

Former High School Athlete Works to Protect Women and Girls in North Carolina

By AnnaScott Cross

Payton McNabb had the world at her fingertips until everything changed in the fall of her senior year of high school.

Growing up in an athletic family, Payton started playing sports as soon as she was old enough to walk. By high school, she was an accomplished athlete, playing volleyball, basketball, and, her personal favorite, softball. She and her family had made sacrifices for years to allow her to pursue her love for these sports and the many hours of practice and games they require. But all of this changed on September 1st, 2022.

The Game That Changed Everything

A senior in high school, Payton was just starting her final season of high school volleyball. On September Ist, her team walked onto the court to play a team that included a biological male athlete who identified as a female. This was a conference game, so Payton's team was required to play despite the fact that some of her teammates were visibly afraid of the risks involved with playing against a biological male.

During the game, the male athlete spiked the ball at an estimated speed of 70 miles per hour and struck Payton in the head. According to the Olympics, the speed of this spike was comparable to the women's world record for spikes in women's volleyball.¹ The force of the hit caused Payton to temporarily lose consciousness and resulted in a severe neck injury and concussion. As a result of this injury, Payton has suffered from severe headaches, vision loss, partial paralysis, long-term whiplash damage, and challenges with everyday activities like her education. She missed the remaining portion of the volleyball season, and could only participate in her final basketball and softball seasons in limited ways. Her hopes of pursuing sports in college were dashed, and even now – over a year later – she is still dealing with the lasting impacts of her injuries. Her doctors aren't sure if she'll ever make a full recovery.

Now a freshman at Western Carolina University, Payton is not playing sports for the first time in her life. And, because of the extent of her injuries and the complexity of her recovery, she's not sure if she'll ever be able to play again in the future. In addition, due to the lasting effects of the concussion, she has to get special help with her coursework. On top of the physical challenges that she's still dealing with, this has taken a toll on her mental health due to the loss of what had been such a significant part of her life.

The National Issue

The discussion surrounding whether or not to allow biological male athletes to play on female sports teams based on their perceived gender identity rather than their biological sex became public in the 1970s with a tennis player named Renee Richards, born Richard Raskind. A successful tennis player on

I <u>https://olympics.com/en/news/</u> volleyball-most-asked-guestions-womens-volleyball

the male circuit and an ophthalmologist, Richards underwent so-called "gender reassignment" surgery at the age of 4l and started competing in women's competitions.² This prompted some serious conversations in the athletic world about who qualifies as a "woman." Obviously, this debate is still going on today.

Fast forward to the present day, and these conversations are again making national headlines. In recent years:

- Celebrity surfer Bethany Hamilton made headlines for refusing to compete in World Surf League events after it was announced that biological males could compete in female competitions.³
- Caitlyn Jenner, the Olympic and professional athlete formerly known as Bruce Jenner, sparked controversy by saying that allowing biological males to compete against females "just isn't fair," and insisting on the importance of protecting girls' sports.⁴
- Riley Gaines, an NCAA champion swimmer, started a national movement to protect female athletes after she was forced to compete against and share a locker room with biological male swimmer Lia Thomas, who easily outpaced many successful female athletes who had been training their whole lives.⁵
- More than a dozen female college athletes, including swimmers Riley Gaines and NC State All-American Kylee Alons, recently initiated a lawsuit against the NCAA, accusing the athletic association of violating their rights under Title IX when the NCAA allowed biological males to participate in women's collegiate sports.⁶
- 2 https://www.si.com/tennis/2019/06/28/
- renee-richards-gender-identity-politics-transgender-where-are-they-now

 https://www.nationalreview.com/news/celebrity-surfer-who-lost-arm-in-shark-attack-
- vows-to-boycott-world-surf-league-events-over-trans-inclusion-policy/ **4** https://www.nationalreview.com/2021/05/
- caitlyn-jenner-is-right-about-transgender-athletes/ 5 https://rileygainescenter.org/about/
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- riley-gaines-college-athletes-lawsuit-ncaa-transgender-policies/





