



Left: The 2022 grand marshals mingle with friends prior to the parade. **Left to right:** Cindy (Fitzsimmons) Fesemyer, BS '82 (track and field), Judy Devine, MA '70 (Emeritus Senior Associate Athletics Director), Darlene Wolfe, BA '82, MA '84 (softball and women's basketball), Linda Kochan, BS '73 (field hockey), Christine (Uveges) Loya, BFA '83 (track and field)

Right: Grand marshals representing track and field from several decades gather for a photo before the parade begins. **Left to right:** Kristin Weymer, BS '03 (track and field), Sheila McGee, BBA '00 (track and field), Denise Zehner, BS '91 (track and field), Erin Anderson, BA '05 (cross country and track and field), Adrienne (Dinapoli) Saunder, BS '04 (track and field), Bekkah Berryhill, BSE '04 (track and field)

The Way It Was and A Ways to Go

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the passage of Title IX, Kent State invited former women student-athletes to be grand marshals of the 2022 Homecoming Parade. Here's what some had to say about the effect of the law on their college careers.

BY BETHANY SAVA, BS '12

For Linda (Myers) Tilton, BS '69, MEd '78, the only memento she has from her time on Kent State's women's swim team is one T-shirt that reads "Put a Tiger in Your Tank Suit," which the team members bought for themselves. Despite her memories of the team's success, there were no trophies, medals or even a team swimsuit to hold onto after her final season.

The women's swim team competed in the fall, and the men's team competed in the spring. Yet, notes Tilton, the women practiced in the old pool, while the men used the new pool even during their off-season. When traveling to conference swim meets, she recalls sharing a hotel room with three other girls, while the men sports teams stayed two to a room. The varsity women were allowed to borrow warm-up jackets from the junior varsity men's swim team as they didn't have any of their own gear.

"My experiences as a student-athlete were awesome," Tilton says. "I relish the memories, but the times were not fair for women's sports."

Such was the norm for women athletes in the United States until the U.S. Congress passed Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 on June 23 that year. The law states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." (That includes public institutions of higher learning like Kent State University.)

Title IX brought benefits for women in the classroom as well as in competition. By formally recognizing women's sports, it allowed more women to qualify for athletic scholarships and gain access to higher education.

In recognition of Title IX's 50th anniversary, Kent State is hosting a yearlong series of events honoring both current and former women student-athletes and highlighting the success and impact of women's athletic programs.

To kick off the celebration, President Todd Diacon invited all former women student-athletes to serve as grand marshals in the 2022 Homecoming Parade. Thirty-seven women representing 13 sports returned to the Kent Campus in October. They had played at Kent State from the late 1960s through the early 2000s, and each brought her own perspective regarding the impact of Title IX on her career as a collegiate athlete. Many noted that the positive changes from the law have taken time to implement.

"At KSU, I competed with teammates who played for the love of the sport since only a few players had funding and many of us worked part-time," says Kris Ewing, BS '83 (field hockey). "Our uniforms were old and sometimes shared between us. We bought our own shoes and sticks, and it was common to play three to four games in one weekend."

Women athletes have faced tremendous challenges over the years, and many still struggle for equity in sports. From lacking the basic necessities of an athletic program, such as uniforms, access to facilities and transportation, to having their efforts and successes as athletes completely overlooked, women in sports have had to fight adversity from opponents on and off the field.

But Title IX brought benefits for women in the classroom as well as in competition. By formally recognizing women's sports, it allowed more women to qualify for athletic scholarships and gain access to higher education.

"Title IX created not only athletic opportunities for women to compete but also the means to earn athletic scholarships," says Denise (Bobby) Zehner, BS '91 (cross country and track). "I was fortunate to



have earned an athletic scholarship all four years while attending Kent State University. This was the main reason I was able to attend college, as my parents did not have the financial means to fund a college education."

Judy Devine, MA '70, Emeritus Senior Associate Athletic Director, is often referred to as the matriarch of Kent State University women's athletics. She first came to Kent as a graduate student in 1969, but she soon took on head coaching roles for women's basketball and field hockey. When Title IX was passed, she led the charge for bringing the university into compliance with the new law.

While the changes made possible by Title IX have transformed the competitive landscape for women student-athletes, Devine says it is equally critical that those women who came before Title IX are remembered and honored for their contributions. "Women have played [sports] since the beginning of time," she says. "It's just that we haven't recognized their need or their desire or their success in doing it."

In 2010, Kent State took a step to honor those trailblazers by inviting former women student-athletes to a Celebrating a Century of Kent State Women's Athletics luncheon, where they received their hard-earned varsity 'K' letters. Those who could not attend the luncheon received them in the mail. More than 100 pre-Title IX women received a letter—including members of the women's swim team. (Both men's and women's swim teams were disbanded in 1988).

"Amazing that some 40 years later, KSU women were honored with a 'K' sports letter sent to our homes," says Shirley Wachner Pickton, BA '74, BS '75 (swimming). "An official Flash at last!"

Kent State currently sponsors 10 varsity women's athletic programs and, in October, launched a campaign called FlaSHEs WILL in partnership with Devine, who established the Judith K. Devine Equity Endowment. Funds raised will provide scholarship funds and other programmatic resources for Kent State women student-athletes.

"We have set a target of receiving at least 50 gifts to celebrate 50 years of Title IX," Devine says. "And I believe we resilient pioneers of Title IX will rise to the call!" ⚡

Scan the QR code for ways to support the FlaSHEs WILL campaign. Or go to kentstatesports.com/flasheswill.



View a video of Judy Devine reading the Title IX law at <https://youtu.be/y1dVrDdKeBU>.