Modifying Flag Football for Gender Equitable Engagement in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Flag or touch football is a popular activity unit in American secondary physical education curricula. However, unlike other sports its stigmatization as a masculine-typed activity and frequent inequitable distribution of game play opportunities at the skill positions (e.g., receiver, quarterback) results in the marginalization of female students. This article synthesizes the literature concerning the teaching and learning of football in order to make a point that without major modifications, many female students will not enjoy football nor will they improve their skill execution and tactical understanding. The article continues with organizational, instructional, and game modifications to promote equitable engagement. Lastly, results of university physical education methods majors' perceptions of the modifications are reported. At the conclusion of the football unit, males more strongly believed that teaching coeducational flag football would be more problematic; however, they also believed more strongly that the game must be modified in such situations and now knew more methods for doing so. Females also more strongly believed that the game must be modified and additionally felt more confident of successfully teaching it. At the start of the unit, female majors—as compared to their male classmates—rated themselves as less confident of successfully teaching football, rated themselves lower in skill level and knowledge, and more strongly believed that female students would be intimidated by differences in size, speed, and strength of male students. These differences were no longer statistically significant or had dissipated by the end of the unit.

In the updated national standards for physical education (National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE], 2004), there is no overt mention of flag football in either the student expectations or sample performance outcomes at each grade level stratification even though other sports are specifically mentioned. There is no reputable source for determining how prevalent flag football is in the secondary physical education curriculum in the United States; however, web-based searches using various search strings reveal that many middle and high school physical education programs across the country include flag football as a stand alone unit or as part of a team sports course. This article synthesizes research literature on attitudes toward and participation patterns in team sport in general, and football specifically, in order to frame and legitimize concerns that NASPE may harbor toward flag football. The article continues with modified game structures, rules, scoring, and equipment, which when collectively and appropriately applied will make flag football a more inviting sport to female students. Results of questionnaires used to assess the efficacy of the proposed curricular modifications toward changing university physical education majors' perceptions of flag football and its teaching in secondary schools are shared and reinforce the argumentation presented in the article.

Literature Review

Based on several decades of research evidence, it is reasonable to conclude that without game modification, teaching during games, and re-organization of game structure and players, team sports, especially football and its variants will often result in miseducation. In coeducational settings, status quo curricular and instructional methods may serve to reinforce approach and avoidance behaviors for dominant male students and less-skilled students (often girls), respectively. In this section, evidence is synthesized to paint a picture of what (team) sports—with football highlighted—mean to students and how they are viewed in order to set up the remaining sections of the paper, where modifications that can enhance equitable and enjoyable engagement in flag football are proposed and assessed.

School contexts

Outside of school, children voluntarily play team sports, hopefully influenced by positive school experiences. In contrast, school physical educators present curriculum—unless offered as an elective—that all students are exposed to regardless of interest. Based on a survey of 180 schools in nine states, team sports compose the majority (52.1%) of the curriculum with individual sports (39.1%) trailing (Napper-Owen, Kovar, Ermler, & Mehroff, 1999). Because of the prevalence of team sports in physical education and students' prolonged exposure to them as they matriculate, it is important to review students' perceptions of, preferences for, and participation patterns in these sports (with references to football when available).

Student perceptions. The labeling of an activity as gender (in-) appropriate (i.e., stereotyping) is observed as early as the lower elementary grades. Using the Physical Activity Stereotyping Index, Ignico and Mead (1990) found that in Grades 1-4, boys more than girls categorized activities by gender; an exception to this finding was noted in a classroom where a teacher purposefully used strategies to promote mixed-gender groupings. Using the same instrument, Pellett and Harrison (1992) found that males and females stereotyped male-appropriate activities (including football) more strongly than female-appropriate activities; however, boys were more flexible than girls in their evaluation of female-appropriate activities. They concluded that typing activities is dangerous because it deters the holistic development of students (i.e., students consistently select one set of activities imbued with extreme qualities—aggressiveness vs. aesthetics, interdependent vs. individual performance). Pellett (1994) extended her analysis, which revealed that sport stereotyping decreased into adolescence but she attributed the finding to the context under study—coeducational high school physical education with an emphasis on lifetime activities. A more rigorous and recent study portended a more ominous note for students' gender typing of sport activities. Among adolescents, 62 percent of secondary school students (n = 365) perceived football to be a sport for boys, more than 30 percent higher than the next team sport that was listed and included in many physical education curricula (hockey; Rimer & Visio, 2003).

