

MICHELLE PAULMAN

Women athletes lack chances

I'm still kicking myself. I changed the channel on the television just in time to see Arantxa Sanchez Vicario kiss her trophy after winning the U.S. Open.

I inadvertently missed the biggest women's tennis match of the year to watch a cheesy movie about a 12-year-old boy who gets to pitch for the Chicago Cubs.

Deep down, I must miss baseball more than I thought.

The movie wasn't that bad, just far-fetched. Henry, the kid, breaks his arm in the middle of Little League season, but when the cast comes off, some freak of nature allows him to hurl a fastball at the speed of sound. The Cubs, behind in the pennant race and needing to sell some tickets (OK, so the movie's not TOO far-fetched), sign the half-pint as a pitcher.

In a sharp turn off Reality Road, the Cubs not only sell out every game but also make it to the divisional championship. It's the ninth inning, Cubs leading 2-1, two men out, Henry is pitching for the save, and the rivals' star slugger comes up to bat. I won't give away the ending, because I know you're all dying to see this cheeseball, but our hero finds himself in big trouble.

In a 180-degree flip over the embankment on Reality Road, Henry looks for guidance not from his coach or his manager, but from his mother.

If I were pitching for the Cubs — an idea not too far-fetched if this strike continues — my mother would be the last person I'd consult for advice. Mother Teresa knows more about baseball than my mother. In fact, my mother doesn't know a whole lot about any sport. When I told her "love" means "nothing" in tennis, she said, "Well, maybe they wouldn't feel that way if they weren't so wrapped up in their careers."



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Sorry, Mom, I shouldn't poke fun at you. I, too, used to know nothing about tennis. To me, the only sport more worthless than two people hitting a ball back and forth was one person hitting a ball across a big lawn with holes in it.

The only sports I knew were volleyball, basketball and track, because that was all my small school offered for girls' athletics. I stunk at all of them.

Then I was forced to play tennis in my high school physical education class. I picked up a cruddy little wooden racquet, and for the first time in my life, I started winning at a sport.

Years later, I stink at tennis, too, but I still love it. Steffi and Gabby and Martina have become my idols, and I no longer groan when tennis is on TV.

Besides the Olympics, tennis tournaments are about the only time I see women athletes on TV.

Reebok once had a magazine ad I liked so much, I put it on my wall — four full-page photos of women athletes. Each had some inspirational and insightful quote about athletics and life that boiled down to "Get off your butt and go for it, you weenie."

I put the ad on my wall in the first place because I thought the photos were colorful and artistic. But the more I saw those quotes, the more I realized how little inspiration there was for girls to get off their

butts and go for it. For students, going to a Nebraska football game costs money. The same goes for men's basketball games, women's basketball and volleyball games are free.

Across the nation, universities give less money and fewer scholarships for women's athletics. And once they're done with college sports, women have nowhere to go except coaching if they want to stay in the game.

Meanwhile, the bozos in the ballpark are on strike, because they want to make more money than the entire state of New Jersey.

You've heard of the glass ceiling. Let's call this the glass scoreboard.

Women play just as tough as men for less pay and less glory. Our daughters should be able to bask in the glory of the game just as much as our sons and still make a living. And they should have more avenues open to them than tennis.

My future daughter could win the U.S. Open. Maybe she could pitch for the Cubs. But she'll probably be part of the 99 percent of Americans who don't have a snowball's chance in hell of playing professional sports.

And when she asks me about love, I'll tell her to work on her backhand so she won't have to worry about it.

Paulman is a senior news-editorial and history major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

MICHAEL JUSTICE

Murder destroys childhood

When I was 4 years old, I lived in a small community in Northern Kentucky. I spent many days and evenings running amok in my neighborhood. I probably didn't know that I was safe, but I knew I wasn't scared. It was home.

More than likely, that's what 4-year-old Derrick Robie thought about his neighborhood in Savona, N.Y. (pop. 930). It was home, and it was safe.

Unfortunately, that was not the case.

Derrick was murdered last summer, just 300 yards from his house. He disappeared while on his way to a summer recreation program. His body was found in the afternoon, at the back of a vacant lot at the end of his street. He had been sodomized with a stick, choked and fatally beaten with rocks.

When I was 4 years old, I played in my friend's sandbox with my Tonka trucks and Hot Wheels cars. My friends and I raced our Bigwheels down the giant hill that ended in my front yard. And I walked the 15 or so blocks to kindergarten alone.

Derrick will never again do these things that he should be doing. No more birthday parties, Saturday morning cartoons, hugs from Dad or kisses from Mom.

As for his killer, well, he's still alive and will be for quite some time. He recently was convicted of murdering Derrick. He even confessed to slaying him. But unlike the circumstances revolving around here two weeks ago, Derrick's killer most assuredly will not make it to death row for execution. The reason: He's 14.

Eric Smith, who was 13 when the



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murder took place, lived close to Derrick. I am not certain if he knew him, but that makes no difference. No one, especially children, should have to fear for their lives. And no one should have to go through what Derrick did that morning.

Apparently, Eric previously had shown a sadistic side. In 1989, he strangled a neighbor's Siamese cat. A child psychiatrist that the defense hired said Eric could not control himself because of developmental abnormalities caused by trimethadione, the drug his mother took for epilepsy while she was pregnant with him.

That is no excuse for his actions. The state agrees.

My mother never took trimethadione when she was pregnant with me, so I cannot say it would cause things like breath-holding spells or head-banging. All I know is that when I was 13, murder was the furthest thing from my mind. I was too busy playing Wiffleball, Risk and street football. I still raced my friends, but on bikes instead of Bigwheels. And I spent a lot of time thinking about girls.

It's natural to look for who's to blame when something goes wrong. That's the American way: Lay the blame on somebody, crucify them and forget it ever happened. But it's not that easy.

What happened inside Eric's mind that day? Was it the drug his mother took? Could it be that all the violence on television influenced him? Or the violence in the streets? Were his parents lazy or disinterested in him? Were they bad parents who didn't bother to teach Eric the difference between right and wrong?

And what about Derrick's parents? Didn't they think it a bit dangerous to send a 4-year-old out on his own? Why couldn't they drive him to the program? Wasn't he told to stay away from strangers?

I ask these questions because I just can't believe a 14-year-old could commit murder. I am fully aware of all the young people killing and being killed in the inner cities, but that's different, isn't it? Or is it?

Something is happening in our society, and it transcends racial, political and socioeconomic boundaries. Children are dying senselessly everywhere, and we can't seem to get hold of it — much less stop it.

Eric Smith faces a lifetime behind bars, countless psychological tests and no freedom. But he will see his 15th birthday. Derrick didn't even make it to 5.

Justice is a news-editorial and broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



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