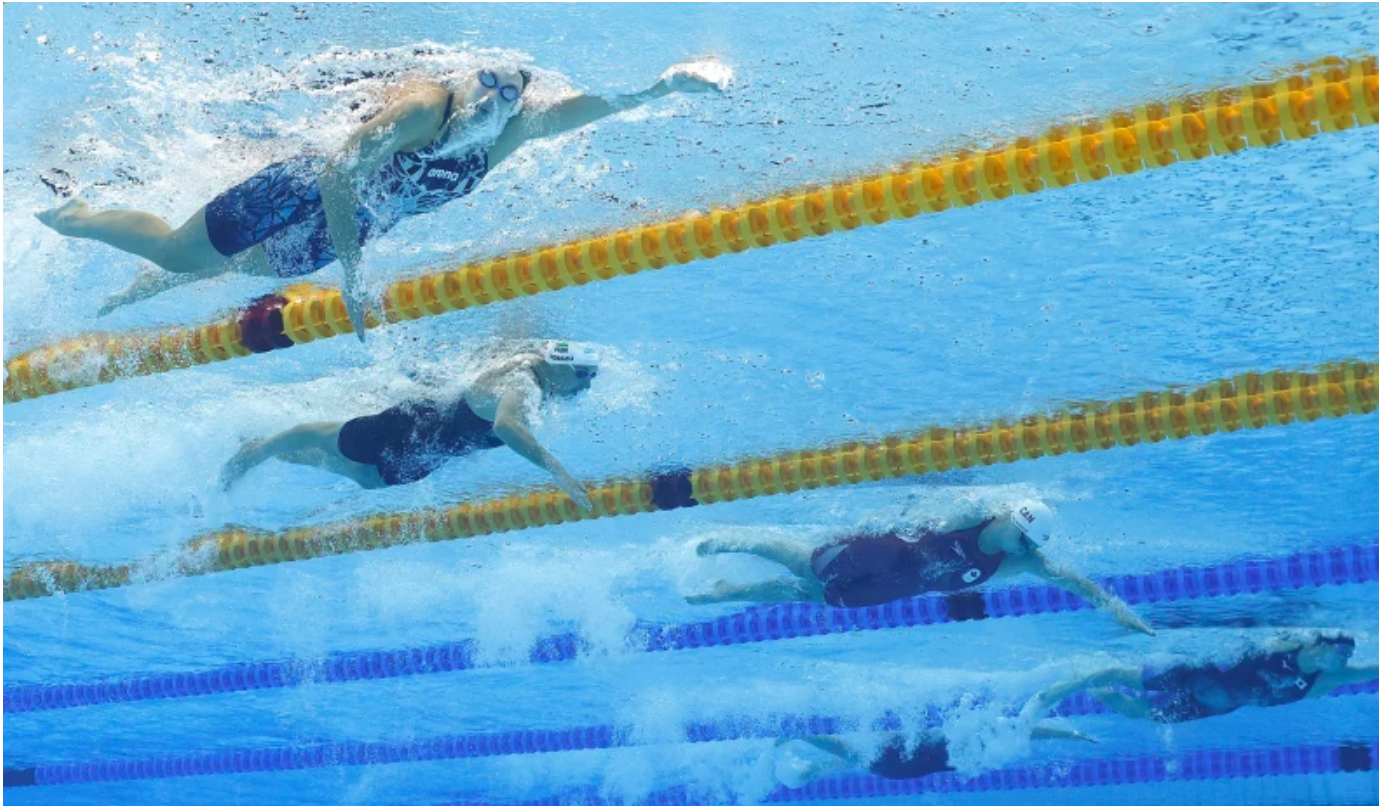


# Transgender Inclusiveness Is an Affront to the Fairness of Sports

By JENNA STOCKER | December 19, 2021 6:30 AM



Swimmers compete in the women's 200-meter individual medley semifinal during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics in Tokyo, Japan, July 27, 2021. (Antonio Bronic/Reuters)

The recent example of a biological male competing against female swimmers for UPenn reveals a truth even more obvious to those of us who participated in the sport.

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**M**ODERN sports are not exempt from controversy — just consider the evolution of equipment and rules, race relations, and politics. But nothing has threatened the future of sports more than transgender integration. Allowing biological men to compete as women *against women* destroys the fundamental concept of what makes athletic competition, specifically women's sports, fair. By allowing an **unfair advantage** to one class of participants is abhorrent and inexcusable,

delegitimizing the integrity of the competition. It is no easy task to reach the collegiate level in any sport, man or woman. I know because I was an NCAA Division I swimmer at the University of Minnesota.