Nearly 20 years ago, Thomas and Thomas (1988) noted that in the physical education context, biological factors alone could not explain sex-based differences in physical performance and reproached readers to admit that because of lower expectations "girls participate, perform, practice, compete, and behave exactly as society expects" (p. 227). Therefore it is important to believe that football is a sport that female students should play and play well and that modifications to promote equity are necessary to overcome the stigma of football as a male-appropriate activity.

Student preferences. Disagreement by gender over preferred activities within the physical education curriculum has been frequently reported in the literature. Rice (1998) reported that while high school boys and girls preferred team sports similarly, boys preferred football first, while girls selected softball first. (Football was not among their top three.) In Utah, junior- and senior high

boys ranked football second and fourth, respectively, while it was not among girls' top 10 activity preferences (Strand & Scantling, 1994). In the mid-south, 37.6% of males expressed a strong interest in flag football, whereas only 15.7% of females felt the same way (Greenwood, Stillwell, & Byars, 2001). In southern California, football was selected second out of 37 activities by ninth-grade boys; there was a 17% difference in the percentage of boys and girls who selected football as belonging in the curriculum; and football was ranked last as an activity that should be taught coeducationally (Hill & Cleven 2005).

Based on these studies, while male and female students may similarly like team sports, a schism over (flag) football exists, which needs to be redressed if participation is to be equitable.

Student participation. In the early 1980s, Pat Griffin conducted field ethnography to investigate students' team sport (seventh-grade flag football was one of the units) participation patterns during physical education at one semi-rural New England middle school. Her seminal work yielded a classification scheme that is still in use today: Boys' were typed as machos, junior machos, nice guys, invisible players, or wimps (Griffin, 1985a), and girls as athletes, JV players, cheerleaders, femme fatales, lost souls, or system beaters (Griffin, 1984). In coed football games, junior machos would deride females who were participatory and as successful as they were, yet nice guys treated girls as equal teammates, especially if they were somewhat skilled (Griffin, 1985a). In the same context, girls categorized as athletes would aggressively hold their own and excel against boys, yet the majority of girls were JV players, cheerleaders, and lost souls and engaged in giving up, giving away, hanging back, and acquiescing (Griffin, 1984). For flag football, Griffin qualified these coping strategies: giving up (e.g., never complaining about not touching a ball or being assigned to a peripheral position), giving away (e.g., declining the opportunity to run for a touchdown or go out for a pass), hanging back (e.g., hesitant attempts to run for a pass, skipping turns in drills or field rotations to avoid contact with the ball), and acquiescing (e.g., allowing boys to poach passes or ignore her when open for a pass, following boys' orders of what position to play). A decade later, similar observations were made in the case of Australian touch, whereby boys played the more powerful/high volume positions, ridiculed girls' participation, and contacted the ball more (Curnow & Macdonald, 1995).

Based on these reports, while there is a wide range of participation styles within both genders, certain styles are predominant with a few students exerting undue influence on the whole class. Unless girls are natural athletes and without curricular and teacher interventions, most girls will not equitably participate in flag football and initial neutral or negative attitudes about the sport may be strengthened. Griffin (1985b) found that teachers' acceptance of the status quo regarding the conditions associated with coed team sport were tied to their recognition of problems, sense of power to effect change, and motivation to intercede. For students of physical educators without awareness, resolve, and a curricular toolkit to address the issues addressed in the preceding sections, NASPE's omission of it in its revised standards is merited.

Modifications to Promote Equity

Ennis (1999) presented a thorough accounting of the implementation of the Sport for Peace curricular model, which infuses Sport Education with "conflict resolution, care and concern for others, and self and social responsibility" (p. 36). Her intention was to equitably and peaceably engage girls in team sport beyond the psychomotor domain, and to include tactical play and intra- and interteam affiliation. During the intervention, "in a few situations, in which the boys did not play cooperatively, teacher manipulation of the curriculum structures, game rules, and class policies required boys to make these changes" (p. 42). It is these actions that are now addressed in order to assist teachers of coed flag football—

regardless of whether they adopt the Sport Education or Sport for Peace models—to more comfortably create conditions, which lead to more equitable engagement.

