

# A Parent's Wish For Her Daughters

by Marg McGregor

*Une mère nous fait part des espoirs et des rêves qu'elle entretient pour sa fille. Elle imagine sa fille dans un système sportif sain où elle aurait du plaisir et où les filles seraient soutenues et respectées.*

---

*I want my daughters' sporting experience to be fun and joyful, helping them to develop self-confidence and leadership skills. I want them to discover that excellence, not winning at all costs, is what matters.*

---

As I choose activities for my young daughters, activities which will help them to learn and to grow, I have a huge menu from which to choose. Appealing possibilities include sport programs, piano lessons, painting, Brownies, ballet, choir, computer camp—there is no shortage of options. Before I choose sport over the others, it first has to demonstrate that it offers the values, the positive experiences, and the learning opportunities that I am seeking for my daughters.

Exactly what am I, as a parent looking for? Well, for starters I want to encourage them to pursue sporting activities which offer them the opportunity to make choices, and then supports them in the choices they make. Let's say Kristy wants to be a pole vaulter. I want to know that she will receive moral support and encouragement to pursue that choice, even though it is not a traditional "female" pursuit. On the other hand, if the lesson of that choice teaches that "it's OK for girls to pole vault for fun, but competitive pole vaulting is for boys," then it is not an activity I could wholeheartedly support and encourage.

I want my daughters' sporting experience to be fun and joyful, helping them to develop self-confidence and personal leadership skills. I want them to learn to work cooperatively with others. I want them to discover that excellence, not winning at all costs, is what matters. I want my kids to look around and see women and men who are valued in the sport system.

I want my daughters to be taught and coached by qualified and certified women, and to be officiated by women as well as men so they learn that women can be leaders, not simply spectators or chauffeurs. I want their coaches to hold female values and to understand what it is like to be an eight- or a 12- or a 16-year-old girl. I want their coaches to understand the position of power that coaches hold—and to respect and not abuse their power.

I want my daughters to be part of a sport system that is deeply rooted in the values of fair play, safety, and equity. I want a sport where Kaleigh does not have to compromise her personal health and safety in order to excel, or where the only way to stay competitive is to perform maneuvers which put her at great risk. There must be no possibility that she will be pressured, from her coach or from her peers, to take performance-enhancing drugs or alter her hormones in order to perform better.

I want my children to play and compete alongside athletes with a disability so that Kristy and Kaleigh gain understanding and respect. I want them to feel that the sporting environment is friendly and comfortable, and gives them so much satisfaction that they choose lifetime involvement as a participant, and by contributing leadership as a coach, an official, or an administrator.

Should one of my daughters choose to be a high performance athlete, I want the sport organization to respect her as a total person, not merely as a gifted athlete, recognizing that she has needs beyond the sporting field. The support may take the form of ensuring that her education needs not be sacrificed while she pursues her sporting goals, that she will be supported during maternity leave and while making her comeback, and she will be assisted when she retires from competitive sport.

I want an equitable system, one which acknowledges that the needs of girls and boys are different, that values these differences, and that strives to satisfy those differing needs. I want a system in which women and men, girls and boys, share the responsibility, share the rewards, and share the pleasures, working hand in hand to build sport for all.

Sport is about so much more than learning raw athletic skills. To a parent, sport's appeal lies in learning solid values and carrying them with you every day of your life.

*This article is adapted from one which originally appeared in The Way Ahead for Canadian Women in Sport: The Report of the 1992 IDPD Tour (a publication of the Tait McKenzie Institute, Canadian Sport and Fitness Administration Centre, 1992).*

*Marg McGregor is Executive Director for CAAWS. She is the proud mom of two active daughters. She is committed to getting girls and women out of the bleachers and cheerleading uniforms, and into the pools, gyms, rinks, locker rooms, and board rooms of Canada.*