

Strength over Stereotypes: Why Women Deserve Better

“Too muscular to be appealing.” These were the words used to describe world-famous tennis player Serena Williams. Instead of focusing on her 23 Grand Slam singles titles and her dominance in tennis, many have fixated on her physical appearance. This reflects a broader issue in women’s sports—female athletes are often judged more on their looks than their abilities. To break down these barriers, we need to shift our focus to their talent, hard work, and dedication rather than their physical appearance.

One of the greatest but least discussed challenges for female athletes is anxiety. It affects not only elite competitors but also young girls and amateur players. Studies show that teenage girls drop out of sports at twice the rate of boys, often due to concerns about body image, self-doubt, and societal pressure. Even athletes who reach the peak of their careers, achieve lifetime bests, or place first in world championships struggle with confidence and self-belief. Why? Because they are often too self-conscious about their appearance. Once self-doubt takes root, it can spiral into a larger issue, affecting performance and mental well-being.

This anxiety can be managed with the right support systems. Sports psychologists emphasize the importance of mental training just as much as physical training. Seeking guidance from professionals, talking to trusted friends, and fostering an environment where struggles are normalized can make all the difference.

As a society, we all have a role to play in supporting female athletes and their confidence. We need to eliminate harmful stereotypes about women in sports. “Women are weaker.” Yes, men and women have different biological builds, but strength is not just about biology—it’s about training, dedication, and resilience. A woman who has trained rigorously, remained dedicated, and shown resilience can be much stronger than many men. This applies not only to professional athletes but also to any girl striving to become fit, healthy, and strong. To say that all men are stronger is simply untrue.

A perfect example of resilience, hard work, and dedication is Katie Taylor, one of Ireland’s greatest athletes. Despite boxing being a male-dominated sport, Taylor fought her way to Olympic gold and became a multiple-time world champion. Her talent and determination silenced the critics who doubted women's place in boxing. She proves that strength and greatness are determined by skill and perseverance, not gender.

“You run like a girl.” Why is this phrase used as an insult? Sharlene Mawdsley, Rhasidat Adeleke, Phil Healy, and Sophie Becker—all female athletes who were part of Ireland's 4x400m relay team at the 2024 European Championships—won a historic silver medal. These women have become role models for children across Ireland, inspiring young girls to follow in their footsteps. The next time someone says, “You run like a girl,” perhaps they should think of these incredible athletes and reconsider their words.

Another damaging stereotype is calling knee push-ups “girl push-ups.” Learning to do a full push-up correctly has nothing to do with gender. Anyone, male or female, must practice and build strength to achieve a full push-up. Even men often start with knee push-ups before progressing. Knee push-ups should never be referred to as “girl push-ups,” and exercises should never be gendered. Donna Jean Wilde holds the world record for the most push-ups in one hour—a staggering 1,575 full push-ups. Not a single one was done from the knees. Her achievement alone disproves this outdated stereotype.

If we shift our focus to female athletes' talent, acknowledge their hard work, and celebrate their achievements rather than their appearance, more women will be encouraged to excel in sports. Language matters. Phrases like “Women are weaker” and “Girl push-ups” reinforce damaging stereotypes that discourage girls from pursuing sports. If we want more women to succeed, we need to recognize their strength rather than diminish their accomplishments.

Together, we can create an environment where female athletes feel nothing but pride and happiness when they reach the high points in their careers. It's time to celebrate the power of women in sports—without conditions.