren't going to get your story."

All in all, I am thankful times have changed. I am glad I am not considered a pervert for being a sportswriter and I am encouraged by IU's reaction. I am also thankful to the women who set the stage to bring these changes about.

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