

Why are boys allowed to play ringette?

Human Rights legislation does not allow discrimination based on gender.

Ringette is a girls' sport, why should boys be allowed to play?

While ringette was initially designed to provide girls and women an option to play a team sport on ice, that doesn't mean it always has to be that way. In 1963, females were not allowed to play hockey which gave Sam Jacks a reason to invent ringette.

Why do males want to play ringette?

There are several reasons why people choose the activities they do – they enjoy it, their friends play, they like a group of coaches, they are good at it and the list goes on. It would be hasty to assume what motivates individuals to join and continue to play a sport. Many ringette players play other sports as well. There are no rules that prohibit athletes from playing multiple sports. In fact, it is encouraged, especially at younger ages.

Males are stronger, faster, bigger, and more skilled than females. Doesn't that give male players an unfair advantage?

Not all males are stronger, faster, bigger, and/or more skilled than all females. Some may be. Some may not be. We should not generalize and say all males have an advantage over all females.

Can we assess and determine if individual boys are too strong, big, fast, or skilled to play with female athletes?

That is discrimination based on gender and violates the Human Rights Act. If we're prepared to do the same kind of assessments for all players, regardless of gender, and place all players onto appropriate teams based on those assessments, that would be acceptable. Perhaps one day, a fully flushed out Athlete Development Matrix, with systems in place and buy-in from stakeholders, can be used to assess and place players. Until then, we cannot single out males.

But some males dominate the game and make that team too good for its competition. How is that fair?

The Leagues should have a system in place to advance or retreat teams to improve competitive equity. It may not be perfect, and the reality of sport is that some teams win, and some teams lose. We look at the relative competitiveness of the teams, not individual players. It is important to point out that there would not be as much push back if there are female players on teams that dominate the game so rhetorically, why is there an issue if those players are male? Athlete placement needs to be based on several factors, but sex and gender are not among them.

Okay, so what about it being about the girls? Doesn't the presence of the boy's ruin that female environment?

Some girls could not care less about a boy playing on their team. Some do. This is where our focus needs to be if we are to legally accommodate all genders in our sport. While we can't discriminate based on gender, we can create female- only environments (and male-only and mixed).

How can we create female-only environments, which means no males, but not violate the Human Rights Act?

Sport organizations can create female-only, male-only, and mixed gender options and participants can make their choice accordingly. Males could then choose from mixed or male-only options, leaving the female-only option to preserve the female-centric environment for those who want it.

With the current number of male players and perhaps for the foreseeable future, how are there ever going to be enough interested in the male-only or mixed option to make them viable?

The first step is creating the options, which we are striving to do. We then invite people interested in these options to participate in them and to recruit others. We establish flexibility to make it easier for these smaller numbers (initially) to participate.

So, the teams that have males on them today are categorized as mixed teams?

Yes.

What do we do now if we are playing against a team with a boy on it?

Treat that player and their team with the same respect that is expected of any participant in ringette, following the True Sport principles and Ringette Manitoba, League and individual Clubs policies for codes of conduct. If you see or experience any negativity directed towards the individuals or teams, speak up. State facts. Empathize – recognize that it may be challenging for them to be perceived as different. Report incidents to the appropriate body. It is up to ALL of us to create the kind of sport community and sports experience we can be proud of.

What is Ringette Manitoba's position on all of this?

Fundamentally, Ringette Manitoba believes in the value of the current female-centric environment for the girls and women who are the foundation of our sport. Girls and women represent our competitive advantage over other sports and most importantly, we do not want to erode the interest girls and women have in our sport by chasing a male demographic. Some have argued that if we weren't so focused on girls and women, we would get far more males playing and our sport would grow. Perhaps, but we do not want to risk the participation of the females that choose ringette. Being focused on girls and women does not mean shutting out males. It does, however, mean finding a place for males to participate in the age category and at the level of play that best suits all athletes. Our hope for the future of ringette is that we have female-only, male-only, and mixed gender options available at all levels, to accommodate all athletes who want to play our amazing sport.