Title Fight: Quinnipiac has conquered women's rugby despite its own administration

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Title Fight

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It's an unseasonably warm late-October day, and the 22 players on Quinnipiac's reigning back-to-back national championship women's rugby team are squished onto their practice field. You can't tell while they're stretching — there's enough room for the normal toe-touching and quad-pulling — but when the team starts to run through its passes and handoffs, you see that something's off.

A scrum half lobs the ball to a back, and instead of the usual juking left to right, the back always runs north-south. The players are handcuffed by the space here, and they're so used to it they don't even think about running outside.

This is the third field they've used over the last five years. It's got bent goal posts that have already been moved once and likely won't survive a predicted second move. It's also 30 percent smaller than the fields where the student-athletes will play during away games. Quinnipiac's rugby pitch is so inhospitably narrow that it forced the team to play all of this season's games on the road.

It's pretty there, at least. The field is nestled below the hills of Sleeping Giant State Park in Hamden, Conn., which provides a spectacular backdrop of foliage. The rugby athletes all wear Quinnipiac white and blue, offsetting the surrounding trees bursting with fall color.

Senior Abby Cook likens it to Villanova's men's basketball team trying to prep for a repeat by practicing on a halfcourt. Except instead of being cut on the horizontal, Quinnipiac's pitch is cut vertically, a challenge that affects how Cook and her teammates strategize. "We had to adapt by starting all our breakdown plays on the sideline that would typically be started in the middle of the field," Cook says.

The too-small field is only one of the many challenges faced by this young team at a university that historically has faced legal troubles relating to how it manages women's sports. Only two years before Quinnipiac's rugby team was formed in 2011 — the second Division I women's rugby program in NCAA history — the university found itself embroiled in a Title IX case of its own making.

In 2009, the university decided to eliminate men's golf, men's outdoor track, and women's volleyball in an effort to save money. On its face, the moves seemed strictly motivated by cost cuts. But the school's female students already lacked participation opportunities comparable to the men on campus. Quinnipiac quickly learned that it couldn't cut a women's team without a fight.



Five volleyball players and their coach immediately sued in federal court, claiming the school was in violation of Title IX, the 1972 federal statute that prohibits any school that receives federal funding from discriminating on the basis of sex. The following year, a judge sided with the volleyball team. “Quinnipiac University,” U.S. District Court Judge Stefan R. Underhill wrote in July 2010, “has violated Title IX … by failing to provide equal athletic opportunities to its female students.”

The volleyball team was saved.

The school then spent the next few years appealing the decision, losing repeatedly. Finally in 2013, four years after the original suit was brought, Quinnipiac agreed to settle. As part of that settlement, the newly formed rugby team ended up playing a starring role in the court’s demands for how Quinnipiac needed to fix its wrongs. Yet today, the school is still struggling to meet its legal obligations, like providing rugby with an appropriate field.

The settlement was a big deal. “We got a major victory for Title IX,” said former Quinnipiac women’s volleyball coach Robin Sparks at the time. “This isn’t just a win for the female athletes at Quinnipiac, but for all female student-athletes across the country.”

The National Women's Law Center reacted by thanking "the brave young women at Quinnipiac who took a stand," because, its director wrote, "all female athletes at the university will benefit, and schools nationwide should take note of how the legal issues were resolved."

Hope was the result; change seemed to be on the horizon.

It's been over three years now. Gender equity in sports remains an issue at the vast majority of universities and colleges across the country, and how the Department of Education will enforce Title IX under the new Trump administration is unclear.

Deadlines have come and gone, and Quinnipiac has made enough improvements to show progress on paper. But in reality, what progress it has made did not come easily, not even with a courtroom win. The coaches and players on the women's rugby team have had to remain vigilant in the fight for gender equity on their campus. They have continually pushed their school to do the bare minimum of what is required, despite the university having a court order and Title IX mandating those requirements.

Nearly 45 years after Title IX was passed, we are still asking why it is so hard for schools to create gender parity in sports. Quinnipiac, perhaps, offers the perfect case study. If a school like Quinnipiac — relatively small in size, punished for its prior behavior, and under the microscope because of it — struggles to get this right, what does that mean for everyone else and for Title IX as law in practice?



Quinnipiac is far from alone in how it struggles to meet gender equity in sport. Title IX passed in 1972, and as the National Women's Law Center's Neena Chaudhry told SB Nation, "If you look at the numbers at the beginning of Title IX and now, of course we have made a lot of progress and we see more women Olympians now. But I think that sometimes obscures what's really happening at individual schools."

The reality at most universities and colleges is that 45 years later, the battle for equality is still being waged. “We can look at numbers. We can look at cases. We can look at what we hear from people on the ground,” Chaudhry says. “We know there’s still a lot of work to do.”