Equipment

The basic equipment requirements for a flag football unit are fairly standard: balls, flags, field markers, and pinnies. Because the hand-size of pubescent boys may (begin to) exceed that of girls, and because a football's spiral flight is partially predicated on the ball snapping off the index finger, it is vital that the ball be appropriately sized for the thrower's hand. Footballs come in various sizes: PeeWee (#4), Junior (#6), Youth/Intermediate (#7), and Regulation/Official (#9). It is recommended that balls of varying sizes be supplied and that student quarterbacks throw with a ball that they can grip with 3-4 fingers across the laces while forming the letter C around the ball with their thumb and fingers. Additionally, the Hands-on™ ball, which comes in sizes #6 and #7, displays the hand positioning on the ball for right- and left handed throwers.

Tackling

In traditional flag football a tackle is recorded and the play called dead when one flag is pulled. Additionally, leaving one's feet to tackle is precluded as a safety hazard. Incorrect tackling (i.e., pulling the flag out instead of ripping it down, pulling with spread fingers) can lead to severe finger injuries. To elude tackles, ball carriers may resort to ducking, dodging, darting, and spinning. At times, two or more tacklers may simultaneously converge on a single ball carrier. Combined, these facets of tackling may scare off many female students when playing coed flag football. Thorough instruction in and progressive practice at tackling should be first conducted. Players can pair up and engage in stationary flag grabbing, in which students alternate pulling off the flags of their partner who turns and ducks to delay the tackle. Next, the pairs can play keep away in a small bounded area, with the idea of moving around to delay the loss of both one's flags before switching roles of tackler/fleer. The pairs can then move to more authentic contexts. For example, a progressive task sequence may involve (a) a ball carrier announcing in which direction he or she will make a specified type of cut so as to prepare the tackler; (b) followed by not announcing the direction of the cut; and (c) finally, introducing a third player who passively shields the ball carrier so as to delay the tackler and provide an opening for unobstructed forward movement. After these drills, modifications to game rules can be made to facilitate equitable engagement. Some ideas include: (a) males may only tackle males while females may only be tackled by other females but may also tackle males; and (b) a play is considered live until a female ball carrier has lost both flags, with only one flag allowed to be removed during any attempted tackle (i.e., no double flag pulls allowed). In the first variant, a restriction on who tackles should free up females who are inhibited due to safety concerns and is also sound practice from a liability standpoint. In the second variant, female ball carriers should gain more yards, which tactically shifts the focus away from male players in short-yardage situations or isolation plays.

Player Number and Rotation

Flag football employs seven players, four fewer than traditional football, and thus predisposes players to more on-the-ball touches and off-the-ball guarding and blocking. Yet, it is still possible to avoid truly participating (i.e., Griffin's male invisible players and female cheerleaders) unless fewer players or player rotation mandates are required. In a 4 vs. 4 game, from two to all four offensive players could be in contact with the ball on a given play (2 = snapper and quarterback who keeps the ball and runs; 3 = snapper, quarterback, and receiver who attempts to catch or receives a handoff for a running play; 4 = situation 3 with an ensuing lateral or some complex gadget play). Instead of or in addition to reducing player numbers, a rotation system can be used such that

students rotate in and out of high volume positions. In general, players rotate one position to the right with the furthest player on the right rotating to quarterback and quarterback rotating to the far left position. When-to-rotate options include: (a) after each play, (b) upon each new possession, (c) after a set number of plays (e.g., 5, 10), or (d) after a set time increment. Option (b) is the easiest for students to self-enforce and preserves game momentum.

Tactical Game Play

The idea behind tactical game play for equitably playing flag football is to expose players to tactical problems that encourage the involvement of more players and reinforce using traditionally under-utilized players (e.g., less skilled players, females). This is accomplished through teaching games for understanding vis-à-vis games modification (see Griffin & Butler, 2005; Morris & Stiehl, 1999). Three such games are next presented as examples for implementation and stimuli for readers to come up with their own ideas.

