

Sex sells, and that's a good thing—even in sports



ANDREW
RENSFREE

Sports
Commentary

Attractive women in sports are the best thing since attractive women in the kitchen.

Okay, so that was totally offensive, but the point is that attractive female athletes—the ones who get more attention for their beauty than their skills, or even their skillz—actually benefit their respective sports more than most people give them credit for.

To highlight this, let's compare two sports: professional women's tennis and professional women's basketball. If I had \$20, and gave a dollar to every person who could tell me who won the WNBA title this year, I'd probably still have enough cash to see a movie. Women's tennis, on the other hand, has been gaining stature in the sports world partly because its beauties receive so much media attention and fan interest. Maria Kirilenko, Maria Sharapova, Daniela Hantuchova and Anna Kournikova, to name a few, are a big reason why women's tennis is more popular than both its men's counterpart and the WNBA combined.

The main benefit of attractive athletes in a sport is that they actually draw people to watch the sport. Many years ago, I thought that tennis sucked—plain and simple. If I wanted to hear two people grunting and whacking balls around, I would have rented a porno. Then, players like Anna Kournikova became popular and I started watching tennis—and it doesn't take a genius to figure out why: she's hot! I would never have given that sport any of my time, but since I was drawn in, I've realized that tennis isn't all that bad.

This phenomenon isn't restricted to the tennis court, either. Another prime example of an attractive athlete helping her sport is Natalie Gulbis, a female golfer. Recently, Gulbis came to Edmonton with three other accomplished male golfers to put on a clinic. The bulk of the press coverage, however, wasn't devoted to the event but rather to Gulbis and her appealing attributes.

It wasn't as if she was golfing alongside a group of amateurs either. Tom Watson, who has amassed five British Open victories, two Masters victories and one US open title in his storied career got only a fraction of the press coverage Gulbis did, and I'll bet you can guess why if you've read this far. It's because Gulbis has ass and Watson has arthritis. Gulbis also overshadowed Paul Azinger and Peter Jacobsen,

who are both damn good golfers in their own right. The thing is, though, that golf is more excruciating to watch than tennis, and Gulbis' presence generated a lot of interest in the event and the sport of women's golf overall.

It's not only female athletes who leverage their sexuality to generate interest in a sport. For example, Sidney Crosby is used in advertisements for companies like Gatorade and Reebok all the time, while Alexander Ovechkin is relegated to endorse jock-itch medication. This is despite the fact that this past season Ovechkin played better than Crosby, won the Calder Trophy for best rookie and plays for a more competitive team. It sounds bizarre doesn't it? Crosby has become the poster-boy for the NHL not just for the fact that Gretzky told us he was the next big thing, but also because he comes from a marketable background and has a face that would make all the puck bunnies swoon.

Some may argue that focusing on athletes' appearances detracts from the game and degrades them as people. However, here's the bottom line: at the end of the day sports are just a form of entertainment and the sex-factor only increases that entertainment. Sports were founded on fair competition and rivalries amongst athletes, but today, sport is a business, and teams want to be as profitable as possible. If six years of business school has taught



HOT=GOOD Natalie Gulbis gets more attention for her looks than skills.

me anything, it's that people don't like losing money. And that applies just as much to sports franchises as it does to McDonald's. For an owner of a sports team, or an advertiser for an individual sport like tennis or golf, the goal is to get as many people interested in the sport or athlete as possible. The more people who are interested, the more

revenue you see, and until this trend changes we'll keep seeing hot athletes as spokespeople for their sports. It's really a simple equation: sexy athletes equals more fans, which equals more money, which equals longevity of sports. I say, bring on the hotness; hell, if I looked like half of these athletes, I'd want to flaunt it, too.



KRYSTINA SULATYCKI

GOLDEN GRIN Christine Bennett took gold in Lithuania. That's in Europe.

Rower strikes gold at FISU regatta

PAUL OWEN
Sports Editor

Canada usually fares poorly in International University Sport Federation (FISU) competitions, winning only 13 medals in the two Universiades of 2005—six of which came in women's wrestling. But this August, a Canadian rowing pair, including University of Alberta student Christine Bennett, was the exception to the rule as they captured gold in the women's lightweight doubles at the World University Rowing Championships on 13 August.

Bennett, a 23-year-old nutrition student, teamed with Lindsay Jennerich of Victoria to take the gold medal in Trakai, Lithuania, finished a spot higher than the week previous at the Commonwealth Regatta in Strathclyde, Scotland. Their boat crossed the finish line of the 2000m course in 8:02.8, six seconds ahead of second place.

"It was definitely the biggest thing I've ever done," said Bennett of her win.

"I came from rowing at the Edmonton Rowing Club, which is a bit of a shanty hut. I started out hanging out down there, and I don't think anyone at that time thought that I would ever do something like this. It's really a confidence builder to know I can push myself to that level. It's more of a personal accomplishment since no one knows about rowing."

Bennett started rowing when she was twelve, mainly because her dad and sister were involved. She went through the Edmonton Rowing Club as a teenager doing mostly recreational rowing. When she hit high school, Bennett coxed for the U of A's rowing club. Being around more serious athletes sparked Bennett's competitive fire, and she joined the U of A club when she graduated and started becoming more serious about it. When

she switched out of junior, she moved into lightweight rowing, which puts a 59kg maximum on female rowers.

While she still spends the fall and winter training with the University rowing team, Bennett spent the summer training four hours a day in Victoria with the national team before heading to Europe for the two regattas. Her training consisted of cycling, practice sessions at least twice a day and weight training in the middle. It's a training regiment Bennett hopes to duplicate this coming summer.

"Next summer I'm going back [to the national team]. I definitely want to compete for Canada again. I really pushed myself hard, and I know if I can keep pushing myself and I can keep seeing gains," she said. "It's really stiff competition in Canada. I'd love to compete for Canada on the senior-A team in the Olympics or the World Championships—that's definitely a goal of mine."

GATEWAY PHOTO

Weekly Volunteer Meetings:

Fridays at 4pm

3-04, SUB

No experience necessary

