

In Praise of Women's Basketball

Michael Sean Winters | Apr. 9, 2014 Distinctly Catholic

Last night, the UConn Lady Huskies won their ninth national championship. They defeated a very fine Notre Dame team that had been previously unbeaten all year but which simply could not find their rhythm all night while the Lady Huskies were in the groove from the opening tip-off.

If you grew up in Connecticut, as I did, women's basketball has been a big thing for a couple of decades. The games were broadcast on Connecticut Public Television and my parents could be found in front of the TV set watching every game. Like Tennessee, which was a powerhouse in women's basketball for years, in Connecticut, the devotion of fans to the women's game was remarkable and the team would routinely play before sell-out crowds at Gampel Pavilion on the campus at Storrs or at the Civic Center in Hartford.

When I first started watching, the women's game was not as fast as the men's game. Not anymore. If you watched the NCAA tournament this year, you will have realized that some teams do better, and others worse, in transition, that the ball flies up the court for teams that wish to play a transition game, and that even in a half-court game, the ball movement compares favorably with anything you saw in the men's NCAA tournament.

There was a time when the women's teams were not as athletic as the men. Not anymore. They drive to the basket, leap for the rebounds, steal the ball, with all the quickness and agility that one sees watching the guys. If anyone thinks that women are incapable of executing with the precision of a men's team, they would need to explain how last night, repeatedly, UConn found an open player breaking into the paint, dumped off the ball, and scored a relatively easy two points.

There was a time when the women's teams did not have the awesome three point shooting capability of the men's teams. Not anymore and, actually, not for some time. But, any doubters were answered at the three-point contest held before the Final Four when Louisville's Shoni Schimmel won the contest over Luke Hancock from the Louisville men's team. Last night, UConn did not have, but did not need, its usual three point shots from beyond the arc, but they got to the final game in large part because any one of a number of players on the team can make those long range shots.

There was a time when the women's game was not as physical as the men's games. Not anymore. Although all the players on the UConn Lady Huskies seem like very nice young women, if I were to find myself in a cage match with anyone of them, I would not be betting on myself. They absorb charges, dive for balls and hit the floor, box out with their elbows, and generally push each other around with sufficient force and vigor that I get tired just watching.

I am delighted that my team won last night but I was intending to write this column whether they won or lost. Watching women's basketball has kept my heart warm on many a cold night during the interminable winter that has finally given way to spring. It is not a good game, it is a great game. The level of competition has increased significantly. In the 1990s, there was a battle between Tennessee and Connecticut but in the past decade a host of programs have emerged as powerhouses from Stanford to Texas A & M to Notre Dame to Louisville to Duke to Maryland to Baylor. UConn was dominant this year, to be sure, and they look to be very strong next year, but

you can no longer take a victory for granted. The Lady Huskies had to fight their way to this national championship.

I think college basketball, men's and women's, is simply the best game around. It is competitive. It has all the energy of youth. The athleticism of these young people is as remarkable as their presence of mind. When I was twenty-two, I was a mess. These kids handle pressure like veterans and they are kids, just kids. And, the women's game has, in a relatively short time, caught up with the men's game in all the qualities that make basketball such a fun game to watch. The season is done, and for someone who grew up fifteen minutes from Storrs, it could hardly have ended better. But, win or lose, next year I will spend many a night watching these talented young men and women do things I sure couldn't do. And, I am but one of thousands upon thousands of fans who can't wait for the next season to begin. You might say our devotion is religious.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/20/2017 - 23:37): <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/praise-womens-basketball>