Justine Blainey: “She Shoots! She Scores!”

Justine Blainey went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada to win the right to play on a boy’s hockey team:

I was a traditional little girl when it came to sports and hobbies – figure skating, ballet, tennis, arts and crafts – until the roaring cheers at my brother David’s hockey games led me to discover my first enduring passion, hockey. I fell in love with the swish of the ice, the bumps, and being able to say “this puck is mine, and using my mental and physical power to make it so.

Hockey school and practicing with my brother’s team came next. Soon his coaches asked me to cut my hair and call myself Justin so that I could play for them. I declined saying, “take me as I am.” David stood by me, left defence to my right, reminding me that there is no reason a girl should have to fight to do whatever a boy can do. As more hockey organizations refused to let their coaches sign me because I was a girl, controversy swirled – everyone had an opinion, mostly negative.

People spat on me, harassed me, grabbed at me, and insulted me. “She must be sleeping with all those boys,” they said in arenas. Coaches threw my bags out of dressing rooms – “No girls on my ice!” Even some of my friends turned against me: my girlfriends told me that they would no longer play or talk with me because their parents said that I was a troublemaker.

I quickly learned how much better men’s teams were with respect to the availability and level of play, length of season, range of age categories, ice time, sponsorships, and scholarships. I originally wanted to play hockey for the fun of it, but a sense of fairness and a desire for equality for women soon became an important part in my fight. Lawyer J. Anna Fraser volunteered her service to help me win the right to play with male teams, and a series of five court cases began. The cases seemed interminable, so to pass the time I joined a girl’s hockey league. To improve my skills I practiced with boy’s teams, played exhibition games incognito, and went to hockey schools.

The battle wasn’t easy, but it was important. With every physical attack I experienced or threat I received, I realized that females need to be physically and mentally tough in order to stand up any threats. Hockey taught me to get up when I was knocked down. I realized that equality of access and opportunity should be a fundamental right for every person, not just in sport, but in all aspects of life. The court battles fostered my determination to fight for a society where we can all work and play as equals.

The law may uphold equality but sometimes the rest of the world is slow to change. I continue the battle for equality through public speaking and private encouragement. And when I play hockey with my young daughter, practicing shooting, bodychecks, falling down, and jumping up to try again, we can always hear that triumphant cry: “she shoots! She Scores!”

Analysis Questions:

1. Although Blainey could have played on girl’s teams, why do you think that she wanted to play on a boys’ team?
2. Why was Blainey’s case an example of an issue concerning “equal protection and benefit of the law”?
3. “The law may uphold equality, but sometimes the rest of the world is slow to change”. Defend or refute this statement.
4. Should there be integrated sports events in which men and women compete with, and against, each other? Why or why not?