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“Play Like A Girl”

“Being a female makes you see the world differently.”

Mariah Thomas is a professional basketball player and certified personal trainer. Mariah was selected to the 2017-18 Canadian National Development Team that traveled to Tokyo, Japan and Taipei, China. She excelled on the court during the FISU World games where she received the Player of the Week award. She also represented Canada in Europe for the 2019 FIBA 3x3 games, which allowed her and her teammates the opportunity to compete in the 2020 Olympics. Mariah has also played overseas in Spain, France and Ireland. Basketball has been one of the best aspects of Mariah’s life. Her new passions now consist of her church ministry and her newest venture, Enrich Fit, a company designed to holistically enrich the minds, bodies and spirits of many.

"You can ball!... For a girl..." this statement is the one I disliked hearing the MOST! What does it even mean to "play like a girl"? Why are all athletes categorized by their gender? I used to think maybe we were better off calling basketball a different name for women, since apparently to many people in society, it's not the same sport men play. It was only in my recent years of playing basketball that I understand now, it is, in fact, the same sport, just played in a different way and to be honest I really appreciate that newfound concept. But I'll get back to that later on...

One thing I've learned as a female athlete is that you'll most likely have a bittersweet relationship with respect. Looking back at the early years of my basketball career, gaining respect from others, as a female basketball player was very challenging. Girls in sports are constantly underestimated and overlooked and I've had to prove myself my entire basketball career. Even now as a professional basketball player I see that women in sports don't get

the same recognition and appreciation that men do. A clear example of this notion that I've noticed over the years, is that male athletes always get more.

When I was playing NCAA in New Jersey, we were fortunate enough to get lots of team gear; we received a travel bag with practice jerseys and tracksuits, long and short sleeve dry-fit tops, socks, two pairs of basketball shoes and more. Now I can't complain about the lack of gear I received because I am very grateful for everything I received, but what surprised me was how much more the men's team got. They received about double of everything we got including another pair of shoes and a pair of walking shoes.

The thing is, I could understand if the men's program was having more success than us, but they weren't. They lost almost every game yet it seemed as though their budget grew after every loss. Their team dinners were much more extravagant than ours even if we won. They even had more fans in the stands!! People actually came to watch them lose...Now I don't want to come off like a hater, because I am so happy they had support and they received nice things, but it just made me think about the fact that despite how well we did, we didn't receive the same type of praise as the men's team.

Back then, I thought it was just the school or university basketball culture. But after travelling around the world and playing basketball on several different teams and different levels I realized it's not just the university culture, it's global. Society simply enjoys and respects male sports more. Now I'm not writing this to discourage you at all, but I think it's important to hear the truth, and although it's a tough pill to swallow, I wish I was prepared for the truth and didn't have to learn it the hard way.

So here are few tips to prepare you as a female athlete:

1) First and foremost: You must respect yourself and the game.

You are your best fan, support, motivator, and opponent. You need to have enough respect for yourself, in your skills and in your passion, so that you can enjoy the game and not worry about if everyone else is respecting you.

Your integrity and devotion for the game will gain the respect of the people that matter the most.

You must be willing to not only love the game but you have to respect the game. Give your all to the game, 110% effort both on and off the court and I guarantee, you will be proud of your own success and merits but also, so will the people around you.

2) Stop comparing!

Don't be silly and do what I did. **Comparing yourself to others is the worst thing you can do** (go ahead and read that one more time, make sure it sticks!). Now looking at others for inspiration and motivation through a self-development perspective is great. But if you're constantly comparing yourself to other players male or female it will be detrimental to your confidence and your growth as a player and as a person. I know this sounds cliché but focus on being better than you were yesterday--trust me it really works!

Comparing yourself to others, especially male athletes is going to make you undervalue the respect that you actually do receive as a female hooper. I must say being a female athlete I have actually received a lot of respect and praise (maybe not as much as male athletes, but remember that doesn't matter!) Seeing people's reaction when I tell them I play ball, or when I beat them in a game of 1 on 1, is actually pretty satisfying. I'm telling you, playing a sport sets you apart from the rest of society and being good at what you do is really going to help you achieve that respect and praise you may be searching for. So remember, you, my friend, are important! **You will be respected if you work hard and strive for success, but most importantly stay humble and respect others while you do.**

3) Be grateful and be hopeful.

Gratitude is key! When I say this I'm not just referring to being an athlete but this is one of the keys to success in life. Be grateful for what you have because it is much more than what others have. When I was younger, I didn't truly understand and appreciate where I was at, in my basketball career and

in life. I had a full National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division 1 scholarship, an opportunity to free education, an able-body capable of doing so much on the court and the opportunity to learn from others and next level coaches. I was getting free clothes, shoes and meals and I got to play the game I loved in front of people who supported her. I got to represent my school and made lots of friends and connections in the process. I had the opportunity that many women dreamed of in the past before collegiate sports for women was a thing; the chance to play NCAA basketball that many young basketball players hoped for and aspired to achieve. **My younger self was truly blessed, but I was too caught up in comparing myself to others, to see it.**

Be hopeful for the future. These days I see so many new resources for young female athletes. So many people invested in the futures and development of these young girls. The upcoming athletes have so much more opportunities than I had and it makes me so happy to see. **This means that, the future of female sports is constantly growing and progressing and it will only continue to be improved, promoted and respected more** as society sees what it takes to be an athlete but more importantly, how much more it takes to be a *female* athlete.

4) Embrace your womanhood.

Being a woman is such a blessing (its so much better than being a man ;) kidding, kinda!) **Being a female makes you see the world differently, it makes you strong in ways that men can never imagine, and it makes you, YOU!** As a girl, you will learn things in life that will sculpt you to be a better person and a better athlete. Having to balance, double standards, emotions, and a monthly cycle is more than enough; but female athletes do it all while striving for success in their sport!

As I mentioned earlier, the game of basketball is very different depending on the gender playing it. Male basketball is really all about athletic abilities and showboating, it's a more 1 on 1 style of play. Yes there will be ball movement, and great team plays from time to time but the essence of the game is really about who can dominate individually. Whereas, women play systematic and

structured basketball. Fundamental team basketball that many people appreciate. It's a totally different style, and true lovers of the game will enjoy it. Women ballers are (most of the time) team players and the game just flows differently. Although there is a lot less dunking and half court shots, women basketball games are a beautiful thing! **Yes, the game is different, because you are different! Different is good. Embrace it!**

Lastly, being a female athlete is so important, not only for you, but for all the girls to follow. Young girls need strong, confident female leaders to show them the way! Young girls are vulnerable and they need someone to look up to, someone who looks like them, that they can identify with. **Being a female role model to young athletes is such a fulfilling and satisfying role to fill. Be that inspiration!**

Love,

Coach Mariah Faith <3

Check out Mariah's Business:

Mariah is utilizing her expertise and professional knowledge as the CEO of Enrich Fit a company designed to holistically enrich the minds, bodies and spirits of many. Enrich Fit is a health and wellness company that specializes in training from bootcamps and group fit class, to team, small group and personal training. Mariah seeks to empower young girls and women through holistic health; with a strong desire to motivate and guide them to explore the many aspect of holistic health. Mariah strives to help others become the healthiest, happiest and most fulfilled versions of themselves. For more information on Enrich Fit, visit Enrichfit.ca or follow her on social media.

Follow Mariah's social media accounts!

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