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Gender Gymnastics -Transsexuals at the 2004 Olympics

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On May 17, the International Olympic Committee Executive Board announced that sex-changed athletes will be able to compete in the 2004 Olympics. This will be another historic "first" for the Olympics, and the official statement from the IOC set down the terms for transsexual competition at the Athens Olympic Games.

Couched in the official language of the Olympic movement, the statement reads like an insignificant change in bureaucratic policy: "The Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee [IOC] today approved the consensus proposed by the IOC Medical Commission stating the conditions to be respected for a person who has changed sex to compete in sports competitions. These conditions will be applied as of the Games of the XXVIII Olympiad in 2004 in Athens."

Put simply, the decision allows both male-to-female and female-to-male transsexuals to compete after they have gone through a minimum two-year period of postoperative hormone therapy.

The IOC Medical Commission decided in 2003 to issue recommendations on the participation of transsexuals in the Olympic Games. For the first time, these new guidelines establish an official set of criteria for deciding which individuals may participate in the games, based on the extensiveness of the sex change process. At the Sydney Olympics in 2000, the IOC refrained from performing gender tests at all, admitting that the group had no accepted criteria for making such a determination.

The IOC's new policies differentiate between sex reassignment that takes place before and after puberty. With respect to individuals whose sex is "reassigned" before puberty, the "new" sex is to be taken as given. Those undergoing sex reassignment surgery after puberty will be eligible for participation in female or male competitions depending on the following conditions. First, "surgical anatomical changes [must] have been completed, including external genitalia changes and gonadectomy." Second, "legal recognition of their assigned sex [must have] been conferred by the appropriate official authorities." Third, "hormonal therapy appropriate for the assigned sex [must have] been administered in a verifiable manner and for a sufficient length of time to minimize gender-related advantages in sports competitions."

In an advisory opinion, the Medical Commission suggested that "eligibility should begin no sooner than two years after gonadectomy." In a further expansion, the IOC claimed a right to make an individual and confidential "case-by-case evaluation" with respect to all participants. Beyond this, "In the event that the gender of a competing athlete is questioned, the medical delegate (or equivalent) of the relevant sporting body shall have the authority to take all appropriate measures for the determination of the gender of a competitor."

Can you believe this? The International Olympic Committee has now decided that transsexuals can compete in the

Olympics, once certain "criteria" have been taken into full consideration. Can you imagine the official challenges that will surely be presented to officials at the Athens Olympics? Now that this policy is adopted, every nation has the right to question the gender of any competitor—and perhaps for good reason! A losing athlete's country can now demand a sex verification test as an official challenge.

Just last year, IOC president Jacques Rogge and medical director Patrick Schamasch began working on the guidelines, claiming to be motivated by a desire to end discrimination and respect human rights. Rogge, himself a medical doctor, told the South China Morning Post that Olympic officials "had major difficulties explaining the technical issues involved to the board members with non-medical backgrounds." One can only imagine. "Even for me this is very complicated," he said.

Gender has been an explosive issue at the Olympics for decades. In several scandalous cases, men have attempted to compete as women, making use of their additional strength in order to win Olympic glory. Stella Walsh competed under her Polish name Stanislawa Walasiewiczówna and won the 100 meters gold medal in the 1932 Olympics and the silver medal in the 1936 Olympiad. She was eventually to set eleven world records as a woman. Walsh was shot dead in a robbery in 1980, and the resulting autopsy indicated that she actually had male genitalia and no female organs.

At the 1936 Berlin Games, Hermann Ration of Germany competed in the women's high jump, and later admitted that he had only pretended to be a woman. In 1964, Tamara and Irina Press competed as sisters in various Olympic events, winning five gold medals for the Soviet Union. Once gender verification tests were announced for the next Olympiad, the pair simply disappeared, leading to speculation that they were actually men.

Ewa Kalobukowska of Poland became the first Olympic athlete to fail a gender test when officials at the 1968 Olympics indicated that she "had one male chromosome too many." East German Heidi Krieger had been infused with so many anabolic steroids that officials were unable to determine her gender. She did become the 1986 European shot putt champion, but in 1997 had a sex-change operation and is now identified as "Andreas Krieger," married to his wife, Ute.

The sport of cycling allowed Michael Dumaresq to compete in the 2002 women's world mountain bike championships as "Michelle Dumaresq." According to press reports, more than 300 female competitors signed a petition protesting the ruling. Earlier this year, transsexual Mianne Bagger competed as the first "male-born female" to play in a national golf championship, participating in the women's Australian Open.

Until now, the most famous transsexual in sports had been Renee Richards, formerly known as Richard Raskind before a sex-change operation. In 1977, Richards won a court judgment and was allowed to compete in the U.S. Women's Open tennis championship. She later became Martina Navratilova's coach.

Richards, now working as a New York ophthalmologist, has registered her opposition to the new IOC ruling. "Basically, I think they're making a wrong judgment here, although I would have loved to have had that judgment made in my case in 1976," she said. "They're probably looking for trouble down the line. There may be a true transsexual—not someone who's nuts and wants to make money—who will be a very good champion player, and it will be a young person, let's say a Jimmy Connors or a Tiger Woods, and then they'll have an unequal playing field."

Richards also acknowledged that male-female disparity in strength will inevitably play a part in competition. "In some sports, the physical superiority of men over women is very significant," she said. Well, Dr. Richards ought to know, after all.

These new regulations—ridiculous as they appear—reflect the Olympic movement's further descent into the anarchy of political correctness. "We will have no discrimination," IOC medical director Patrick Schamasch said last year. "The IOC will respect human rights." The more urgent question is whether the IOC will respect the reality of gender and the demands of common sense.

The IOC has faced numerous scandals in recent years, and the authorities have been notably ineffective in blocking the use of performance-enhancing drugs and anabolic steroids. Allowing transsexuals to compete in the Olympics is further evidence of the IOC's near-perfect embrace of postmodern sensibilities.

The participation of individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or "inter-sex" genetic profiles is legitimate. That part of

the new guidelines is perfectly reasonable and necessary, even though such individuals are exceedingly rare in the population.

The scandal in this development has to do with adult transsexuals who now demand to compete in the Olympic Games as whatever gender they have chosen. Evidently, the new competition to watch at the 2004 Olympics will be “gender gymnastics.” What will they think of next?

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