A recent Vice Sports report, using the data schools must submit to the Department of Education under the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA), found that “many NCAA Division I athletic programs may not be fully compliant with Title IX” because universities have disparity in athletic aid between men’s and women’s programs, low participation rates for women’s sports, or are “overstuffing the rosters of inexpensive sports such as women’s rowing and counting the male practice player opponents used by many teams as female athletes.”

These kinds of inequities exist on the high school level as well, with girls of color receiving the fewest opportunities to play school sports.

Dr. Donna Lopiano, former CEO of the Women’s Sports Foundation, echoes these findings. She estimates that “80 to 90 percent of most institutions are out of compliance with Title IX.” At the least, because the Quinnipiac volleyball players sued, “there is now court precedent in terms of how courts will treat schools who purposefully use these mathematical manipulations, that they shouldn’t be given the fruits of their lies,” Lopiano says.

Under Title IX, to achieve gender parity between men’s and women’s sports, universities and colleges have to meet one of three different requirements: 1) equity in participation opportunities for both men and women; 2) scholarships offered proportionally based on the number of male and female athletes; and 3) comparable overall treatment of women’s and men’s sports (including but not limited to quality and maintenance of locker rooms and facilities, equipment and supplies, access to practice fields, publicity of teams and events, the quality of coaching, academic tutoring, traveling budgets, etc.).

In 2009, when Quinnipiac cut its women’s volleyball team, the administration tried to replace it with competitive cheerleading. Then-Director of Athletics and Recreation, Jack McDonald, said at the time that Quinnipiac would “continue to provide gender-equitable and competitive opportunities for the greatest number of male and female student-athletes in these fiscally challenging times.”

During those times, according to local reporting, Quinnipiac was in the midst of "a building boom," including "a new, $52 million hockey and basketball arena" while also "freezing senior management salaries, ending job searches, and reducing operating budgets by 5 percent."

That same year, John Lahey, president of Quinnipiac, was one of only 36 presidents across the country to make more than $1 million in salary, bringing down $1.8 million in total compensation. To this day, he remains one of the highest paid university presidents in the country.

"80 to 90 percent of most institutions are out of compliance with Title IX."Dr. Donna Lopiano

Title IX allows universities three different checks to prove that they are providing enough participation opportunities for female athletes. First, a school can show that the number of opportunities is proportional to the number of women on campus (i.e. if the full-time undergraduate student body is 50 percent women, 50 percent of the athletic opportunities must be for women.)

Second, it can demonstrate a history of expanding opportunities, though that standard is hard to meet since it requires continually adding sports and teams. Third, a university can prove that it's fully and effectively meeting all the interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex so that there is no outstanding demand for more.

Of the three Title IX requirements, Quinnipiac argued that it was meeting the first –– proportional participation opportunities for both genders — by swapping volleyball for competitive cheering and maintaining equitable numbers in other sports, offsetting the big money men's sports like hockey and basketball with a large women's track and field team.

The court rejected that claim since the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, which oversees the enforcement of Title IX, has never approved competitive cheerleading (or its cousin, acro-tumbling or stunt) as an acceptable sport to count as participation opportunities.

Quinnipiac also argued, like most schools do, that it was meeting participation opportunities for women under the third "fully and effectively" option –– satisfying all the women's demands for more participation opportunities. This, despite leaving a team of volleyball players without a sport to play.

Lopiano served as an expert witness in the case, testifying that the school was purposefully miscounting "the number of participants in every sport in order to misrepresent what the female participation gap really was." Lopiano told the court that Quinnipiac was double- and triple-counting female athletes so that a single woman competing in multiple sports would get counted multiple times. A judge did not agree with the extent of miscounting but ultimately found that Quinnipiac's participation numbers were intentionally inaccurate.

On top of all of this, the court found that the disparities in how Quinnipiac funded men's and women's sports amounted to inequitable treatment. Since universities often can't fund all sports at the elite level, the NCAA allows Division I schools like Quinnipiac to divide teams into three tiers of funding. With its 6,703 undergraduate enrollment, QU must divvy up $26.5 million in athletic expenses among 21 teams spread throughout all three tiers.

The tier one teams — ice hockey and basketball at Quinnipiac — get the most publicity, have the biggest market draw, and receive the most substantial funding, with descending levels of funding in tiers two and three.

The tier system solves budget constraints but easily creates inequity if unchecked. "Title IX says is that it's OK if you want to treat sports differently," Lopiano adds, "but you have to have the same percentage of male and female athletes within each one of those levels of competition. So it would have to have the same percentages in tier one, two, and three for men and women," which Quinnipiac, she says, "didn't begin to do. There were more women in pauper than there were second tier, first tier."