Bonus yards. This game works best if played on a marked field (i.e., yardage markers painted directly on the field or cones set up every 5 yards); however, a student's elongated stride length can be substituted for counting off bonus yards. Games should be played on a sufficiently large field (e.g., 50×30 yard field, 10-yard long end zones) so as to prevent clustering and yield bigger gains. The modification in the game is geared toward involving female players in plays that gain yards. Doing so results in bonus yards being added from the spot of the tackle.

1. In its simplest version, a female player who carries the ball on a positive-yardage running play or passes/receives the ball on a positive-yardage passing play, earns her team a 5- and 10-yard bonus, respectively.
2. Additional permutations can be added (i.e., on a passing play, female thrower/male receiver or female thrower/female receiver yields two additional bonus yardage quantities).

Tactically, a female running the ball when her team is near a first down or the goal line or her involvement in a pass play near the 10-yard line, would yield first downs or touchdowns. In the previous scenario, the team would realize that it could score passively. For example, if a female receiver caught a pass and was tackled at the 9-yard line, when the 10 bonus yards are added, her team has crossed the goal line and scored.

Running still. This game is a variant of ultimate football (ultimate Frisbee set to flag football rules).

1. Any given play is extended (more yardage is gained/more players touch the ball) by stipulating that the person in possession of the ball may not be tackled provided he/she is not moving.
    a. Thus a quarterback can stand in the pocket or roll out and come to a stop without being tackled.
    b. Rushers or receivers who are about to be tackled can stop their progress and essentially become a new quarterback.
2. Once a tackle is recorded, the next down ensues.
3. On a given play, the last complete pass marks the new line of scrimmage if an ensuing pass is incomplete.
4. The tackled rusher's mark also indicates the line of scrimmage and interceptions can be returned and a change of possession occurs.
5. Variants of this game involve: (a) how closely to guard a still player, (b) how long a still player may retain possession without throwing/moving, and (c) modifying the rule of running still to allow for any sideward or backward movement to afford protection from being tackled.

In this game, no bonuses are awarded for overtly employing certain players; however, the

context of extending a play creates a situation whereby more female players can be involved on offense and defense. By standing still, the tackle, which for some is a deterrent from playing, is avoided and buys the player in possession more time to properly execute the throwing skill and make a good decision (i.e., whom to throw to).

Double flag grab football (DFGF). This final game example challenges students to move the ball downfield without losing flags and to strategically use certain personnel (player involvement variable). Generally, when a player in possession of the ball loses a flag, play is dead and a new play is restarted. The object of the game is for a team to score as many times as possible before losing all its members' flags. (Earlier in this article, a modification that female players may be considered tackled if they lose two flags was suggested. If incorporating this modification into DFGF, female students' flag belts should be able to accommodate four flags.)

1. A small-sided team retains possession of the ball until all team members have lost their flags.
2. Players who have lost both flags turn into blockers but may not further touch the ball.
3. The offensive player with the final flag starts the play with the ball in hand and can only run it.
4. There is no defensive double-teaming.
5. An incomplete pass, fumble, or interception results in the defense selecting a player on the offense to lose a flag.
6. Maintaining possession can be based on standard flag football rules (four downs to gain 20-yard increments) with the game ending when one team has exhausted all of its flags during a possession.

Because not losing flags is a key to this game, offensive skill execution must be sharp and conservative decisions made from a tactical standpoint. For example, in most traditional coeducational flag football games, boys would be observed dominating the number of on-the-ball touches and throwing long balls, which are more difficult to complete. In DFGF, such play would be discouraged: (a) An incompletion results in a player losing a flag (the defense would be expected to select the most skilled players first), (b) a scrambling quarterback looking to throw long passes runs the risk of being sacked and permanently losing a flag, and (c) the completed bomb is usually downfield and does not afford the receiver the same opportunity to get out of bounds as down-and-out and slant-out plays, and thus the receiver would permanently lose a flag upon being tackled. Instead, shorter and safer pass plays along with well-guarded rushing plays are encouraged and reticent female players are involved earlier so as to mix up personnel usage and save more skilled players for crucial and later plays.

