This summer marks the 40th anniversary of Title IX, legislation that changed the landscape of college athletics forever – and continues to shape the intercollegiate athletics program at Elon. University trustee Deborah Yow Bowden ’74, athletics director at North Carolina State University and one of the most accomplished women in the world of athletics administration, summed up the law’s impact: “Title IX was the second-most important piece of civil rights legislation passed in this country. Had it not passed, opportunities for women in this country and the world would be vastly different.”

When I asked legendary Professor Emerita Janie Brown to reflect on the birth of women’s athletics at Elon, she sounded like a Nike commercial: “We just did it.” The desire for women’s athletics opportunities arose from the students themselves, and they did everything from buying their own uniforms to driving their own cars to games to make it happen. Janie recalls that student-athlete Teddy Ireland Baxter ’76 had a sewing machine and took charge of sewing numbers on uniforms.

Our earliest record of women’s athletics is a handwritten schedule for the basketball team in 1970–71, but more official records for the team exist beginning in 1971–72. Volleyball was added in 1972–73. Both teams were coached by one of the true greats of intercollegiate athletics, the late Kay Yow.

Today, Elon celebrates the addition of its 10th women’s intercollegiate sport – lacrosse. Construction proceeds apace on Hunt Softball Park, named in recognition of trustee Vicky Hunt and The Hon. Sam Hunt of Burlington, N.C., whose generosity demonstrates our continuing commitment to advancing women’s intercollegiate athletics.

The ripple effects of women’s athletics at Elon are tremendous. This summer, more than 1,100 girls visited Elon to participate in camps for basketball, volleyball, soccer and softball, preparing future generations of students with lessons in leadership, teamwork, discipline and commitment to personal excellence.

Forty years after Title IX, Elon has emerged as an institution offering both top-flight academics and Division I athletics. Our women student-athletes, such as rising senior Ali Deatsch, are pursuing amazing accomplishments. Ali, a volleyball star and physics major, became the first student-athlete to receive Elon’s prestigious Lumen Prize, which funds exceptional research and creative projects for top students. Her project, “Optimizing Heating Efficiency of Magnetic Microspheres for Magnetic Hyperthermia Treatment of Malignant Tumors,” studies a method of destroying malignant cancer cells while leaving healthy cells untouched. It’s hard not to come full circle and appreciate how proud Kay Yow would be to see a team she began with such humble resources now attracting student-athletes with the intellectual gifts to study and help conquer the disease Kay so courageously fought.

As the father of two daughters, I am grateful for the tide of opportunity that Title IX swept in. We should all celebrate the fact that American higher education will be forever better because of the progress that has been achieved over the past four decades.

Leo M. Lambert
President

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