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## COMMENTARY

# Charity Vogel: Girl's dreams frozen out by an ugly word

By Charity Vogel  
News Columnist

It's always tough for a young woman, the first time she hears that terrible word. Not a slang term or a vulgarity. Life sends those your way, sometimes, and if your mother raised you right, you know how to deal with them.

We're talking about a much simpler, far more devastating word.

No.

Young women still hear it, when seeking opportunities taken for granted by their male peers. They still hear it on the job. They still hear it in their churches and schools.

And they still hear it, sadly, in the sports arenas of Western New York.

Look for proof at the current situation in Williamsville, where girls seeking to play ice hockey in high school—just like the boys—are being told they can't.

And listen to Megan Gramza, a 14-year-old student athlete who's just heard the first gender-based denial of her ambitious young existence.

"It was very shocking to me," said Megan, an honors student who will attend Williamsville North next year.

Here's what happened. A few years ago, some girls in the Williamsville Central School District, and their hockey-happy families, started thinking that girls in the district should have a varsity team to play on. After all, boys in the district have played ice hockey for almost 20 years. The district fields a number of boys teams, and the guys have a great time playing all over Western New York, building friendships and honing skills that will carry them into college and beyond.

Girls—Megan among them—saw that, and decided they wanted the same chance. Surveys by hockey proponents found that 70 girls in the district would be interested in joining a team.

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“We’ve tallied them up,” said Helen Drew-Meosky, a Williamsville mom of seven who teaches sports law at UB. “We have more girls registered with USA Hockey in Western New York than anywhere else in upstate New York.”

The girls did all the right things. They asked nicely. They attended board meetings and circulated petitions, set up Web sites and held “unity skates” at the Amherst Pepsi Center to rally support. (The last one sold out, attracting more than 200 women skaters.)

Last year, it didn’t work. School officials said there would be no team in 2008-09. But girls like Megan held on to the hope that a team could be formed by next fall.

Just last month, the district scotched that idea as well, saying the problem isn’t money but a lack of competition. (The girls say they don’t care; they’ll play against each other till other high schools form teams.)

Still, a team “will not be in place for next year,” said Rita Wolff, a district spokeswoman.

The district has said a committee will study the issue.

But all that means nothing to a 14- year-old who likes baby-sitting and playing the flute, who dreams of becoming a doctor, and who—oh yeah—wants to play hockey just as her two older brothers did.

“No” is a big word. It can come as a sober awakening. That’s what it did for Megan, who’s played hockey since she was four and, despite her 5-foot-2, 100- pound frame, has always dreamed of playing in college.

“I do see it as an issue of inequality,” she said. “The 19th Amendment was passed in the beginning of the 1900s, and it’s taken us this long to get sports teams equal? That’s crazy.”

Megan may be 14, but she’s learned a lot this year about where she stands in the course of history.

It’s a place where girls still have to fight for some things their brothers take for granted. It’s a place where no still hurts.

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