Quantitative Assessment of Modification Effects

Within a sport applications course devoted to teaching preservice physical education majors how and why to modify outdoor sports for secondary students, a 6-day flag football season structured around the Sport Education model is included. Coeducational teams of up to six players are formed at the start of the semester and student skill level and knowledge of the sport varies widely. The season unfolds through tactical game play presented by instructor and students alike, and equipment, routines, and games are modified in order to create and model an inclusive learning environment.

At the beginning and end of the flag football season, as part of regular class activities, students complete an anonymous questionnaire composed of 14 Likert-scaled (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 4 = *Strongly Agree*) items addressing issues that might surround teaching flag football to a coeducational high school class (Table 1). The exit questionnaire version includes the same statement but with the preface, "As a result of this unit." Additionally, it includes a free response question which asks what game and which modified rule or routine best

addressed equitably engaging students (Table 2). The questionnaire was composed with collegial input: The colleague possesses a doctorate, is a nationally board certified physical educator, and is a lecturer in our department while on sabbatical from her high school teaching job of 9 years, where she teaches coeducational flag football. While the questionnaire has face validity, it is specifically used for the improvement of the course and thus has not undergone formal validation procedures.

During a recent semester, 23 students (14 males, 9 females) completed both introductory and exit questionnaires. Their responses were analyzed for measures of central tendency, within-group (pre- to posttest for males and females, respectively) differences, and between-group differences (pre- and posttest by gender). No correction in p value for multiple comparisons was made due to the purpose of the analysis—to identify changes in attitudinal trends within and between groups toward teaching coeducational flag football as a result of engaging in a season of the sport (much as their own students would do in their future careers).

Within-group differences from pre- to posttest on a question-by-question basis were analyzed through two-tailed dependent t tests and between-group differences between genders were analyzed through two-tailed independent t tests on a question-by-question basis (Table 1). Where findings were significant, an effect size was calculated: Owing to small sample size, significant t values were always accompanied by very large effect sizes (i.e., $ES > 0.8$ = large; Thomas & Nelson, 2001). Free responses were tallied and grouped by gender (Table 2). For the sake of clarity, when specific games were mentioned the overarching tactic or modification was used instead of the game's name.

Results

For descriptive data, any value below 3 indicates some level of disagreement with the statement (Table 1). Statements that evoked some level of disagreement on the pretest regardless of gender included: (a) "Female students do not like flag football," (Statement 2); (b) "Teaching flag football to a coed class would cause problems," (Statement 4); (c) "I think female students would be nervous about physical contact with male students," (Statement 5); (d) "I think male students would have more, well developed skills than female students," (Statement 7); (e) "I know methods and games by which females can play more safely and actively," (Statement 11); and (f) "At this time, I am confident I can successfully teach flag football to a coeducational high school PE class" (Statement 12). By posttest the level of disagreement had abated, such that students, regardless of gender, only disagreed with Statements 2 and 4. Additionally, students now disagreed with "Flag football is a stereotypically male sport" (Statement 1).

Between pre- and posttest, three and four statistically significant within-group differences for males and females, respectively, were noted. As a result of the football season, male students agreed more strongly that "Teaching coed flag football to a coed class would cause problems" (Statement 4); that "Flag football must be modified for it to be taught successfully in a coeducational setting" (Statement 10); and that "I know methods and games by which females can play more safely and actively" (Statement 11). Female students also agreed more strongly with Statement 11 at the time of the posttest and felt more strongly that "At this time, I am confident I can successfully teach flag football to a coeducational high school PE class" (Statement 12).

Statistically significant between-group differences (four pretest, one posttest) were also noted. On the pretest, females felt more strongly that "I think female students would be intimidated by differences in size, speed, and strength of male students" (Statement 6). (The difference between genders was even stronger—based on effect size magnitude—for this statement on the posttest.)

