

Women's Sports, Women's Health

By Billie Jean King, 2009 recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom

I am a big believer that if you help others, you help yourself.

For the last 35 years, I have been working with the Women's Sports Foundation to create programs and opportunities for young girls and women. We currently have an initiative called GoGirlGo!, which seeks to get more inactive girls active and to improve their overall health and quality of life. Since its inception, we reached almost 1 million girls at more than 14,000 organizations in cities across the nation. And we hope to reach several million before too long.

This is just another example of how health lies at the true core of our future—especially the future of women and our families. Few things illustrate this point better than the progress we are making toward the financial health and independence of women in this country and around the world. It is simply at the very core of our future.

If you have not already done so, I urge you to read Muhammad Yunus' book, "Banker to the Poor." Professor Yunus' concept of teamwork and free enterprise is changing the face of our future. By providing financial resources to women through low-cost loans arranged through The Grameen Bank—now operating both here as Grameen America and abroad—he gives them much more than money. These women gain status in their own communities, confidence in themselves, and become better caregivers for their families. By thinking globally and acting locally, we can—and will—create change in our lives, our communities, and in our homes.

Financial independence provides women with mobility, choices, and new experiences. We are seeing the roots of financial independence create new opportunities. Many of our children are becoming the

first in their family to attend college. Women are seeking leadership positions in public government and overall we are reaching higher and feeling more fulfilled with our life's work.

Beginning in 1968 and continuing until 2007, it took 39 years of patient, hard work for professional women tennis players to obtain equal prize money for women and men at the four major tennis tournaments. And while it was an important milestone, it was not only about the money, it was also about the message. That historic moment is symbolic of what financial independence can do for us as women and for you as a person. If I learned one thing from our experience in securing equal prize money in tennis, it is that we recognized we had a voice and we understood how important it was to use our voice effectively.

While I am so proud of the progress women have made over the years and feel strongly we should celebrate our advancements, we still have a long way to go. With the privilege of being part of a movement come challenges, experiences, and connections that not only fulfill us as individuals but help us make a difference in the lives of others.

So how do we get there? We do it by actively listening to and learning from others. We do it by respecting others (regardless of their position). And we do it by remaining strong in our own beliefs. We do have a voice and it's up to us how we use it.

The 21st century is the century of and for women. We need to take full advantage of what lies ahead of us. Financial independence will give us the tools to be strong, the power to believe, and the right to belong.

Go For It!

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