After the court ruled in 2010 that Quinnipiac was in violation of Title IX, Lynn Bushnell, Quinnipiac's vice president for public affairs, released a statement saying that the university would be adding women's rugby as a varsity sport in 2011. In November 2010, it hired Becky Carlson as the program's first head coach.



But by the time it settled in 2013, most of the disparities identified in the original court case remained and so had to be addressed as part of the settlement's consent decree. At its most broad level, the school was not allowed to cut women's teams and had to provide more scholarships to female athletes and better benefits to their teams.

More specifically, the school agreed to "ensure that its Title IX coordinator is trained concerning gender equity in athletics," to "spend at least $5 million to improve the permanent athletic facilities used by its women's varsity sports teams … so that they are comparable to the facilities provided to men's varsity sports teams in the same tier," and are obligated to "elevate two … women's teams to tier one."

The court said that both men's and women's ice hockey and basketball counted as these "sports of emphasis," but that Quinnipiac needed to also elevate women's field hockey and another women's sport, which it had to determine within six months of signing the decree, to tier one. Over the last three years, it has elevated women's soccer and men's and women's lacrosse to that level. Additionally, as part of the decree, the school is not allowed to retaliate against anyone who helped with the litigation.

Women's rugby was mentioned repeatedly throughout the decree. The team was 2 years old when the school agreed, via the decree, to "upgrade the quality and condition of the rugby pitch to ensure that it is safe for practices and competitions." The pitch should be "the maximum dimensions allowed by the International Rugby Board [100m x 69m]," level, "not contain holes, dangerous rocks, or other hazards," and be "maintained to a quality comparable to the varsity soccer fields."

The team would get at least nine full scholarships, have a full-time head coach and full-time assistant coach, and "compete in at least two-thirds of its regular season against NCAA varsity rugby teams." Quinnipiac also promised to "make a good faith effort to promote women's rugby as a varsity sport." The decree promised similar treatment for the women's track and field team.

Both sides agreed on a "referee," Jeffrey Orleans, to oversee the implementation of everything laid out in the settlement. Orleans' job is to implement and monitor compliance, provide annual written updates to the court, and make recommendations to Quinnipiac for it to comply properly.

"Quinnipiac has made substantial compliance progress during the course of Decree."Jeffrey Orleans

The entirety of the decree was in effect through June 30, 2016. The referee will remain in his position, though, until June 30, 2018, because the school has until then to make all of the improvements to facilities on campus. But once the referee is gone and the consent decree is no longer the guiding document, Title IX will still be in effect and Quinnipiac, under federal law, must continue to strive for gender equity among its student athletes.

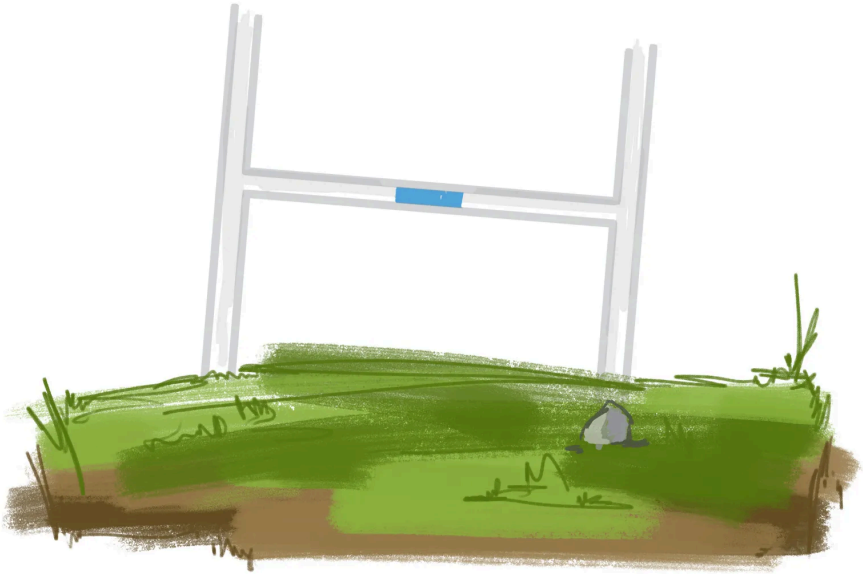
After the case was settled, Lahey went around to the various schools on campus to discuss the overall state of the university which, on the heels of the landmark settlement, included a discussion of how Quinnipiac would become Title IX compliant.

Associate Professor of Journalism Rich Hanley was at one of these forums and recalls that Lahey felt the judge in the case had used wide judicial discretion. "[He] mentioned broadly that it was the judge's interpretation of Title IX that led to the decree. I think he thought it was open for debate in terms of the decree. He was obviously going to follow it," Hanley stresses.