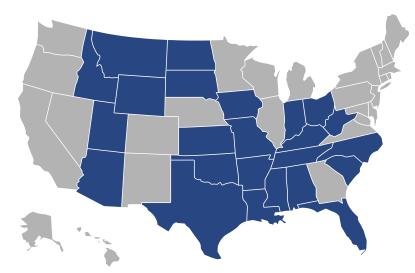
These are just a few examples of the many situations that have come up since the LGBTQ movement started seeking "equality" for biological male athletes who identify as female. Women like Payton, Bethany, Kylee, and Riley are all seeing firsthand how women are being denied awards, scholarships, spots on teams, privacy in locker rooms and showers, and safety - all to cater to a small percentage of athletes who are suffering from gender dysphoria.

Standing Up for Women Legislatively

In recent decades, we have seen a monumental shift in legislation to protect women's rights, from acknowledging women's right to vote to establishing Title IX protections in schools from discrimination based on sex.⁷ One of these changes was the expansion of women's sports, which was intended to give women equal opportunities in athletics, acknowledging the biological differences that exist between men and women. Now, after watching biological men slowly take some women's places in sports, lawmakers are starting to enact additional legislation designed to protect women's rights and safety in athletics. This January, Ohio became the 24th state to enact legislation to prevent biological males from playing on female sports teams.⁸

7 https://nationalwomenshistoryalliance.org/history-of-the-womens-rights-movement/

8 https://familypolicyalliance.com/issues/2024/01/31/ update-massive-win-for-children-and-female-athletes-in-ohio/



24 States Have Laws That Save Girls Sports

On August l6th, 2023, the North Carolina General Assembly passed HB 574—Fairness in Women's Sports Act⁹, which requires middle school, high school, and collegiate sports teams to be designated as male, female, or co-ed on the basis of biological sex, and prohibits biological males from participating on female sports teams. It took four months from the time the bill was filed in April to the time it became law, and the journey was not an easy one, requiring an override of Governor Roy Cooper's veto of the bill.

9 https://ncleg.gov/BillLookUp/2023/H574

Fighting to Protect Female Athletes in North Carolina

With primary sponsors Reps. Jennifer Balkcom (R-Henderson), Karl Gillespie (R-Cherokee), Erin Paré (R-Wake), and Kristin Baker (R-Cabarrus), the Fairness in Women's Sports Act slowly made its way through the North Carolina House and Senate.¹⁰ During the many hours of committee meetings, Payton was able to share her story to encourage legislators to pass this legislation. She was joined by NCAA champion swimmer Riley Gaines, and together, they made a powerful argument in favor of protecting women's privacy, safety, and athletic opportunities.

Payton shares that, "[The Fairness in Women's Sports Act is] a really big win for North Carolina altogether, and every woman and girl in North Carolina." And to the critics of this legislation, she says, "It's not anti-anyone; it's just pro-women."

Becoming a public figure advocating for the protection of women was not in Payton's plans. She shares that it was her faith in her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, that prompted her to pursue this path, since it was not something in her comfort zone. In addition to this, she adds that even though she knew her time of playing sports was over, she wanted to share her story to help protect her younger sister, cousins, and teammates, because every woman in North Carolina deserves an equal opportunity to play sports.

As a result of her work speaking out on this issue, Payton has befriended Riley – who she says is just as amazing in private as she is in public. Payton has partnered with the Independent Women's Forum, where she is an Ambassador, Spokesperson, and Communications Intern.

Now, Payton is a rising sophomore at Western Carolina University and says that she wants to pursue whatever plan the Lord has for her, adding, "I'm just here to help as many people as I can." She continues to encourage lawmakers across the country to protect female athletes and hopes to see more strong men get involved in advocating for the issue as well.

10 <u>https://www.ncfamily.org/</u> state-house-committees-approve-fairness-in-womens-sports-act



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