

Sports and Women

Young Joo KIM (Korea)

Traditionally, sports have been in the sphere of men. Since most of those interested in sports, such as sports players and spectators, have been men so far, sports has been a typical domain regarded as unsuitable for women.

With changes in society, however, the number of opportunities for women's social and economic participation has increased, leading to the end of the age in which sports were regarded as being possessed exclusively by men. Nowadays, there are almost no sports that women are not allowed to participate in. Of particular note were the Games of the XXX Olympiad, held in London this year. In the Olympics, a female athlete represented each of the 204 participating countries for the first time in the history of the Games. As a result, the event was highly praised as having achieved gender equality in a symbolic way.

In Korea, sports are still characterized as "strong" and "active." In other words, the idea still persists that sports are a thing related to men. However, even in such a country, the number of women who enjoy sports is gradually increasing, with some female athletes earning national fame and popularity. For example, in Korea, Jang Mi-Ran, a female weightlifter, has been attracting attention and popularity among the Korean people for the past few years. Competing in the over 75 kilogram division at the Olympic Games and world championships, this female athlete won many medals and established world records. With her enormous body weighing 115 kg, she made earnest efforts to establish new records and always did her best in competitions, making many people feel that she was beautiful and cool. Even though weightlifting is not so popular in Korea, her popularity compares favorably with that of Kim Yu-Na, a figure skater attracting national attention.

Currently, the number of professional athletes in Korea has reached 25,439 (Korean Olympic Committee, 2010), 11,346 (44.6%) of whom are women, and 14,093 (55.4%) of whom are men, indicating that there is no significant gender difference in the figures. Of the 25,439, a total of 1,143 are national representatives, 492 (43%) of whom are women, and 651 (57%) of whom are men, with the percentage of female national representatives exceeding 40%.

Thus, it is indicated even by the gender breakdown of professional athletes that women are actively participating in a wide variety of sports categories.

The number of women is gradually increasing, not only in the field of professional sports but also in amateur sports. Women are beginning to participate in sports actively.

Now, let's take a statistical look at the current situation of women's sports activities. According to a survey conducted in 2010 on the actual situation of the Korean people's participation in sports to enjoy their life fully, the percentage of women who do not participate in any sports activities is higher than that of men. Additionally, the number of women who have participated in a sports club or have competed in a sports event in the past is lower than that of men. On the other hand, there are some sports activities where there is a large number of women participants, such as swimming, badminton, and dance sports.

Moreover, currently, the number of women who watch sports, which is an indirect form of participation in sports activities, is increasing considerably.

A good example indicating such a change is the significant growth in the number of female spectators at ballparks over the last few years. Although baseball was once regarded as a sports for men to play and watch, women spectators are beginning to be prominent these days, changing the atmosphere of the ballparks. According to the Korean Baseball



Female baseball fans at a ballpark

Organization (KBO), in 2012, the number of spectators for the season was more than 7 million, approximately 30% of whom are estimated to be women. The most outstanding of these are young female fans, who visit a ballpark, yell out the names of their favorite players, and exhibit their joy and excitement when they watch their favorite players' excellent performances.

In response to the increase in the number of female spectators at their respective ballparks, each baseball team has launched efforts to provide services for female fans and improve facilities for the fans.

As indicated by this, the growth in the number of women who participate in sports leads to not only improvement in women's health and to a higher propensity for women to enjoy sports in their daily lives, but also to the revitalization of sports in a variety of ways.