In his final full report in July 2016, Orleans wrote that "Quinnipiac has made substantial compliance progress during the course of Decree," noting the women's rugby championship in the 2015-2016 season as one example of the women's teams' "recent competitive achievements." He conceded that "changes and additions to the senior administrative staff, and development of that staff's advertent focus on Title IX are still in progress."

As for the rugby pitch, Orleans wrote that Quinnipiac had pursued the city of Hamden's permit processes "consistently" but that it had taken longer than expected. The school originally predicted that the new facilities for rugby would open in fall 2015; those have been pushed back to fall 2017. He also wrote that as he had "expressed in prior Reports ... Quinnipiac has fulfilled its Decree commitments for supporting women's rugby," including "promoting the growth of women's rugby as a Division 1 varsity sport."

When the bar is low, any step over it seems like a success. Many felt that the bar was on the ground at Quinnipiac when the original Title IX suit was filed in 2009. Progress has been made, as the court-appointed referee attests. But frustrations still abound for the Quinnipiac women's rugby team over the seven-year battle to get the university to meet its legal obligation.



Back on its too-tiny field on that late fall day, the team starts off practice with a number of stretches, led by the captains.

Coach Carlson walks among the players, encouraging them and pushing them to do more than a purely physical workout. As stretches turn into plank poses, Carlson quizzes her athletes on general trivia — everything from the Civil War to what the fastest fish is (It's the sailfish, for the record.) Carlson is an acolyte of the DiSC coaching method — Dominance, influence, Steadiness, Conscientiousness — which uses individuals' personalities and personal assessment to achieve the greatest success on and off the field.

She credits the methodology for creating a team culture which vaulted a team of walk-ons from a 3-6-1 record in the program's first season to 15-1 in its second. It's also made Carlson an internet target for relying on assumptions regarding athletes' behavioral traits.

Dressed in navy track pants and a gray Quinnipiac T-shirt, her blonde hair pulled back from her face, Carlson is making a point. She wants her athletes to know she's as invested in making sure their brains are working as hard as their bodies.

After warm-ups and a quick 10-minute scrimmage, the team gathers around Carlson, who wants to go over their loss to Central Washington two days before. "Why weren't we effective during the last game?" she challenges. After a bit of contemplation, the players begin calling out responses that analyze themselves as much as their play.

"It feels weird to say that — we lost," one admits.

Carlson has the team run through one of the plays that cost it the game against Washington. As the athletes fall into formation, Carlson runs right along with them, just as passionate, just as invested.

They win their next game against Vermont's Castleton University by an astonishing 213-0.

A month later, in November, Quinnipiac takes the rematch against Central Washington— the national championship game — 46-24. Like in its last title game, Quinnipiac is the road team because its miniature pitch isn't suitable for hosting championship games.

"Women's rugby was forced to give up their field because 'it's just women's rugby'"Bill Roskopf

QU's women's rugby team played all but one game of the 2016-17 season on the road (The lone "home" game was at Southington High School, located a half-hour away.)

"I recruited fast, outside wings that use the width of the field to put points on the board," Carlson explains. "But during our practice, you would see that players would be making shorter passes and are more bunched together," due to the lack of space. "We had to change our game plan basically. We've always been a team that scored our points from the outside. If you look at this year, we scored our points from the inside. It's statistically proven."

The lack of a regulation-size home field not only limits the team's strategy, but it has impacted the support it has seen from its university fan base, a blatant disregard for the portion of the consent decree which requires Quinnipiac to increase the dimensions of the pitch to the maximum dimensions allowed by the International Rugby Board.

Bill Roskopf's daughter Emily is a sophomore on the team, and he's astounded by what he sees as the school's sexist treatment of the rugby team.

"Women's rugby was forced to give up their field because 'it's just women's rugby,'" he says. "If there was a NCAA men's rugby team on campus that used the same game field, there is no way the university would have asked them to play a 100 percent road schedule. Of course there is no way to prove this, but it's my hunch. If the university built a new ice hockey arena, they wouldn't ask the team to play 100 percent on the road while they built a new arena … no way that would happen."