Table 1. Comparison of Pre- and Posttest Scores on the Flag Football Questionnaire (*N*=23; 14 Males, 9 Females)

Statement	Pretest *M* (*SD*) Males	Pretest *M* (*SD*) Females	Posttest *M* (SD) Males	Posttest *M* (SD) Females	Within-group differences	Between-group differences
1. Flag football is a stereotypically male sport.	3.00 (0.96)	2.89 (1.05)	2.43 (0.94)	2.22 (1.20)	*ns*	*ns*
2. Female students do not like flag football.	1.86 (0.66)	2.00 (0.87)	2.14 (0.53)	2.33 (0.87)	*ns*	*ns*
3. When given a choice, female students would prefer another activity to flag football.	3.00 (0.55)	2.89 (0.78)	2.86 (0.66)	3.00 (0.87)	*ns*	*ns*
4. Teaching flag football to a coed class would cause problems.	1.79 (0.80)	2.44 (0.73)	2.57 (0.76)	2.56 (0.88)	Males ($t = 2.80$, $p<.05$, ES=.98)	*ns*
5. I think female students would be nervous about physical contact with male students.	2.64 (0.74)	2.89 (0.78)	2.79 (0.58)	2.78 (0.53)	*ns*	*ns*
6. I think female students would be intimidated by differences in size, speed, and strength of male students.	2.64 (0.50)	3.11 (0.33)	2.71 (0.61)	3.33 (0.50)	*ns*	Pretest ($t = -2.71$, $p<.05$, ES=1.06) Posttest ($t = -2.66$, $p<.05$, ES=1.09)
7. I think male students would have more, well developed skills than female students.	2.86 (0.66)	2.56 (1.13)	2.93 (0.73)	3.11 (0.93)	*ns*	*ns*
8. I think female students might be more passive than male students during game play.	3.07 (0.47)	3.11 (0.60)	3.21 (0.58)	3.33 (0.87)	*ns*	*ns*

Note. Items 1-12 are scaled on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) scale. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; *ns* = non significant; ES = effect size.

Table 1 (continued). Comparison of Pre- and Posttest Scores on the Flag Football Questionnaire (*N*=23; 14 Males, 9 Females)

	Pretest *M* (*SD*)		Posttest *M* (SD)		Within-group	Between-group
Statement	Males	Females	Males	Females	differences	differences
9. I think male students would try to "hog" the skill positions (e.g., quarterback).						
	3.07 (0.73)	3.33 (0.71)	2.79 (0.97)	3.00 (0.87)	*ns*	*ns*
10. Flag football must be modified for it to be taught successfully in a coeducational setting.						
	2.64 (0.74)	3.11 (0.93)	3.36 (0.63)	3.78 (0.44)	Males (t = 2.50, p<.05, ES=.97)	*ns*
11. I know methods (i.e., organization, rule changes) and games by which females can play more safely and actively.						
	2.21 (0.89)	2.22 (0.97)	3.50 (0.52)	3.44 (0.88)	Males (t = 4.84, p<.001, ES=1.45) Females (t = 3.77, p<.01, ES=1.25)	*ns*
12. At this time, I am confident I can successfully teach flag football to a coeducational high school PE class.						
	2.86 (0.95)	1.78 (0.83)	3.36 (0.63)	3.33 (0.71)	Females (t = 5.27, p<.001, ES=1.87)	Pretest (t = 2.88, p<.01, ES=1.19)
13. On a scale of 1 (lowest) – 10 (highest), rate your overall skill level for playing flag football.						
	7.79 (1.85)	5.56 (2.46)	7.68 (1.88)	5.94 (2.24)	*ns*	Pretest (t = 2.21, p<.05, ES=1.06)
14. On a scale of 1 (lowest) – 10 (highest), rate your overall knowledge of flag football strategy and tactics.						
	7.43 (2.41)	5.11 (2.32)	8.11 (1.96)	6.72 (2.14)	*ns*	Pretest (t = 2.31, p<.05, ES=.98)

Note. Items 1-12 are scaled on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) scale. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; *ns* = non significant; ES = effect size.

Table 2. Student Identification of Games, Routines, and Rules that Promote Equitable Engagement.

Statement: Identify the modified game, rule or routine that best addressed equitably engaging players regardless of gender or skill level.

