

SPORTS | INBOX

Letters to the Editor

AUG. 1, 2015

Missing the Point in a Biological Controversy

To the Sports Editor:

Re “A Win for Athletes Whose Sex Was Questioned,” July 29: Dredging up the notion of questionable sex, not just in the headline but in the article itself, is a disturbing case of the newspaper inventing news instead of reporting it. John Branch’s article raised questions about Dutee Chand’s sex, even while it elsewhere indicated that her status as a woman was never in question. This amplifies the harm that has already been done to Ms. Chand.

Hand-wringing about sex determination misses the point of the case. The Court of Arbitration for Sport said that this regulation never served to draw the line between men and women. Instead, the policy divided the category of female athletes into those eligible to compete and those ineligible by virtue of their natural biology.

This is the crux of what CAS found impermissible: A rule that prevents some women from competing at all as a result of the natural and unmodified state of their body is antithetical to the fundamental principle of Olympism that “every individual must have the possibility of practicing sport, without discrimination of any kind.” So, too, is a rule that permits an athlete to compete on condition that they undergo a performance-inhibiting medical intervention that negates or reduces the effect of a particular naturally occurring genetic feature (Article 513).

REBECCA JORDAN-YOUNG and KATRINA KARKAZIS, San Francisco

Rebecca Jordan-Young is an associate professor of women’s, gender and sexuality studies at Barnard College. Katrina Karkazis is a senior research scholar at the Center for Biomedical Ethics at Stanford University and served as an expert witness in Chand’s appeal.

To the Sports Editor:

In the article, Paula Radcliffe said that elevated testosterone levels “make the competition unequal in a way greater than simple natural talent and dedication,” and that other top athletes shared her view. Is she not aware that her own “simple natural talent” is anything but simple, including an uncountable number of DNA and hormonal factors, some of which have given her advantages over her competition?

The notion that any human being could be denied entry into competition because of the way his or her body naturally functions is beyond a slippery slope, defended, apparently, by those highly successful

individuals who deem themselves somehow more natural.

HOYT TAYLOR, Pittsboro, N.C.

To the Sports Editor:

As described by John Branch, conventional wisdom regarding gender doesn't account for the myriad biological quirks that make a spectrum out of what is typically thought to be a black-and-white issue. While there is no easy solution for athletes in gender limbo, there needs to be a position between the untenable self-identification and the inhumane naked parades of the 1960s-era International Olympic Committee.

Perhaps as we continue to better understand our genomes and the genetics underlying athleticism, we will begin to better appreciate how unfairly genetically gifted many of our prize athletes truly are. That appreciation will hopefully enable us to draw more understanding and flexible lines to allow for athletes like Ms. Chand and Caster Semenya to fairly compete.

DOV GREENBAUM, New Haven

The writer is an assistant professor at the Yale University School of Medicine.

Some Credit to Football Hall

To the Sports Editor:

Re "Junior Seau's Family Silenced by a Policy Not Found at the Other Halls of Fame," July 29: Richard Sandomir contrasts the Pro Football Hall of Fame's policy with that of the others. However, what he fails to note is that the Hall is at least willing to admit someone who committed suicide under circumstances that cast a poor light on the sport.

The Baseball Hall of Fame has never admitted Harry Pulliam, the president of the National League at the beginning of the 20th century. This is most likely because he committed suicide after the league was hit by a bribe scandal and his attempts to investigate it were largely thwarted by the team owners.

When the Hall of Fame admitted the American League president of the time, Ban Johnson, it chose to overlook Pulliam, who with Johnson helped create the modern relationship between the two leagues. Instead, the same year it chose Johnson, it also selected Morgan Bulkeley, an insurance company executive and politician who happened to be in the president's seat when the N.L. was formally created.

STEVEN A. KING, New York

Say No Thanks

To the Sports Editor:

The International Olympic Committee president, Thomas Bach, wants the United States to bid for the 2024 Olympics to cloud the view that the Games have become too unwieldy and expensive. The rest of the United States should follow Boston's lead and let other nations have the honor of assuming the excessive cost of raising the Olympic rings.

MICHAEL SHETZER, Miami Beach

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