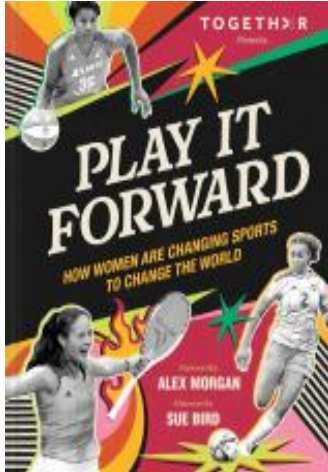


## Play It Forward: How Women Are Changing Sports to Change the World

by TOGETHXR



### About the Book

New from TOGETHXR --- the sports media company that set the sports world on fire with their defining statement "EVERYONE WATCHES WOMEN'S SPORTS" --- this inspiring collection of stories shines a light on the grit, smarts and determination of record-setting and boundary-breaking female athletes around the world and across sports.

PLAY IT FORWARD features 25 inspirational stories of badass women from all corners of the sports universe, curated by TOGETHXR, a sports media company founded by legends Sue Bird, Alex Morgan, Simone Manuel and Chloe Kim. From profiles of professional athletes and Olympians at the top of their game to everyday women putting in the work without a crowd, these are true tales of fierce competitors, dedicated teammates and passionate advocates who are all too accustomed to hearing the word "no." Each story highlights an inspiring athlete or team who is defying expectations and rebelling against inequality in big and small ways, including:

Indigenous women forming a softball team in Mexico

Older women finding friendship and purpose through competitive swimming

A woman mountain-climbing her way out of oppression in Afghanistan

WNBA players developing a voice for social justice and influencing a pivotal election

Incarcerated women playing soccer to prepare for life after release

For sports fans of all ages, PLAY IT FORWARD celebrates and elevates the gutsy true stories of activists and dreamers who are changing the game, and the world of sports, for the better.

### Discussion Guide

1. Title IX is a federal law that prohibits sex-based discrimination in educational programs and activities that receive federal funding. Do you think Title IX has achieved its goals? Were you surprised that, in the wake of Title IX, women still had to fight for better conditions and equipment? How do you think today's world would be different without Title IX?

2. Jordan Marie Whetstone and Rosalie Fish are Native American women who have run marathons under the banner of groups like Rising Hearts and Native Women Running. Rosalie has said, "I just came to terms with the fact that, even if it wasn't my original decision to be this advocate or this spokesperson, that by getting this type of awareness or by having this platform, it's a privilege --- and that I need to utilize it" (p. 25). How can a sport also be advocacy? What are other examples of this?

3. Madeline Murphy Rabb and Ann E. Smith are African American women swimmers who, at ages 78 and 84, prove the adage that "it's never too late." Madeline says, "You don't arrive at a certain age and just sort of stop. There's so much more that you can achieve, and that you don't have to have a life that has just one focus. You can do a whole variety of things. You can just keep going. I want to inspire people to achieve their best and their most" (p. 36). How did a shared love of swimming solidify their friendship? According to the author of this chapter, Lauren J. S. Porter, there's a long history of Black people being hesitant around the water. Discuss the reasons for this that Porter mentions and how Madeline and Ann rebelled against them.

4. The WNBA players known as "the 144" banded together and helped Raphael Warnock, a pastor at the Ebenezer Church, get elected as Georgia's first Black senator --- in direct opposition to the Atlanta Dream's owner, Kelly Loeffler. Do you think owners and players should keep politics off the court? Is that possible? Why or why not?

5. In Kabul, Afghanistan, Farahnaz Ibrahimi "was driven by the opportunity to prove that she could do something no one else in her community had done" (p. 48) --- exposing other girls and women to sports. But when the Taliban took over in 2021, it became clear that no opportunities for sports or education would be available to her or girls like her. Through the climbing group Ascend, she began making a plan to emigrate to the US via Qatar, where she could participate in all the sports she loved in peace and safety. What do you think you would do in her shoes? Think about the immigrants you know. Why did they leave their countries of origin?