Responses	Male *n*	Female *n*	Total
1. Rotating players one position to the right after every play.	7	6	13
2. Providing differential point scoring options based on field position relative to the endzone.	7	2	9
3. Barring passing plays (i.e., every play must be a rush).	6	2	8
4. Awarding bonus yardage for females making positive yardage gains either rushing, passing, or receiving.	3	2	5
5. Making play continuous (i.e., no downs—elements of ultimate style invasion games).	3	2	5
6. Barring a player in possession of the ball from being tackled as long as that player is at a standstill.	3	1	4
7. Shortening and narrowing the playing field.	2	1	3

Males felt more strongly that "At this time I am confident I can successfully teach flag football to a coeducational high school PE class" (Statement 12) and also on items involving sport specific skill level (Statement 13) and knowledge of strategy and tactics (Statement 14).

Free responses to identify the modified games, routines, and rules that best promoted equitable engagement are listed in order of frequency in Table 2. Rotating players one position to the right on every play was cited most often and afforded all students the opportunity to play quarterback and wide receiver multiple times during game play. The second most cited response refers to awarding points for scoring passes or rushes based on proximity to the scoring area (i.e., modified endzone). With this modification, students who could not pass as far, reliably catch, or consistently rush for positive yardage before being tackled could still earn points for their team based on performing these skills successfully under modified success criteria. The third most cited response involved taking away passing plays. Male students tended to look for other male students and throw long passes (often incomplete) in modified games that allowed for passing. With this rule, coupled with the awarding of bonus yards, if a female gained yardage, purposeful attempts to include female students ensued (particularly near the goal line where bonus yards could automatically advance the ball into the endzone for a score). The awarding of bonus yards for female involvement (described under tactical games earlier in the article) was termed "Gravy" by the students because it was an extra bonus on top of positive yards gained. Tied in response frequency with the bonus yards modification was making play continuous. In these game forms, downs were eliminated in favor of continuous play, whereby the ball could be continuously advanced forward any number of times until the ball carrier was tackled or the play was called dead (modification of the Running Still game described under tactical games earlier in the article). Students felt that this option allowed for more players to be involved on any one play and over the course of a game. The sixth most frequently cited modification was barring a player in possession of the ball from being tackled, which potentially lengthened the duration of a play and the yardage gained. For example, a quarterback who stopped moving could not be sacked; and a receiver or rusher in possession of the ball and who came to a standstill could not be tackled. This modification mitigated concerns over males' size and speed advantage related to the threat of being tackled. A motionless ball carrier had more time to make and execute an appropriate tactical decision and coupled with the continuous play modification increased opportunities to respond, yardage gained, and scores (described as Running Still under tactical games earlier in the article). The final modification cited concerned field dimensions; having a smaller field allowed female students a greater chance to record more tackles on male ball carriers because both players had less space in which to run.

Discussion

Findings from the analysis of questionnaire responses reveal useful data for understanding how and to what degree modifying coeducational flag football has on students' attitudes. Physical education majors believed that flag football is an appropriate sport to teach to females, and that although it may not be their first choice, they would not be afraid of physical contact with male students. While female majors' feelings regarding gender differences in size, speed, and strength were reinforced as a result of the unit, they were extremely confident that they could better teach flag football and knew methods for promoting equitable game play. Males' view that the sport must be modified for it to be taught coeducationally and that they too learned methods for promoting equitable game play were welcome resultant insights of the flag football season. Finally, while males' self-rating of knowledge of and skill in flag football was higher than females, this difference was only significant at pretest. By

poststest, female students' knowledge and skill levels had increased to a far greater degree than males'.

The data presented herein are acknowledged as not representative of purposeful research and studies should be conducted in actual secondary school settings to determine the efficacy of modification interventions on student participation in and perceptions of coeducational flag football.

Concluding Remarks

Of all the team sport invasion games physical educators teach, flag football can be the hardest to teach coeducationally because of its stigma as a male-appropriate game and concerns for safety and discrepant sport-related fitness levels. While the beginning section of this paper identified concerns that readers may feel legitimize the exclusion of flag football from the curriculum, we need not throw it out altogether. Modifying flag football in the ways described in this article help us envision flag football as a sport in which females' play is valued and vital to team success and thus befits many of the NASPE Standards.

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