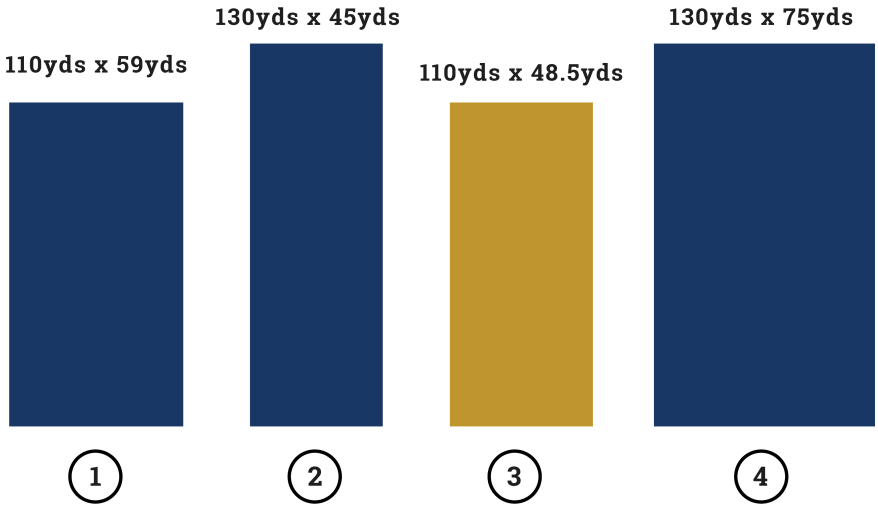
Emily still has two more years to play for Quinnipiac, so she is passionately invested in whether or not her team has a home field to play on. Rugby is everything to Emily and the main reason she's attending Quinnipiac. "[Rugby] defines who she is and how she spends her time," Roskopf says of his daughter. "Emily was heavily recruited by most top-tier college rugby programs. Because she knew she wanted to play in college, she only considered schools with NCAA or Division 1 rugby programs."

When it came to choosing Quinnipiac, Emily says that a big part of her decision was Coach Carlson. "When I was on my recruiting trip, I was really impressed by the team culture and expectations. Coach Carlson knows what each and every one of her athletes is capable of, and she pushes them to be the best that they can be."

It was a fight to even get that space to themselves. Before the consent decree, during the team's first season (2010-11), it was given time on Quinnipiac's intramural field 1. The space (which was the largest one the team has been given to date at 39.6m x 13.7m) is considered a "rec field," and any club team that reserved a timeslot was able to play on it. Carlson recalls leading practices and intramurals squads were converging on the sidelines, waiting for rugby to finish. The field was also not level and contained holes, rocks, and other hazards that made practicing on it difficult.

The following year, the team was moved to a smaller field 2 than the first, at 33.5m x 15m; another with holes and rocks. The team had to share this field from 2011 to 2013, despite Carlson frequently emailing and taking her concerns to the athletic department in person.

"I pointed out to the lawyers that we were the only varsity team sharing our field with intramurals, and the lawyers included it in the decree," Carlson says. Finally in 2013, the school dedicated the field solely to women's rugby, a stipulation specifically prescribed by the consent decree.



The second field was still too small to be used to host games, and Cook remembers that this field was particularly perilous. The International Rugby Board, the NCAA standard, requires a 5m safety minimum around a pitch's edges that the field barely accommodated before the grass ended. "[If] you tackle[d] people out of bounds," Cook explains, "we would literally tackle them into a gravel road if we went too far."

After winning its first national championship, the team was relegated to the smallest field yet 3: a 33.5m x 14.8m space that was formerly used for men's soccer practice. Due to the size, it is unusable as a regulation rugby field.

The school's plan is to eventually give women's rugby the 36.6m x 21.3m men's soccer field 4 after necessary renovations are made. Quinnipiac has recently been given the OK from the town of Hamden to start construction on a new 1,500-seat stadium for the soccer and lacrosse teams. But the school had a difficult time with its application, facing resistance from Hamden's residents, many of whom oppose building a stadium so close to Sleeping Giant State Park.

One of the main reasons that the men's soccer team is in need of a new field is because the current one — which women's rugby will supposedly inherit — has flooded several times in the past year due to poor drainage. In 2013, when Carlson was told by the university that it planned to repurpose the soccer field for rugby, she met with John Copela, QU's head groundskeeper, to discuss the potential move.

According to Carlson, Copela told her that "it would not be a smart move to put rugby on the soccer field without renovations including full resodding and drainage installed due to flooding and heavy foot traffic crossing to other athletic fields." When Carlson asked Copela if he had any insight about what the future plans were for the rugby team, she says that he advised her that he had seen "nothing that included rugby up to that point."

"The university complies with Title IX and is committed to the equitable treatment of all male and female student-athletes, which includes women's rugby"Greg Amodio, director of athletics

When Carlson noted these concerns to QU Vice President Mark Thompson via email in September of 2013, he said he would do some research and get back to her, but never did. According to Carlson, when she met with him to initiate some follow-up after her email, he stated that neither he nor the athletic department "were aware the soccer field required any upgrades."

Yet, a year earlier in 2012, an article for *The Chronicle* reported that "... several times over the past few years the field has flooded and forced both the men's and women's teams to cancel their upcoming matches." But McDonald commented to the paper that the men's soccer field was part of their "master plan" and that fixing the flooding problems would be addressed.

Still, the flood-prone pitch, which needs resodding, would be an upgrade. "It's better than the field that I have played on the last three years in the sense that it's gonna be regulation-sized and it's going to be able to seat 50 or so people" in metal bleachers that run alongside the field, she says.

