

# The best way to overcome barriers? How about jumping them?

## A special section on women and sports



*Donna de Varona, President, DAMAR Productions, Inc. (left); Nawal El Moutawakel, Vice President, International Olympic Committee (center); and Beth Brooke, Global Vice Chair – Public Policy, Ernst & Young (right)*

DONNA DE VARONA IS A PIONEER IN athletics and broadcasting. A 1960 Olympian and world record holder at 13, she captured two gold medals in swimming four years later at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. In 1965, at the age of 17, she became the youngest and one of the first women TV sports broadcasters. In 1974, de Varona helped establish the Women's Sports Foundation and as its first President pioneered the fight for increasing athletic opportunities for women in high school, college, and the Olympics through her work as a consultant to the U.S. Senate on Title IX and Olympic legislation. In 1991, she earned an Emmy for a Special Olympics story. De Varona was also Chair of the U.S.-hosted 1999 Women's Soccer World Cup. Inducted into the Seneca Falls Women's Hall of Fame and the U. S. Olympic Hall of Fame, she is the recipient of the NCAA's Theodore Roosevelt Award. Named one of the most powerful women in sport, de Varona serves on the executive board of Special Olympics International and is a member of the International Olympic Committee Women and Sport Commission. She is also Chairman of the International Swimming Hall of Fame and serves on the U.S. Department of State's Empowering Women and Girls Through Sports Council. An ambassador for Tony Blair's Beyond Sport initiative, de Varona is a UCLA graduate and President of DAMAR Productions, a marketing, consulting, and events advisory company. ●

NAWAL EL MOUTAWAKEL WON THE inaugural 400-meter hurdles during the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics and made history as the first Moroccan and the first African-Muslim woman to capture an Olympic gold medal. Her win inspired Morocco's King to declare that all girls born on the day of her victory should be named Nawal. He appointed Nawal to his cabinet and subsequently she became Morocco's first woman Minister of Sport. In capturing Olympic gold, Nawal helped generations of young girls and women transcend thousands of years of traditional barriers that had kept women off of the playing fields of sport. After retiring from athletics, through which she won additional prestigious titles, she emerged as a powerful and popular sports leader. She currently holds positions on the International Association of Athletics Federations and most recently was elected Vice President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). She is also Chairperson of the IOC Evaluation Commission for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. A Title IX beneficiary, she is a member of the Iowa Sports Hall of Fame. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Physical Education. ●

BETH BROOKE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SHAPING Ernst & Young's position on public policy and has become one of the profession's most prominent voices in the public policy arena. She is also Ernst & Young's global sponsor of diversity and inclusiveness efforts and a prominent advocate in the world for the benefits of inclusive leadership and inclusive growth. Brooke is regularly named by *Forbes* magazine as one of the world's 100 most powerful women. She joined Ernst & Young in 1981 and has since held a number of leadership roles including U.S. National Director of Tax Advisory Services and Global and Americas Vice Chair for Public Policy, Sustainability, and Stakeholder Engagement. Brooke worked in the U.S. Department of the Treasury during the Clinton Administration. She played important roles in the health care reform and Superfund efforts. She is a Certified Public Accountant and a Fellow, Life Management Institute. Brooke has a B.S. degree from Purdue University where she played women's intercollegiate basketball. She is a member of the inaugural class of the Henry Crown Fellows of The Aspen Institute and serves on its board of trustees, and is a member of The Committee of 200. She also chairs the board of The White House Project. ●

THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING – OR ON THE TRACK FIELD, IN THE SWIMMING POOL OR ON THE basketball court. In 2012, we celebrated the 40th anniversary of Title IX, a U.S. law that requires gender equity for males and females in every educational program or activity that receives federal funding, including sports. Four decades later, research affirms that providing sport in combination with educational opportunities has reaped huge benefits for female athletes, including a greater likelihood that they will graduate from high school, earn postgraduate degrees, and make more money. In fact, a 2001 survey of executive women by MassMutual Financial Group and Oppenheimer Funds revealed that 81 percent of them played sports growing up and 69 percent said sports helped them to develop leadership skills that contributed to their professional success.

## Barriers remain

The fact remains, women around the world still face formidable constraints: lack of schools and access to technology; legal prohibitions; social conventions that inhibit female participation in the workforce; government restrictions on small businesses and outdated approaches to risk and credit; and other social, legal, cultural, and financial norms and practices that make it difficult for women to go to school, seek employment freely, benefit from their earnings or manage their lives in other ways.