6. What do you think of people using Title IX to discriminate against trans athletes, saying that "transgender girls should be kept out of women's sports in order to 'protect cisgender athletes'" (p. 60)?

7. The sports world is severely lacking the necessary protections to ensure that women are treated fairly when it comes to reproductive health and justice, from pregnancy to maternity leave to ongoing parental support. Think about your own experience with parenthood or the experience of friends and family. In what other ways do we see this lack of support for mothers? Was it surprising to learn that, in a 2019 study from UNICEF, "the United States ranks last among forty developed countries when it comes to paid parental leave --- it was the only Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country to offer zero federally mandated paid weeks of maternity leave" (p. 68)?

8. Since speaking out against the war in Ukraine and coming out herself, professional tennis player Daria Kasatkina knew that returning to her homeland was unlikely. She currently lives in Spain with her girlfriend, former Olympic figure skater Natalia Zabiiako. Daria says, "I want to be able to respect myself when I look in the mirror, and if being a good person means I have to sacrifice my home, that's my choice" (p. 75). What would you make that kind of sacrifice

for?

**9.** In the chapter about the Reggae Girlz soccer team, we learn that "Jamaica's national women's soccer team had qualified for the World Cup for the second time in history. They had earned the opportunity to play on a stage that would hold the eyes of the world. Yet their government wouldn't fund their trip" (p. 80). Why do you think men's sports historically get more funding and support than their female counterparts?

**10.** Sue Ann Glaser and Jenn Gibbons founded ROW, Recovery on Water, a rowing team that's "not just any old rowing team --- it's a rowing team for people whose existence has been threatened with cancer" (p. 102). What do you think it is about rowing specifically that helps women recover?

**11.** FIFA, the global governing body for soccer, and FIBA, which governs basketball, were organizations that, until quite recently, banned players from wearing hijabs, the traditional Muslim headdress for women. What do you think was the purpose or intention of such bans? Shireen Ahmed, the chapter's author, states that "forcing women out of clothing is as violent as forcing them into it" (p. 112). Do you agree?

**12.** In the "They Resist" chapter, we learn that women in Iran weren't even allowed to enter the Azadi Stadium in Tehran (ironic, as "Azadi" means "freedom"). Some female fans would resort to sneaking in, dressed as men. Not only did these fans and hopeful future athletes face discrimination, they also faced imprisonment or worse. Twenty-nine-year-old Sahar Khodayari doused herself with gasoline and set herself on fire when faced with the prospect of six months in jail for impersonating a man to enter the stadium. She died from third-degree burns a few days later. Even female photographers were subjected to the same discrimination: "In Iran, governmental policies toward women soccer players, journalists, and fans reflect policies toward women in general" (p.123). What are some ways that women circumvent restrictive policies to pursue their passions?

**13.** Parathlete Alia Issa made history when she qualified for the Tokyo Paralympics: "It was only the second time that a Refugee Team competed at the Summer Paralympics, and Alia was both the youngest and the only woman on the team." She says, "The moment I throw the club, I feel like I have the wings of a bird longing to fly, that I am free, strong, happy, and triumphant over everyone who betted on my failure and bullied me. I am triumphant over myself and my illness" (p. 176). Why is it important for other hopeful parathletes to see competitors like Alia on the field?

**14.** Women who grew up in the Yucatan Peninsula were discouraged by their mothers from "participating in sports --- and even just recreational play --- [which] reflect[s] the sexist attitudes that are deeply ingrained in their Mayan communities. Traditionally, their culture has placed hard limits on what the lives of women can look like" (p. 180). Why is playing sports considered "unfeminine"? Are you aware of any cultures that value and celebrate strong women?

**15.** In her Afterword, Sue Bird states, "True legacy is generational" (p. 211). What do you think she means by that?

**16.** What life lessons can be gleaned from the female athletes featured in PLAY IT FORWARD? What do you think the athletes gain from participating in their respective sports? What role has sports played in your life?

**17.** Which athlete's story did you find most inspiring, and why? What do you think playing sports offers girls and women that they don't get from other endeavors?

# Author Bio

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