But she's also realistic about the state of that field and what it will take for it to be up to par. If "they replace the grass and stuff, it might be," she hesitates, "I don't know. It's not what the soccer team is going to get up in the new construction area because they're going to have gorgeous stadium seating and locker rooms and just great stuff."

SB Nation reached out to Quinnipiac University's Athletic Director Greg Amodio, Deputy Director Sarah Fraser, Associate Athletic Director of Sports Information Ken Sweeten, and President Lahey to learn more about why the school has taken so long to fulfill many aspects of the consent decree as they relate to women's rugby. However, we were not given a chance to ask any questions and instead were given the following statement by Sweeten on Amodio's behalf:

"The university complies with Title IX and is committed to the equitable treatment of all male and female student-athletes, which includes women's rugby," said Greg Amodio, director of athletics.

Despite this statement, the women's rugby team still does not have an adequate field. Recent graduate Tesni Phillips remembers when she began playing for the women's rugby team during her freshman year and how the team had to share a locker room with women's cross-country, while the men's ice hockey and basketball teams had multiple locker rooms for themselves.

After taking the next two years off from rugby, Phillips returned for her senior year to find that rugby finally had its own dedicated locker room. "It was still really, really small," says Phillips, noting that it was just one of the things that made it seem to her that the administration wasn't particularly interested in looking after the team.

"It's about the size of, like, two living rooms and with a bathroom attached that has three showers, two stalls, and three sinks," Cook says of the team's current locker rooms. It might have 35 lockers, she guesses, but probably more like 30. Since the team is currently made up of 22 players, "that locker room fits my team now alone." But a full rugby roster is 30 athletes, and as it stands now, Cook says, "If we carried 30 kids, there's no way we would have all fit in that locker room."

There are other challenges, too. The consent decree has specific language that outlines QU's responsibility to promote the sport both internally and at large. But Carlson and her players have been demoralized by the lack of support for their athletic success.

When the men's hockey team made it to the coveted Frozen Four (but lost out to North Dakota, coming in second), it was celebrated all over the school, from a congratulatory school-wide email sent out from Lahey to a variety of Frozen Four spirit gear for sale at the school store.

Compare this to when the women's rugby team *won* its first national championship in 2015.

It was if the team didn't even exist. Plans for a billboard congratulating the team contained misspellings and never materialized. The most recognition it received, according to Carlson, was when QU administration gave the rugby team gold XXL T-shirts, although the acronym of its league (the National Intercollegiate Rugby Association) was misspelled.

There was no congratulatory email from President Lahey, and the school store didn't sell any rugby championship gear, driving Carlson and her team to set up an online shop themselves where they sold over $2,500 worth of merchandise in a weekend.

"If we carried [the full squad of] 30 kids, there's no way we would have all fit in that locker room"Abby Cook

In the *Quinnipiac Chronicle*'s "Latest With Lahey," a Q+A with the president, from April 20, 2016, President Lahey was told that "the rugby team posted on social media, upset that Lahey had emailed the student body about Quinnipiac making the Frozen Four when he did not send an email when rugby won its national championship." He was then asked what he would say to the women's team. His answer deflected the direct question and did not answer why he did not acknowledge the team's championship win:

> "We have 21 sports and rugby is still an emerging sport, actually, but I love them all. When they win a national championship, I think that's great, but I would say, again, the amount of media coverage–it's not a question of my recognizing a team, I recognize all our teams that do well and I call coaches after games and talk with them–so the point that I really was communicating about the men's hockey is the amount of national coverage that they gave the university....I try to look at not just the team's athletics in terms of their success on the field, or on the ice or on the court, or wherever it is, but what it is doing to extend the good name of Quinnipiac far and wide. And I think if you use that as the standard and that's what I was really thanking the team for and congratulating them."

We asked Carlson if she had ever heard from President Lahey personally, either after a regular season game or the national championship ones. She told us that she has received "zero [calls] to date."

