

Studies: Women Who Play Sports Fare Better

High School, College Athletes Have Higher Graduation Rates, End Up in Better Jobs; But Women Still Lag Behind Men

By Michelle Miller



University of Connecticut basketball player Tina Charles (CBS)

(CBS) The top-ranked UConn Lady Huskies crushed Syracuse today in the Big East tournament to tie their own record for most consecutive wins in women's college basketball. The Lady Huskies are a strong team, but it turns out playing any team sports helps girls do better in life as **CBS News correspondent Michelle Miller** reports.

In the world of college basketball, there is nothing else like them. No other team, male or female, can boast a 70 game winning streak, each win by double digits.

"He always says the star of our team is our team," said player Tina Charles.

"He" is Geno Auriemma, the no-nonsense, hard-driving coach of the University of Connecticut Lady Huskies for the last 25 seasons.

"Come on, I'm not nice?" Auriemma joked.

"Nice" doesn't win 33 Big East titles and six national championships, he said - teamwork does.

"I don't think people appreciate how hard it is to be on a team, where you're so dependent on

other people for your own success," Auriemma said.

Off the court, the Lady Huskies are just as impressive: a team with a perfect 100 percent graduation rate in the 2008-2009 season. Compare that with only 33 percent of the men's program at UConn. And consider star forward Maya Moore, voted ESPN academic all-American of the year, with a 3.75 grade point average.

Such feats may not have been possible for the Lady Huskies if not for the passage of Title IX nearly four decades ago. The federal mandate forced schools and colleges to even the playing field for girls by providing them with the same sports opportunities as boys.

And it's paid big dividends. When the bill passed in 1972, only one out of 25 girls played high school sports. Today it's one in three.

"People who participate in high school sports get more education and earn higher wages later in life," said Betsey Stevenson, an assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business.

A study released last month shows girls who play team sports in high school are 20 percent more likely to graduate high school and 20 percent more likely to go onto college. A similar study indicates that female athletes are half as likely to become pregnant in high school. And a University of Illinois study found that female high school athletes are 7 percent less likely to become obese in middle age.

But there is still some catching up to do. While only a third of girls play sports in high school, half of all boys do. The Lady Huskies record-setting win was only carried by a few cable systems. And unlike women athletes in individual sports who become household names, these star players don't get the star treatment or the money and endorsements that go with it.

"Tina Charles is going to be the number one first round draft pick. And she's going to get what? Like a pair of Nikes? You know a little bit of money?" Auriemma said.

The top salary for a WNBA player is only \$95,000.

"We don't let it get us down. We just keep representing out on the court and in the classroom," Moore said.

For coach Aureimma, that's a winning attitude. Now the only lesson left for him to teach his athletes, is how to lose.