Here are three interviews with outstanding women who speak from experience: women who are leaders in sports can shape attitudes toward women's capabilities as leaders and decision-makers in other sectors, especially in traditional male domains.

Gender equity has long been a serious and smart business. More corporations should invest in the enormous untapped potential of women, which is the most significant economic growth engine of the next decade and beyond.

## Be inspired

For more information on women, sports, and leadership, please visit [ey.com/highachievers](http://ey.com/highachievers). ●



BEFORE THERE WAS BETH BROOKE – Ernst & Young Global Vice Chair of Public Policy and a mainstay on the *Forbes* annual list of the World's 100 Most Powerful Women – there was Beth Brooke, basketball player on the Big Ten Purdue University intercollegiate team. “It’s hard to overemphasize what being an athlete has done for my career,” she says. “Certainly it turned me into a team player at an early age – and in business, that’s pretty much everything.”

The platform of sports as a springboard to corporate leadership is one of her passions as she travels the world championing women's personal and professional advancement. She learned this firsthand as one of the “firsts” throughout her career where she had very few female role models as she climbed the corporate ladder.

### Speaking the language

From day one, she says, being an athlete gave her an innate ability to speak the language

## It's all about the team – in sports and in business

### Beth Brooke

of the men who surrounded her in the-then Big Eight accounting world she joined in the early 1980s. While her job performance was getting her noticed, she never felt intimidated when working alongside male higher-ups in the C-suite. “Sports gave us a language in common,” she explains. “I was very comfortable in ‘their’ world because we had the common bond of athlete-to-athlete. I loved basketball, softball, golf, talking about sports – it was very genuine and heartfelt on my part.” She recalls with a laugh at one point forming both an Ernst & Young co-ed softball team and a corporate softball league while at the Indianapolis office. “Both were great for building relationships and it was fun for me, too.”

The bond over athletics allowed her to relate directly to powerful men, serving as a way to respond and connect with them on a genuinely human level. “You understand the pressure, you know what training and focus it takes to compete, you feel the confidence and hard work required to win,” she explains. “Countries that don’t support or block women from competing in sports are doing their economies a great disservice by neglecting women’s training as athletes – and that carries implications for building a new generation of business leaders. Women are not just a demographic segment; they are the largest emerging market in the world. Over the next decade, women carry the potential to wield enormous influence over politics, sports, business, and the global economy.” To this end, Beth notes that she is thrilled that the London Olympics has set a new record

for gender equity – with all 205 participating nations sending at least one woman to compete.

### Going the distance

Another bonus from sports that helps Beth cope with the demands of her life as Global Vice Chair is the capacity for endurance. Long hours, days spent on an airplane getting from one time zone to the next, and decisions that need to be made quickly – any of these can take its toll. “I find that my athletic training has prepared me mentally for the corporate marathon,” she says. “Sure, I get tired, but I am familiar with the feeling of exhaustion, so I know how to stay focused even when I am physically drained. That’s what sports trains you to do, and staying power on the road and in the office is definitely a requirement for anyone in a global business profession today,” she says.

Ultimately, sports is all about attitude. Beth credits her skills as an athlete with instilling in her the confidence and mindset that she can “do anything.” Her career record, which, in addition to her seat on the executive board of one of the Big Four, includes a two-year stint in the Clinton Administration as well as service on numerous boards committed to women entrepreneurs, public policy, and economic growth is proof enough. She looks forward to continuing to make a difference as she sees her work at Ernst & Young “as a platform to build a global community and make real change for women in the corporate world.” ●

## A passion for change

### Nawal El Moutawakel



NAWAL EL MOUTAWAKEL IS THE FIRST MUSLIM female born on the African continent to become an Olympic champion. In 1984, she won for the inaugural 400-meter hurdles at the Los Angeles Summer Olympics, a breakthrough example for all sporting women in Morocco and other mostly Muslim countries. Today, she is an executive board member on the International Olympic Committee.

She credits her parents with instilling in her a love of sports at an early age. Both practiced what they preached – her mother was a volleyball player and her father trained in Judo. “They played a major role in shaping my personality and my dreams

by speaking to me about the true value of sport on a daily basis and by attending my training sessions and competitions on the weekends,” she says.

In addition, she notes the importance of her “amazing coaches” who had faith in her at the club level, at Morocco’s National Federation, and finally at the university level – these were all key elements in pushing her towards excellence. It was her acceptance of a Title IX scholarship at Iowa State University that gave her the chance to indirectly advance the lives of many girls and women in the U.S. and elsewhere through sports. Also, she notes, the Flo Hyman Award bestowed on her in 2003 by the late Senator Ted Stevens on behalf of the Women’s Sports Foundation and her induction into the Hall of Fame “empowered me to continue my aim of gender equality in sports, to push for the retention of young girls in sports programs, and to encourage education concerning the importance of physical activity and living a healthy lifestyle.”

