

## T-Notes

by Robbi Cohn . Contributing Writer

### Gender discrimination in sports

Sarah Gronert's desire to play tennis isn't complicated. Unfortunately, for her, everything else about the game is. You may have heard her story. A number of LGBT and/or alternative papers have covered her travails — even the *New York Daily News* ran an item about her. Briefly, Gronert had been born with an intersex condition, subsequently treated surgically. Many knowledgeable clinicians recommend allowing persons with intersex conditions to determine sex and gender identity for themselves. The outdated practice of arbitrary sex determination by surgical fiat is recognized to have caused irreparable damage to many who should have been allowed to self determine. Gronert was lucky to have been born during an era when some positive light has been shed on the subject of intersex conditions and to have been able to make those choices for herself.

Gronert is not physically a giant; she's not even big. Neither is her torso large, nor her musculature overdeveloped. Her hands look like any average woman's hands might appear. Yet, she has been accused of having an unfair advantage on the pro tennis circuit because of her former intersex condition. Israeli coach Schlomo Tzoref, who coaches Julia Glushkow, has been Gronert's major critic. After Sarah won the match against



Glushkow, and subsequently, the tournament, Tzoref declaimed, "There is no girl who can hit serves like that, not even Venus Williams."

He further stated, "When I heard her story, I was in shock. I don't know if it's fair that she can compete or not. She does have an advantage, but if this is what the WTA have decided, they probably know best. If she begins to play continuously, within six months she will be within the top 50."

Gronert currently is ranked number 619 on the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) circuit, has won two tournaments and a grand total of \$20,000 in prize money. Coach Tzoref's complaints are anything but grounded at this juncture. Even if she proves to be a consistent winner, there is no just cause to ban her from competition. Gronert has the apparent musculature and body mass of any average athletic woman in her early 20s. Her physique is not necessarily reflected in her ability or talent.

The Women's Tennis Association has heard Gronert's case and voted to allow the 22-year-old to compete. The association is due the recognition it deserves for its open-minded policies regarding Gronert.

Of course, the WTA's choice to be inclusive has not always been the case in sports. East German women power lifters were questioned during mid-20th century Olympics and international competitions. Then, there was the case of Foekje Dillema, a Dutch athlete born in

1926 who Radio Netherlands covered in July 2008. She appeared to have a promising Olympic career before the Dutch Athletics Union banned her from competing. There appears to have been some chromosomal anomalies, but analysis by experts today has deemed that there should have been no reason for her not to have been allowed to compete with other women.

The aforementioned Olympics have been fertile ground for gender discrimination. In her July 30, 2008, *New York Times* article, Katie Thomas noted that during the early Cold War era, "women were asked to parade nude before a panel of doctors to verify their sex." Starting in 1968, chromosomal testing was used. Thomas wrote that the practice of testing "came under increasing criticism in the 1990s by doctors, scientists and athletes who argued that the tests were not just invasive, but were also bad science." With all the testing, women did fail, but it was always determined that the situation involved intersex conditions and that there had categorically been no evidence of imposters. There certainly were no valid cases for women to be barred from participating.

With no negative incidents, and a post-Cold War mind set, it appeared as though there would be a liberalizing of policy. And, in 2004, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) set an inclusive policy for gender diversity.

In August, 2008, writer Paul Steinbach noted that, "The IOC doesn't allow a transsexual athlete to compete in the Olympic Games without evidence that the external genitalia have been changed, the appropriate hormonal

therapy has been administered to ensure equitable competition, and at least two years have passed since the surgical removal of the ovaries or testes."

This policy is neither haphazard nor half-baked and ample consideration has been given to ensure a level playing field.

The most recent Beijing Olympics brought a switch regarding any concept of liberalization. The policies we saw were nothing short of draconian.

According to a spokesman from Organization Intersex International (OII), "Chinese officials have announced they will be using chromosomal and genetic tests as well as nude examinations of women athletes at the Beijing Olympics."

Members of OII, as well as other organizations, decried the Chinese position and we can only hope that their treatment of gender diversity is anomalous.

Conversely, decisions like the kind the WTA made regarding Gronert give hope that athletics will nurture the kind of change we hope to see across the gamut of gender issues — employment, housing, medical, insurance, for example.

Once again, the struggle for equality is evident on the world stage. Each trans person whose life and story become visible becomes an ambassador for tolerance and acceptance. In that regard, Gronert's tennis court doubles as a court of public opinion. ▀

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