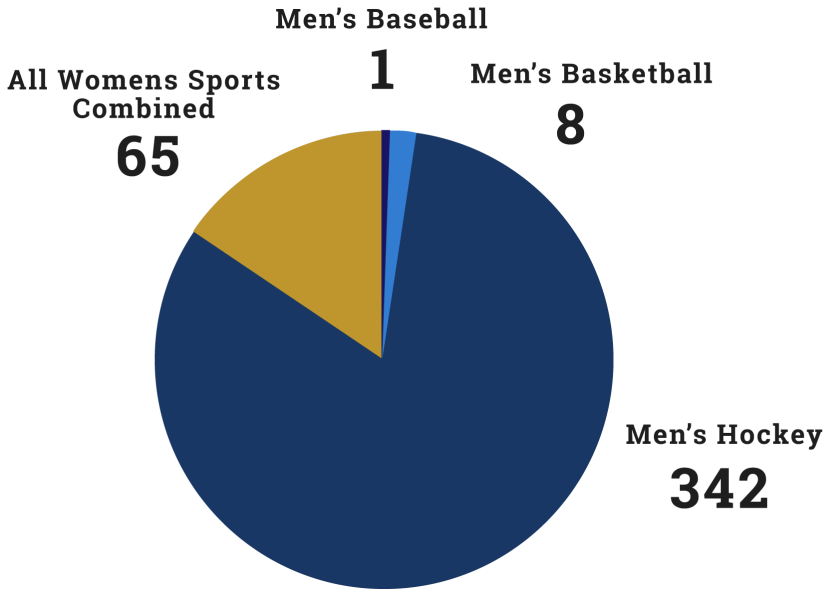
According to the consent decree, "Quinnipiac will make a good faith effort to promote women's rugby as a varsity sport and to encourage other NCAA Division I schools to sponsor women's rugby as a varsity sport with the goal of establishing a Division I varsity women's rugby athletic conference and a NCAA varsity women's rugby national championship." In other words, the school's promotion and support of women's rugby, both within the QU community and outside, is not optional.

Back in 2014, Carlson sat down with Jon Alba, then a reporter for Q30 Television, a student-run television station. She spoke at length about the issue of gender inequity when it came to media attention. According to Carlson, the rugby team had an in-person meeting with Sweeten and student media reps around the same time this video clip was released. Carlson says that they did listen to the team's concerns, but that, in her recollection, they responded by saying that "... women's sports were of no interest to their readers and that people care more about men's ice hockey and basketball."

The students who attended the meeting were tired of being told that nobody cares about women's rugby and that was the reason it lacked sufficient media coverage. Carlson's athletes came to the meeting prepared, pointing out the unequal representation of men's and women's sports on campus.

What the rugby players asked for was straightforward: They wanted equal coverage of women's sports at the school, along with equal content within the school paper's pages. The athletes reminded the media reps that this was a Title IX issue and that they should and could actually make a difference with how they covered sports at the school.

The athletes didn't stop there. In May of 2016, rugby player and junior Flora Poole wrote an op/ed for *The Quinnipiac Chronicle* running the numbers when it came to the school supporting the various athletic teams via social media.



"In the spring 2016 semester alone, the handler behind Quinnipiac University's Twitter account dedicated 415 tweets and retweets on Quinnipiac athletic teams and their achievements. Three hundred and forty-two were dedicated to men's ice hockey, eight to men's basketball, one to men's baseball and 65 to all women's sports combined. Leading up to its national championship, rugby received four tweets over a period of 14 days promoting its championship. Men's ice hockey, on the other hand, received 46 tweets in a period of three days covering their quarterfinal against Cornell."

Poole's op-ed is poignant, especially in the aftermath of the Title IX case, where Quinnipiac legally needs to be doing better. When we spoke, Poole noted that perhaps her strong words, which called out Quinnipiac for placing men's athletics above women's, have had a positive impact.

"In terms of administration, there has been — from the athletic department — more acknowledgement of our games this year. It's little things really. This year they have been very good with the Athletics Instagram; every single game they've promoted us and have done a photo of the day."

The rugby team created the Fill the Silence campaign last year in response to the lack of coverage. Players posted numerous snapshots and statistics on their own social media pages that pointed to the fact that stories and information on women's athletics on campus are sorely lacking, especially compared to the men. Cook notes that things have gotten better, but her point of comparison shows just how low the expectations of school support are.

Cook also says that this year, the team received announcements for game days, something that wasn't always released on time.

"The athletic department has been better this year," she says. "They haven't messed up our names in our write-ups, which I know is a really low standard, but take what you can get at this point."

When the team won its second championship in a row, President Lahey still did not send a campus-wide email, though he did acknowledge the team in a Facebook post. The school paper is covering rugby games with more frequency, and the athletic department seems to be stepping up its sports information game as well. When the team won its second national championship, the Quinnipiac Bobcat's homepage included photos and a lead story.

Quinnipiac held a pep rally for women's rugby in December, where the school handed out T-shirts to the student body and feted the team for winning its second title. President Lahey did not attend.

"The athletic department has been better this year ... They haven't messed up our names in our write-ups"Abby Cook

Professor Hanley, who had been present when President Lahey addressed faculty after the consent decree was issued, is also an Athletics Council chairperson for QU and noted in a phone interview that the team deserves better treatment than it's getting. "Rugby is national champion team. I think they should be treated like national champions. I think those athletes and their coach deserve the red carpet treatment for all they've accomplished. They deserve a first class facility."

