

Dear All

Last week was an important announcement from the Union Cycling International – the world Cycling governing body. It said that from 2022, Men and Women will compete in the same course together during the '2022 Road Cycling World Championships'. This is a dramatic departure from segregated championships - having men compete with men and women with women in most sports.

It has long been held that men have a physical strength advantage and also in some cases speed of reaction or reaction time. Hence most sports have been segregated by men and Women. There are of course the mixed doubles events – In Badminton, In Tennis etc. how and where did this trend start? Here's my take and learnings on this topic which will bring in a lot of debate in the coming months:

1. Horse Racing is a sport where men and women compete against each other. A recent survey has shown that there is no difference between a man being a jockey or a woman being a jockey if the ability of the horse is the same.
2. Equestrian is an Olympic sport where men and women riders compete against each other in Eventing, dressage and show jumping disciplines. The reason being that the attributes required to win are about confidence and being an able rider of horses, something that doesn't vary by man or woman.
3. Sailing is a surprise, it has an element of strength in it, but in one class the Nacre 17, men and women compete against each other. All other classes are segregated by men and women.
4. Motorbike racing is an area where the line is disappearing. In September 2017, a Spanish lady Anna Carrasco became the first woman to win a world championship motorcycle race in Portimao , Portugal, beating many men.
5. Darts – On 17 th December 2019, a lady Fallon Sherrock made history when she beat a man Ted Evetts at the PDC world championships. Fallon was only the fifth woman to play in the open gender event.
6. Chess is open to both men and women in many categories even though there is a separate event for the Women's chess championships.
7. Danica Patrick is the most successful woman in the history of American car racing. Danica won the Indy Japan 300 in 2008 and in 2009 she was placed 3 rd in the Indianapolis 500 which marked the highest finish by a woman driver. In 2013, she became the first female Nascar driver to take a Nascar sprint cup series.
8. Carissa Moore has won several surfing titles but her most important win came in 2007 when she won the Quicksilver King of Grooms event against male competitors. In 2011, Moore was the first woman to get a wild card entry into the Men's Triple crown of surfing
9. There is absolutely no difference between men and women when it comes to professional and skilled roles. Women are moving to the top job in companies. In 2021, we have 8 % women leading Fortune 500 companies, the number is still small, but it's the highest since the Fortune 500 list was compiled. Previous skilled roles like Fork lift truck drivers, taxi drivers, pilots etc. are well staffed with women today. India has the highest number of women pilots. The global average for women pilots is 5 %, while in India of the total number of 17,726 pilots, 2764 are women, that's 15 %, much higher as a percentage vs USA, Europe etc.
10. The men vs women debate started in 1973 when Bobby Riggs challenged Billie Jean king, then the Tennis ladies champion to a match. Billie Jean King, aged 29 thrashed Bobby Riggs aged 55 beating him in all three sets. This match was watched by 50 million people in the USA and 90 million people worldwide. This was a turning point and Billie Jean went on to champion the women player rights for equal pay at tournaments.

11. The Tennis Williams sisters challenged that they would beat any man outside of the men's 200 ranking. Karsten Braasch, a German player ranked 203 in the world accepted the challenge. He beat Serena 6-1 and he beat Venus 6-2. At the end of the match Serena said "I didn't know it would be that hard, I hit shots that would have been winners on the Women's tour and Karsten got to it easily".
12. Women are allowed in the men's Golf circuit, but so far no woman has won a Golf tournament where both men and women have competed.

I personally feel that more sport will open up to mixed fields. What started as a pay parity situation has developed into more of an inclusive debate.

Feedback welcome

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