

Roe v. Wade overturn threatens women's athletics



COMMENTARY

Elena Alexander /
Sports Editor: Print

Politico leaked a Supreme Court draft opinion May 3 which revealed the Supreme Court privately voted to strike down Roe v. Wade. This leaked document suggests that the court might officially rule to overturn Roe v. Wade at the next relevant case, throwing abortion rights in peril.

With 28 states projected to immediately ban or severely restrict access to abortion in most cases if the court overturns Roe v. Wade, the decision would impact over half of the women in the U.S., per The New York Times. More specifically, athletes would face severe and unique consequences.

Athletes depend on their bodies for their work. They need to have total control to train and compete to their best ability. A pregnancy and following maternal care, on the other hand, is strenuous on the body and can cause unintended physical and psychological

stress. Thus, a pregnancy can be a death sentence for an athletic career.

Not permitting the choice to have an abortion puts women athletes at constant risk of their careers abruptly ending for simply being sexually active. It is not just to force an athlete to end their careers and abandon their goals they have worked towards for years in order to go through with an unwanted pregnancy.

Restricting abortion access will also lead to a decline in the quality of women's sports as a whole. As

highlighted in a petition to the Supreme Court from September 2021 defending supporting abortion rights through the lens of athleticism, restricting abortion access will force many women to carry through a pregnancy and sacrifice their careers. This means athletes that have the potential to raise the bar for their sport may be

swept off the radar. As a result, losing abortion access also represents a gender inequality as men, who have an equal role in initiating a pregnancy, do not have to make the same sacrifice.

Some may argue that women athletes who do not want to become pregnant can simply improve their birth control. Condoms are 98% effective and the pill is over 99% effective when used correctly, per the NHS. While this means multiple birth control methods used together would correlate with a higher ef-

fectiveness rate, accidents do happen.—According to WebMD, the effectiveness of birth control only holds when the birth control methods are used consistently and correctly. Small incidents such as missing a day of the pill or a condom unnoticeably breaking could jeopardize the efficacy of birth control and increase the risk of

pregnancy without the woman ever knowing. Even if a woman who does not want to get pregnant is diligent with birth control methods, they can still get pregnant, and should not be punished for these accidents while being sexually active.

Along with slip-ups in birth control, women can also get accidentally pregnant through sexual assault and rape. According to the CDC, one in five U.S. women have experienced rape.

With the combined risks of sexual assault and failing birth control, unintended pregnancies will undeniably occur among women athletes. Not allowing them the option to have an abortion forces them to walk away from their aspirations and years of hard work. It is completely understandable for a woman to choose to walk away from their sports careers to go through with an unplanned pregnancy. However, they should be able to make that choice for themselves, and not be forced into carrying through with the pregnancy because they are unable to access an abortion.

There is a need and demand for abortions among women athletes, proven by the abortion rates in the demographic. A survey by the BBC in 2020

among British sports-women found that 4.1% of respondents said they had gotten an abortion due to the effects

a pregnancy would have on their sporting career. This percentage is over double the standard abortion rate of the U.K., which stood at 1.82% of women in 2020, according to U.K. Government statistics.

Although some states will continue to allow abortions if Roe v. Wade is overturned, women in poverty and women of color living in pro-life states will be disproportionately affected. Women in poverty are less likely to be able to travel and take time off work to access an abortion in another state, and women of color make up the majority of those seeking an abortion, according

to The New York Times. Thus, many women athletes, particularly those of color and lower income, in states dominated by pro-life officials would have

to give up their careers for accidental pregnancy.

Ultimately, an athlete's sport is not only a career,

but also a key part of their identity, purpose, relationship with their body and outlook on life. Consequently, placing women athletes subject to a constant risk of needing to give up their sport and control over their body in order to fulfill a pregnancy they do not want is an assault to the livelihood of women's athletes and women's sports as a whole.

For the sake of preserving the dignity and quality of women's athletics and athletic careers, and among many reasons outside of sports, it's vital that the Supreme Court does not decide to overturn Roe v. Wade.

Restricting abortion access will lead to a decline in the quality of women's sports.

A pregnancy can be a death sentence for an athletic career.