#### On equal footing

Nawal is a strong advocate of Title IX and believes many countries would benefit from U.S. experience by introducing a law that forbids sex discrimination. “In many other parts of the world, girls and women are not afforded the same

opportunities as boys and men,” she says. “In sports, this disparity is very pronounced in the lack of girls’ participation in athletics in schools, youth centers, and sports clubs. Sports are one of the best tools for social change because they are a large part of culture around the world and reach into every socioeconomic class of society.”

If laws are put in place, she is certain the benefits will be beyond measure. “Sports help develop self-esteem and confidence, improve physical and mental well-being, serve as a medium of communication, and empower women to improve themselves and their communities.”

Where does her passion for change come from? Nawal looks at stereotypes, taboos, gender discrimination, and prejudice if she needs to get fired up. She also draws great encouragement from the victories and changes she sees as more girls and women around the world get the opportunity to feel the team spirit, perform, and succeed.

According to Nawal, “Now in addition to Moroccan women, Arab and Muslim women are breaking records and competing in international sporting competitions. I was happy to finally see that during the 2012 London Games, two women from Saudi Arabia, four from Qatar, and one from Brunei Darussalam participated for the first time ever.” ●

## Breaking barriers, making a difference

### Donna de Varona



SPORTS ‘CHAMPION’ THE FULL PERSON.

Olympians may start from the simplest circumstances, giving hope to the rest of us mere mortals. Perhaps the medals, the world records, the accolades, and groundbreaking moments come later, but that’s not what drives everyone as they launch their legendary careers.

Donna de Varona remembers riding the waves on her father’s back in the beautiful and powerful Pacific Ocean off San Diego, where she grew up. She recalls loving to be with her older brother and tagging along with him to baseball practice, only to be told “girls can’t play.” No matter. She went to the community pool and then to a YMCA program where she and other girls were welcome to swim. And swim she did – all the way to a Gold-winning U.S. Olympic team in Rome in 1960 when she was just 13. Four years later, in Tokyo, she would win her first individual Gold for the women’s 400-meter individual medley and set an Olympic record while

in the process. She was also a member of the team that captured Gold in a world record-breaking 400 freestyle relay performance. At a very young age, she had a title to defend.

#### The great leveler

Despite her youth and the thrill of being part of the global village, she noticed barriers everywhere she looked: for women, for blacks, for developing relationships with the Russians in the Cold War era. She realized early on that sports could be the great leveler, especially for women. Everyone in the Olympic Village knew what it took to be a champion – they all felt an instant connection because of hard work, focus, drive, and dedication – and for her particular sport, the mind-numbing “six to eight years of practice for a five-minute opportunity” to win in the water. “No matter where we came from, what our differences, we all spoke the language of athletes,” says Donna. “It was our common bond.”

With her fame came cover shoots for popular magazines like *Look*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Life*, and the press voting her “The Most Outstanding Woman Athlete in the World.” Still, for all of her accolades and recognition, she learned that women in the early 1960s had few opportunities in high school or college sports. Donna retired from swimming at age 17 and flew to New York to knock on the door of what was then the male-dominated world of sports broadcasting. As she explains, she wanted to stay close to the sport she loved and had done so much to elevate in the world’s consciousness.

Covering the Olympics for the networks was the one way she could “bear to leave it” since she would remain involved. She appeared on ABC’s *Wide World of Sports*, the youngest and one of the first women to do so, where she added an Emmy as well to her gold medals and world records. She covered 17 Winter and Summer Olympics, and found she had a solid platform to become an activist for youth sport and fitness opportunities in the U.S.

#### Always swimming, never treading water

She helped change the landscape through five terms on the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. Her work includes being an ardent promoter and defender of the landmark Title IX legislation and the establishment of the Women’s Sports Foundation with her friend Billie Jean King. Today she serves on the executive board of Special Olympics International and is a member of the International Olympic Committee’s Women and Sport Commission.

If she is passionate about what sports do for women, she speaks from the best platform of all: her own experience. “I learned endurance, I learned how to compete, I learned focus. It taught me that women need sports so we can learn how to successfully compete in the world in which we live while developing ourselves as full human beings.” Perhaps, most importantly, she adds, “It has given me a happier and more purpose-driven life.” Jump in, everyone, the water is indeed fine. ●