



ALICIA PELTON

MAKING SPORTS EQUITABLE FOR WOMEN

WHEN ALICIA PELTON WAS INDUCTED into the Janesville Sports Hall of Fame in 2011, she reflected on her career in sports as a high school, college and, eventually, professional athlete. She reflected on the people that helped her along the way, but also the walls she knocked down and the difference in opportunities had by her and the other inductees, who were mostly male. She spoke about these differences in her acceptance speech.

Afterwards, as people approached her with their own stories of inequity in sports, she realized that, although her years as a mom of athletes, the wife of a professional athlete, a coach, a physical education teacher and a mentor, were meaningful and well-served, she also knew she needed to do something bigger.

So she took a leap and decided to get her master's degree in sports leadership. As she dug into her course work, she

realized that every review, every paper and every study was focused on men. For her capstone project, Pelton decided to reach out to women across the state of Wisconsin to get their viewpoints on the barriers faced by women in sports. Within two weeks, 135 women responded, from college athletic directors, to bike shop owners, to Girls on the Run organizers. But how could she turn these voices into action?

"I decided I wanted to start a nonprofit in Wisconsin and be the connective tissue for female athletes, all the way up through leadership," she says of her organization, Athletic Leadership Alliance.

Through public speaking, leadership summits, and mentoring programs around the state, Pelton has developed a four-pronged model for changing how society values females in the sporting world: Raise girls in a more equitable way so they feel valued next to their male peers in sports.

Then engage them to be mentors for younger athletes. Hire them into leadership roles, and finally, retain them.

"By building their confidence and knowledge base early, females become more hireable and have the confidence to apply for a job in the male-dominated world of sports," she says. "If you don't talk about the inequity, then it becomes status quo," she says.

In 2018, Pelton will build on the work that Athletic Leadership Alliance has accomplished in the last few years, especially working with Madison Metropolitan School District through coaching breakfasts and leadership programs for young female athletes.

"I'm not about you're wrong, I'm right. I'm about here's the issue, here's how people are feeling, here are some options. Let's move forward," she says. "That's how you start to build a community of people and begin to make change." —Emily Leas