

The right of boys to join girls' teams

BOSTON (UPI) — High school boys cannot be barred from joining certain girls' interscholastic athletic teams, the Massachusetts Supreme Court says.

The court's ruling came in a unanimous decision yesterday, in which the justices declared a 1978 policy adopted by the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association was unconstitutional.

That policy, which flatly prohibited any high school boy from joining any girls' sports team, discriminated against boys under terms of the state equal rights amendment adopted in 1976, the court said.

The court added that boys must be permitted to participate on a girls' interscholastic athletic team if their school does not field a boys' team in the same sport.

"We do not believe our decision will interfere with the development of competitive athletics for girls," the court said in a 26-page decision written by justice Benjamin Kaplan.

"On the contrary, to immunize girls' teams totally from any possible contact with boys might well perpetuate a psychology of 'romantic paternalism' inconsistent with such development and hurtful to it in the long run," the court added.

Schools could guard against any boys' takeover of girls' teams, the court said, by establishing separate teams for both sexes if enough boys sought positions on the girls' teams.

The ruling came in a lawsuit filed last year against the association by the state board of education.

Association regulations govern interscholastic sports teams at virtually all public high schools in the state, as well as some private schools.

The organization adopted rules last summer barring high school boys from participation on any girls' interscholastic team, but allowing girls to play on boys' teams if their school did not offer the same sport for girls.