

PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES ARE PRESSURED TO ABORT

The day before she was scheduled to leave for the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games, track star Sanya Richards-Ross went to an abortion clinic. She wrote, “Everything I ever wanted seemed to be within reach. The culmination of a lifetime of work was right before me. In that moment, it seemed like **no choice at all**... All of the crying leading up to that moment had left me so numb that I barely remember the cold instruments as they brushed against my skin.”



The very next day, she boarded a flight to Beijing. She didn't tell her coaches, her Team USA peers, or even her father. Instead of Olympic gold, she finished third. She wrote later, “People will say, you know, 'Just have an abortion.' Well, you don't just 'have an abortion.' It was extremely traumatic for me ... I made a decision that broke me.” Her experience is not unique. Richards-Ross told *Sports Illustrated Now*, “I literally don't know another female track athlete who hasn't had an abortion.”

For student athletes, a pregnancy can also end scholarship money. According to an ESPN investigation, college policies practically shove pregnant athletes into abortion clinics. At Clemson in 2007 for instance, students signed a document that says: “Pregnancy resulting in the inability to compete and positively contribute to the program's success will result in the modification of your grant-in-aid money.”

Faced with unexpected pregnancies, female athletes risk losing a lifetime of work by carrying to term, especially when culturally athletes are encouraged to sacrifice and do “whatever it takes” to perform at the highest level. All of this is illegal under Title IX: Federal civil rights law codifies that any school which receives federal money can't treat students differently because of their sex or parental status.

Enter the bright spot from the 2021 Olympics: Gold medalist Allyson Felix. She was already a winner of six gold medals and three silver medals, when she chose to continue a high risk pregnancy. She wrote that deciding to have her daughter in 2018 was “terrifying.” Throughout the pregnancy, Felix faced intense pressure from her sponsor, Nike. It also coincided with renegotiating her contract. If she didn't abort, Nike wanted her to accept a 70% pay cut, and no financial protection in the event her performance slipped during or after pregnancy.

Felix walked away from Nike and is now sponsored by Athleta, a women's apparel brand which offers full maternity benefits. She is also the mother of a two-year-old girl, the founder of her own sportswear brand, Saysh, and started a foundation which supports female athletes by (among other things) covering the cost of childcare so they can compete.

Contrast Felix's story with that of jumper Brianna McNeal. McNeal who was banned from her sport for five years after a missed drug test in January 2020. She told the *New York Times* that she didn't hear

the anti-doping representative knocking at her door because she was recovering from an abortion, traumatized, and curled up in her bed.

Depressed by her decision to abort, McNeal made a series of poor judgments which sparked a bureaucratic chain reaction. Investigators didn't accept she was traumatized after the abortion, and banned her from competing at the Olympics.

Sadly, it was shortly after her abortion, that the 2020 Olympic Games were suddenly rescheduled because of COVID-19. McNeal now knows she could have had her baby without missing the competition after all.

The high number of female athletes who become pregnant in spite of understanding what it will cost them may be the result of a misconception prevalent on college campuses. While they are very aware that chemical forms of birth-control (the Pill, the Shot, implants) may have a negative impact their performance, they often believe that loss of menstrual cycles due to extreme exercise means they **can't get pregnant**.

It is disheartening that people who have trained their bodies to perform at an unbelievably high level, are rarely trained in the art of sexual self-control.



COACH'S CORNER

Fear can produce expedient results, but its not sustainable as a long-term motivator.

For instance, threat of punishment for sneaking out at night. Every kid who does it knows there will be consequences if they get caught, but they do it anyway, banking on their ability to get away with it or talk their way out of it. The point is they KNOW the risk and they do it anyway.

It's a mistake to primarily focus sexual decision making on avoiding pregnancy or infection. After all, your teen reasons, it doesn't *always* happen, so maybe it *won't*.

A good coach will focus on the WIN. Take your child's temperament into account. What would winning at sexual decisions look like?

- ◆ Being the kind of person who never puts someone else at risk?
- ◆ Protecting their future, their dreams and their potential no matter what the personal cost?
- ◆ Training to be faithful to a future spouse and to be present for future children?
- ◆ The kind of husband or wife who can be trusted and believed when they say, "you and you only, until I die"?

Teach your child to win at the goal others won't even try for!



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