



Arizona Interscholastic Association
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AIA FEATURE STORY By: Don Ketchum

AIA ACADEMY'S GIRLS ATHLETICS SYMPOSIUM RETURNS FOR FIFTH YEAR

PHOENIX, AZ (March 30, 2009) – Participating in athletics often presents a unique set of issues for high school girls, and the Arizona Interscholastic Association Academy (AIA Academy) is recognizing that by holding its fifth annual symposium, *Steps to a Healthy Future: Celebrating Girls in Sport* on Thursday, April 23 from 8:15 a.m.-1:30 p.m. at Westview High School in Avondale.

Athletes and coaches from around the state are invited to attend the free educational event and listen to featured speakers on a variety of topics such as dealing with injuries, staying drug-free, nutrition and hydration, self-esteem and maintaining a healthy lifestyle in general. The AIA Academy will announce its list of speakers soon.

According to AIA Executive Director Dr. Harold Slemmer, the event made an impact in its very first year and continues to grow.

“We could see right away that there was a need being filled, sharing with these young women about topics specific to their needs, and the way the speakers were able to connect with them,” Slemmer said.

“It also is important for the coaches to be involved, to understand what makes athletics different and unique for girls.”

None of these events are the same.

“I learn something new all the time by attending,” said Michelle Byers, Director of Community Relations for the AIA and the academy. “It is a really effective environment, empowering for the girls.”

Scott Brown is a Coach Education Specialist and Lead Trainer for the AIA Academy, and is the Paradise Valley Unified School District's athletic director. He has helped to coordinate the attendance of girls from his district's five Phoenix high schools (Paradise Valley, Horizon, North Canyon, Pinnacle and Shadow Mountain).

“At first, some of them might think that it's simply a day away from school, but they always seem to come away with a lot of knowledge and enjoy themselves,” Brown said.

He said some of the younger athletes have expressed a desire to return to the event the following year, but stressed that it is not just for underclassmen. Current seniors also benefit and learn about issues that will help carry over into college, whether the young women participate in athletics at that level or not.

“Just hearing other women, other athletes, talk about the trials and tribulations and successes they have had, talk about what it takes, is worthwhile,” Brown said.

Byers and Brown recalled words by USA Softball and University of Arizona softball coach Mike Candrea that illustrates the need for this event.

“He said, “Girls have to feel good to play good, and boys have to play good to feel good,’ ” Brown said.

Said Byers: “We want the girls to feel good about themselves.”

Attending schools must have one staff member on hand for every 15 students. Seating and participation will be limited to registered participants only.

For additional information, contact Byers at mbyers@aiaacademy.org or at (602) 385-3820