

UNDERSTANDING D.C.'S YOUTH SPORTS GENDER GAP



A research initiative commissioned by Monumental Sports & Entertainment's *District of Play* youth sports program conducted by an independent research firm

GIRLS WANT TO PLAY SPORTS, BUT 6 KEY BARRIERS IN ACCESS, EQUIPMENT AND SUPPORT GRADUALLY PUSH THEM OUT.

53%

OF D.C. GIRLS PARTICIPATE IN YOUTH SPORTS

70%

OF D.C. BOYS PARTICIPATE IN YOUTH SPORTS

37%*

OF D.C. YOUTH LIVE IN WARDS 7 & 8

*Youth in Wards 7 & 8 have less access to sports and lower participation in nearly every sport outside basketball and football.

DATA ABOVE IS PULLED FROM THE ASPEN INSTITUTE'S 2023-24 D.C. STATE OF PLAY REPORT COMMISSIONED BY UNDER ARMOUR.

"We don't get enough love in the sports community. We just get overlooked because of the boys. We're not getting enough love for the girls." — High Schooler

1

SPACE TO PLAY

Girls often struggle to access them because boys dominate the available space.

"The court would always be full of boys. Unless the girls want to step to that level of play, they really couldn't access it." — Coach



2

EQUIPPED TO COMPETE

The right gear builds confidence, belonging and excitement to participate.

"Girls' sports can be more expensive just because of what girls need. We had a girl come to soccer practice in jean shorts. She didn't even own a sports bra." — Coach



3

BELONGING ABOVE ALL

Belonging and support from coaches + teammates are major reason girls stay in sports.

"The main thing is the team, that's my favorite part (about sports). I get to connect with everybody." — High Schooler



4

COACHES CARRYING THE LOAD

Coaches often fill transportation, financial, and emotional-support gaps themselves.

"A lot of times, I'll take them to Chick-Fil-A or something to celebrate a win or just have fun. And pay for it myself." — Coach



5

THE "MIDDLE SCHOOL CLIFF"

The transition from middle school to high school is where participation often starts to slip.

"The athlete who is on the cusp, the handoff from middle school to high school can be really rough if it doesn't feel as supportive as before." — Coach



6

GIRLS ARE QUIET-QUITTING

When girls feel unsupported or priced out, they often leave quietly without explaining why.

"If a girl misses a couple practices and thinks the coach is mad, she just won't come back." — Coach



TURNING INSIGHT TO ACTION

LEARN MORE ABOUT A NEW INITIATIVE FROM MONUMENTAL SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT, THE DISTRICT, MAYOR MURIEL BOWSER AND UNDER ARMOUR, DESIGNED TO ADDRESS SOME OF THE MOST IMMEDIATE BARRIERS THAT THE RESEARCH FOUND.

ALL INFORMATION AND QUOTES BASED ON 40 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL FEMALE ATHLETES AND ADULT STAKEHOLDERS. INTERVIEWEES LIVE, WORK, PLAY AND/OR ATTENDED SCHOOL IN WARDS 7 OR 8. MORE THAN 12 SPORTS WERE REPRESENTED ACROSS THE INTERVIEW POOL, WHICH INCLUDED ATHLETES AND ADULTS INVOLVED IN DCPS-SANCTIONED AND RECREATIONAL LEAGUES.

ADDITIONAL QUOTES

FROM GIRLS AND ADULT STAKEHOLDERS

SPACE TO PLAY

"In my neighborhood, the basketball court has a backboard and doesn't have a rim, so you can't really shoot." — Middle schooler

EQUIPPED TO COMPETE

"A lot of my girls wear whatever shoes they wear to school. That makes them super self-conscious, and everyone knows you can't hoop in shoes with no grip." — Coach

"It's not a case of some have and some have nots. Everyone's got the cool stuff. And for the girls, that makes a world of difference in being excited to be part of the team." — Coach

"People think, 'oh they don't need fancy uniforms,' so we don't get a lot of donations (to upgrade to better uniforms). But really it makes a big difference at this age. They feel good when they look good." — Program director

"I love the gear. Walking around in my little free warm up suit and my shoes." — High schooler

BELONGING ABOVE ALL

"Something that's very important to me is just having a team. If I'm not having fun there, even if I'm doing good at what I'm doing, I wouldn't have (any) motivation to practice." — Middle schooler

"Most importantly, it's knowing your coach believes in you. Because if you don't have a coach that believes in you, it's gonna be really hard to stick to the sports." — High schooler

COACHES CARRYING THE LOAD

"I actually called one of my girls' moms — she was one of my best players — and said 'Can we work something out so she doesn't have to leave halfway through to pick up the littler kids?' I live in the neighborhood too, my wife even said she could help or maybe she could help find someone who could help you." — Coach

THE "MIDDLE SCHOOL CLIFF"

"I've known some girls who don't have time for practice after school. Mom is at work, so they would have to pick up and take care of their younger siblings or be there when the sibling gets home from school. They have to cook dinner. That's a very real thing, especially in D.C." — Coach

"I came to exit sports when I started doing AP classes and doing dual enrollment classes. I found out that was too much on my plate." — High schooler

"Middle school is that time they're like: do I want to play sports or do I want to be cute?" — Coach

GIRLS ARE QUIET-QUITTING

"If you don't make a pay to pay for it, they're not even going to tell you why they're not doing it. They're just going to pull out, because who wants to be open about their financial hardship?" — Coach

TURNING INSIGHT TO ACTION ▶

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