

Title IX Is Why Boys' Volleyball Is Booming

By Coach Sarah Conklin

When Title IX gave girls real access to volleyball, it created opportunities never seen before. But it also sparked a lifelong love of the game that would eventually reshape the sport's future.

Title IX passed in 1972. By the early 80s and 90s, women's college volleyball was exploding. Scholarships increased. Rosters expanded. Full-ride opportunities became real. Girls grew up chasing something many of their moms never had the chance to.

They played in high school. They played in college. And they fell in love with volleyball at a level that simply had not been possible before.

Fast-forward a generation.

Many of those girls from the 80s and 90s grew up to become moms, coaches, teachers, players, and directors. They built careers around the game. And the boys in their lives grew up watching practices, peppering in the living room, shagging balls long before they knew what an approach was.

Volleyball has become a force in the United States. For the first time in history, the women's side of a game is leading the way and paving the path for the men's side. Professional leagues are expanding. College arenas are packed. Nearly half a million girls nationwide are playing high school volleyball every year. This moment did not appear out of nowhere. It grew out of access, and we are now seeing the impact of a generation raised inside this game.

The ripple effect of that opportunity is more visible than ever. Women are not just coaching girls. They are increasingly leading on the boys' and men's side of the game.

Nickie Sanlin, head coach of McKendree Men's Volleyball, the 2025 AVCA National Coach of the Year, and a coach within USA Volleyball's men's pipeline, is one of the most successful leaders in the college game. At UMES, Dr. Anitra Brockman is building their newly launched men's program, and her leadership will soon be featured in a documentary about the team's first season.

Many boys' high school programs are led by women who are making a real difference every day. And beyond the gym, women are also driving statewide efforts to secure boys' volleyball a place in our schools. In Minnesota, for example, leaders like Jen Kilkelly and Krista Flemming played central roles in the successful push for sanctioning, organizing communities and building the momentum needed to move the sport forward. Their work paved the way for boys across the state to finally play for their schools, and similar efforts are gaining traction nationwide.

In the club world, leaders like Arielle Houlihan at Bay to Bay, one of the premier boys-only clubs in the country, are helping develop hundreds of players who will carry the game forward for this generation of young men.

In a sport where girls' participation has outweighed boys' roughly five to one for decades, it is no surprise that many of the voices influencing the future of boys' volleyball are women.

And yes, Title IX remains a real hurdle for some boys' and men's programs. But a big part of the story is this: the same law that opened the door for girls also empowered the women who are now helping build the boys' game. Title IX was never meant to limit opportunity. It was meant to expand it, and its impact on our game is still unfolding.

The leaders of today's boys volleyball movement are men and women who share the same conviction: give kids access to this game and incredible things happen. They know that because they have lived it.

Our volleyball community was built on grit and determination. That is why advocates across the US are meeting with coaches and athletic directors, rallying communities, and working tirelessly to give boys a chance to play.

And boys are stepping into that opportunity with real courage. In much of the country, many don't start playing volleyball until late in high school. And even though a lot of them pick it up quickly, it takes guts to learn this game as a teenager. They take risks. They struggle in front of their peers. They get back up, learning that failure is not fatal.

That alone would be enough reason to fight for access.

But something else is happening too. As more men's college programs expand across all levels, boys across the country are starting to dream bigger. They are trying to reach the next level and realizing this game can change their trajectory in the same way it did for girls in the 80s and 90s.

And as they pursue their goals, they are not doing it alone. Millions of us who understand what that opportunity truly means are standing behind them. As coaches, teachers, administrators, and parents, we are supporting the game in our communities and ensuring the next athletes in line get that same shot.

This is what the work has been leading to.

Boys' volleyball is the fastest-growing boys' high school sport for ten straight years. Nationwide efforts are underway to sanction boys' volleyball in every state. New men's college programs are opening their doors. Communities are rallying behind kids who just want to play for their school.

Title IX built the foundation that boys' volleyball is now growing on. We are seeing in real time how one generation's access can ignite the next.

All boys deserve the opportunity we had.

That is why this movement has momentum.

That is why advocates refuse to take no for an answer.

That is why boys' volleyball is booming.

And if this is what happens when girls gain full access to our game, imagine what happens when boys finally do too.

Byline:

Sarah Conklin is a former Division I volleyball player, Boys High School Volleyball Coach, Founder and Director of the NCBVA which leads the statewide effort to sanction boys' volleyball in North Carolina, USA Volleyball Foundation Board Member, Co-Chair of the First Point Committee to Grow Boys' High School Volleyball, and proud volleyball mom.