Junior Jessica Maricich transferred from Carlson's alma mater in Illinois, Eastern, which had its rugby program suspended in 2015 due to injuries. She says her passion for the sport and for athletic equity only grew when she began playing for QU and Carlson.

"We don't get the support I believe we deserve," says Maricich. "But the team culture and those behind Coach Carlson, we fight for things we deserve. Even though we're accepting what we have, and making the best of the situation, we're also fighting for what we deserve — which is something I really like with this team."

Carlson's advocacy may have emboldened her players, but she worries that it's also put a target on her back. She filed an affidavit with the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights in early 2017, charging Quinnipiac with discrimination and retaliation.

Her affidavit states:

> "In stark contrast to its treatment of male coaches, the University failed to provide me and my team access to necessary benefits, resources, and support services — such as adequate practice and competition fields, training programs, equipment, recruitment support, and access to media and publicity – that I needed to carry out my job as head coach."

Carlson says that when she pushed the administration for these things, she opened herself up to baseless accusations and retaliatory discipline, which impacted her both professionally and personally. As she writes in her complaint:

"... this discriminatory treatment has required me to work more hours with significantly fewer resources, making my job more difficult, forcing me to work more hours for less money, benefits, and personal time relative to male coaches, and reducing my chances for competitive success."



There are not many court cases like the one that led to changes at Quinnipiac. Suing is expensive and contentious. Coaches don't want to lose their jobs for speaking up, and players don't want to risk their playing chances since they are only in school for a few years.

Lopiano says that most schools aren't interested in doing the work to get gender parity because schools want their "men's sports program at the highest competitive level" and so they say, we "don't have the money to give [women] the same opportunity." Unfortunately for these schools, though, Lopiano adds, "there's no financial excuse for not complying with federal law."

Moving forward, it's hard to say what will change overall, either at Quinnipiac or universities in general. Chaudhry notes that no action is taken on gender equity in sports unless someone speaks up; the Department of Education is not out actively looking for violations. Quinnipiac's struggles to comply with Title IX remain a problem at other programs.

For instance: Earlier this month, the *Seattle Times* investigated the reported numbers of women who row for the University of Washington and "found dozens of women who appear to have not been on the women's rowing team, but whom the UW counted as crew participants in reports to federal officials over the past several years."

In the end, it will continue to be up to the student athletes and their parents to hold the schools accountable. "[They] are often the ones who are vigilant," Chaudhry says. "The more they know, the more they can try to make sure their schools are providing equal opportunities."

The fight might be growing even more arduous. There is currently uncertainty about how the Trump administration — and specifically, the Department of Education, under Secretary Betsy DeVos — will handle Title IX. Most of the discussion has been about the problem of campus sexual assault, but the overall concerns that the DOE will not enforce gender equity under Title IX bleeds over into sports, too.

As Lindsay Gibbs recently reported, outside of the main concern that the Office for Civil Rights within the DOE will stop enforcing the law, there are fears about the scope of the law dwindling.

"If DeVos follows through on her plans to privatize education and hold charter schools receiving federal funds to different standards than public schools, as she indicated she would in her confirmation hearing, this could mean that fewer and fewer schools are even required to follow Title IX guidelines at all," Gibbs wrote.

Still, as the law has been interpreted for years now, Chaudhry says, “schools have affirmative duties. They have to go out and ask their female students; they have to look around and see what’s popular in the geographical region … they can’t just sit back and say, ‘well, we haven’t heard anything from anybody so I guess we’re OK.’”

Beyond that, she adds, “they also have to have a process by which people can request new sports or request that sports that might be club sports be elevated to varsity sports.”

The fight for gender equity in sports at Quinnipiac over the last eight years — both in court and on the ground at the university — is indicative of this overall struggle. It was hard to get the legal victory, and once that was secured, it’s been difficult to get the consent decree enforced to the point of Carlson filing her recent complaint with the Office for Civil Rights.

This is now all thrown into relief against the backdrop of the new Trump administration. Indications suggest that the enforcement of Title IX will not get easier, and perhaps might even become much harder if the Department of Education does not prioritize it as it had done during the last presidential administration.

The hard and troublesome truth of this issue, though, is that female athletes are not asking for much. They want a place to practice free of rocks and potholes, a space large enough to run plays and host games. They want adequate resources like locker rooms that have sufficient space for teams and enough trainers to monitor their health. Often, they are simply requesting that their athletic departments and university administrators care about them and the sports they play — and show it.

Cook, who loves rugby and has given four years of her life to playing the sport for Quinnipiac, gets to the heart of this issue:

“I want [the administration] to be involved in the growth of our program. They’re so disaffiliated from all things rugby that it’s no wonder our student body doesn’t support us. You don’t even talk to us or know what we’re doing.”