I consider swimming a gift. It offered a place where I learned many of life's lessons: being a graceful winner — and a more graceful loser — the value of hard work, perseverance, working through adversity, and team cohesion. All of these qualities helped build my character and eventually led me to a commission as an officer in the United States Marine Corps. But if I knew the sport I loved was rigged against me in the form of obsequiousness to wokeism masquerading as fairness, I might never have participated.

The University of Pennsylvania women's swimming team has a front-row seat to what is nothing less than the consequences of **denying biology** for the fantasy of transgender equality in sports. Will Thomas lived and competed his whole life as a male, only identifying as a female and joining Penn's women's team as Lia this year. The NCAA is complicit in this anti-competition campaign and even issued a **statement** on transgender participation: "The NCAA Board of Governors firmly and unequivocally supports the opportunity for transgender student-athletes to compete in college sports. This commitment is grounded in our values of inclusion and fair competition." But there is nothing *fair* about it.

The NCAA, following the guidelines of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), requires biological males to demonstrate that their testosterone level has been below ten nanomoles per liter for at least one year before their first female competition. But a **study** published in December of 2020 by the British Journal of Sports Medicine found that after suppressing their testosterone for two years — a year longer than NCAA and IOC guidelines — transgender women still ran 12 percent faster on average than biological females. Twelve percent may seem like a small amount, but in the world of elite athletes, in which the difference between first and second place often comes down to tenths or even hundredths of a second, a 12 percent advantage can seem unsurmountable, and it is certainly *not* fair.

The NCAA guidelines regulate competition in the pool and on the field. But what about before athletes even get a chance to participate? I grew up in a working-class family, and college was not guaranteed. My parents sacrificed to drive me back and forth to practices, many years of which involved two practices per day, as well as early morning carpools. They knew that my hard work and determination could lead me to a college swimming career, and this became even clearer when I secured a scholarship to attend the University of Minnesota. But what about the young women whose hopes for a college degree could depend on an athletic scholarship? What happens when this limited pool of money and resources for women is taken by a man? Where is the fairness and equality of opportunity in that scenario? The express purpose of **Title IX**, passed 49 years ago, was for universities, colleges, and schools that receive federal money to “provide equal athletic opportunity for members of both sexes.” Taking away opportunities for women’s advancement through athletic and academic performance is a step backward, and the NCAA’s seeming refusal to acknowledge this shows it cares nothing about opportunity or fairness.

This is turning into a vague echo of the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal, Canada, in which members of the East German Olympic team participated in illegal doping, stealing ten out of eleven gold medals in individual events. The American women’s ’76 Olympic swimming team was a powerhouse, yet in race after race, they fell to the East Germans, whose obvious masculine physical traits were difficult to ignore. Shirley Babashoff was arguably the Michael Phelps of her time, and in the 1976 Olympic trials, she won every freestyle event as well as the 400 individual medley, and she set one world record and six national records. But she never won Olympic gold in an individual event. The East German swimmers dominated the games. Babashoff was the only swimmer who dared to question the legitimacy of the events. For doing so, she was harshly criticized by the media, who branded her, “Surly Shirley,” and her teammates as “Ugly Americans.” In an **interview with *Swimming World*** about those Olympics, Babashoff’s coach Mark Shubert said, “She was the only one that had the guts to speak out back then.

If anybody had the right to speak out, it was her because she was the one that was cheated out of Olympic gold medals.”

Who is speaking out now on behalf of the female athletes being robbed of their records, their place on the podium, and their chance at winning — or even simply participating?

I am not alone in my experience of enduring long, often excruciating workouts, many hours accumulated looking at the bottom of a pool, accompanied by nothing more than my own thoughts and a will to continue. Being a distance swimmer is a fraction of the glamour of any other sport, but it's twice as grueling. However, if you ask why I spent most of my childhood and young adulthood smelling of chlorine with ice packs on my shoulders, my answer is this: because I knew that if I always trained my hardest, used every ounce of will, never gave in to the temptation of the easy path and then lost the race, there was no shame. I lost because my opposition was better. That is fair; that is competition. But if I lost because the other person had an obvious, unfair advantage, what is the lesson? That I was a fool for playing along.

And too many are just playing along. The feckless policy-makers at the NCAA, the IOC, and United States Swimming care less about the integrity of the sport than about transgender inclusiveness and the appearance of tolerance. The collateral damage is being done to the thousands of girls and young women who see sports as an equalizer: No matter one's color, religion, politics, or socioeconomic status, in the pool or on the playing field, everyone has the same opportunity. Winning or losing comes down to hard work, determination, commitment, and natural ability. Or at least it used to.

