

September 26, 2008

Mr. Mark Zieman
Publisher
Kansas City Star

Dear Mr. Zieman:

On behalf of the WIN for KC Advisory Board and members, the thousands of Kansas City area residents interested in women's sports, and concerned Kansas City Star readers, we are writing to express our absolute shock at your decision to eliminate the Kansas City Star staff writer position devoted to women's sports, which also resulted in the termination of award-winning Mechelle Voepel, a twelve year veteran of the Star. We understand the financial difficulties facing newspapers, including the Star, and that hard decisions must be made in a time of declining circulation. However, it is incomprehensible that the Star has chosen to eliminate consistent and focused coverage of women's sports in the midst of tremendous, continual and escalating growth in the interest and participation in girls and women's sports.

This decision will have significant negative consequences as it will deprive young girls and boys from getting information about women competing in sports and of having positive, strong female role models, not to mention the public at large who deserves the opportunity to be aware of and interested in the great accomplishments of local, national and international women athletes. In fact, Donna Lopiano, former CEO of the Women's Sports Foundation, has noted that the media shapes the public's perception of the accomplishments of women playing sports and whether women in general can be strong, confident and highly skilled. Given that the media influences the dreams and aspirations of girls, we are even more disappointed by this decision that will cut short dreams and eliminate aspirations for many local girls.

Certainly the Kansas City Star cannot be intentionally turning its back on a significant segment of the Kansas City population – current and potential fans of women's sports. Sports pages serve as an important anchor for newspaper readership – both in terms of paper circulation and online readers. The increase in participation and interest in women's and girls sports is well-documented and shows no signs of slowing down. These athletes and their families, friends, etc., are potential readers of The Star, and targets for advertisers. Studies have shown that women, particularly those new to athletics, are a great source for advertising revenues. According to a recent USA Today article, women, not men, make up the majority of Olympic TV viewers by a wide margin — 7%. Dozens of global marketers used the Olympic Games to reach female viewers, including AT&T, McDonald's, Visa and L'Oreal. Continuing to cover women's sports on a detailed and regular basis will increase the Star's readership base and thereby increase the potential for advertising revenue.

This decision is particularly troubling following the report by The Association of Women in Sports Media that gave sports departments an F grade for gender hiring practices. So in this climate, where there are so few women in sports departments, The Star eliminated one of the two female writers on its sports staff. This action is even more troubling and surprising given that Mechelle Voepel is known as one of the best women's sports writers in the country due to her knowledge, talent and national (and local) reputation. Whether it was a huge LPGA, WNBA, women's tennis, NCAA sports or any significant women's sports event in the Kansas City area, Mechelle was there to cover it for the Star. And because of the respect she has garnered in the women sports world, she has intimate access to the best stories and insight for her readers.

In the past, we have proudly proclaimed that we live in a city that did a very good job of covering women's sports. Now, we have the distinction of living in a city where our leading newspaper has turned its back on women's sports and allowed our most talented spokesperson to get away. This is a huge injustice to Mechelle, your readers, and the thousands of girls and women that participate in sports in our city, as well as to the thousands of fans who want to read about women's sports and accomplishments.

This letter is not about Mechelle's future – as talented as she is, she will land on her feet. Rather, we are extremely concerned for your readers, those who are and those who could be interested in girls and women's sports, girls and women athletes themselves, and women's events that deserve coverage and recognition. We would like to know what your plan is to cover women's sports on a regular and detailed basis now that the position has been eliminated. We welcome a detailed written response and would also be happy to meet with you in person to discuss further.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Patti Phillips
WIN for KC Director

Kathleen Kunkler
WIN for KC Chair

cc: Mike Fannin; Holly Lawton



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