



## **ST. PAUL AREA ATHENA AWARDS**

To the 2020 St. Paul Area Athena Awards Winners,

Congratulations to each one of you dedicated student-athletes who have been recognized for your athletic excellence and scholarship! I'm sorry that I will not get to meet you in person this year, but please know that I'm very impressed with you and your accomplishments. I was an Athena Award recipient myself. (I'm taking the Fifth Amendment on how long ago it was.) I remember being thrilled to be included in the company of such wonderful student-athletes.

As a Justice on the Minnesota Supreme Court, I'm grateful for a law that changed my life (and yours): Title IX. The law states:

"No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

When it passed in 1972, it meant that schools, colleges, and universities had to offer girls and boys equal athletic opportunities. So girls' and boys' teams had to have the same quality uniforms, facilities, coaches, and equally good (or bad) practice or game times.

The law had a big impact on the participation of girls in sports. In 1978, six years after the law's passage, six times as many girls played competitive high school sports than did in 1970.

And the law had a big impact on the opportunities that I had to play sports, especially when compared to the women who loved athletics in my family. In 1918, my grandmother played basketball on her high school team in Madison, Minnesota. In 1923, she was the first letter winner in my family, lettering at the University of Minnesota in field hockey. While my grandmother had the opportunity to play sports, Title IX would have improved her experience because her uniforms, facilities, coaches, and practice times did not compare to what the boys received.

Surprisingly, my mother, who was in high school in 1944-46, had no opportunity to play organized sports at all because attitudes towards girls participating in sports had changed since my grandmother's time. Nor did my older sister, who graduated the year that Title IX passed, have a chance to play any organized sport in high school.

Because of the law, I was able to play competitive basketball and tennis in high school and in college. I participated in the first-ever Minnesota State High School League Girls' State Tournament, and I was later able to receive a scholarship to play tennis at the University of Minnesota.

My sports experience taught me many lessons: how to compete, how to perform under pressure and to gain confidence when things went well, how to win and how to lose, and hopefully to do both with grace. I learned how to set goals, how to manage time, how to push myself—to realize that practice and persistence helped me improve. And I learned how to become a good teammate, which is essential now in my work with six other Justices on our court.

I'm so convinced of the benefits of athletic participation that when I hire law clerks I look for athletes. Of the seventeen women law clerks that I've hired, five of them played sports in college. I'm pleased to report that all had a strong work ethic, were excellent team players, and are now contributing to the legal profession in meaningful ways.

My experience in sports has been confirmed by research: Sports are a great way to develop positive habits and to build leadership skills. Girls who play sports are less likely to use drugs, they perform better in school, and have greater personal safety. And like me, many employers like to hire athletes because they have a strong work ethic, are team players, and can see projects through to the end.

Women athletes become leaders in our society. One study showed that 94% of all women working in what's called the "C-Suite," that is, as Chief Executive Officers, Chief Operating Officers, or Chief Financial Officers, played sports at the collegiate level. In addition, the great majority of these executives thought that their involvement in sports led to their career success.

In closing, congratulations again for being one of the top athletes in the St. Paul area. You've already had impressive achievements in sports and studies. I look forward to seeing what you'll do next, not only in the sporting world, but what you, as the next generation of women leaders, will contribute to our community and country. With the lessons that you are learning from your participation in sports and your determination, the sky is the limit!

Sincerely,

Margaret H. Chutich,  
Associate Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court