

# Transgender Athletes

Chris A. Cavacuiti MD, CCFP, MHSc, ASAM

# Case 1: Michelle Dumaresq

- Began her career as a professional downhill mountain bike competitor
  - After being discovered by a group of women who were filming an independent film on female mountain bike riding.
  - Suggested Dumaresq consider racing and also invited her to appear in their film, called “Dirt Divas”.
- Michelle entered the sport in 2001, six years after completing SRS
  - First event entered – Bear Mountain race in Mission, BC in May 2001. Entered the novice female class and won. Finish time was 2.5 seconds faster than the winner of the female professional category
  - After racing two more races, her license was suspended by Cycling BC due to complaints from female competitors
  - Cycling BC and the Canadian Cycling Association met privately with local organizers and the UCI. Dumaresq was told she would not be allowed to continue racing; eventually this decision was reversed.

# Case 1: Michelle Dumaresq

- In April 2002, awarded a license to race in the pro women's category
  - Three weeks later, entered her first race in the pro women's category and finished 3<sup>rd</sup>.
  - The following week, she finished 1<sup>st</sup>, beating her competitor by 10 seconds.
  - A wave of protest ensued → a petition created and signed asking for Dumaresq to be disqualified. The request was denied and her first professional win with females was upheld.

# Case 1: Michelle Dumaresq

- At the 2006 Canadian Nationals, a protest from one of her competitors during the podium ceremonies brought renewed attention to Dumaresq's participation in female sports
  - The boyfriend of a second-place finisher, Danika Schroeter, jumped onto the podium and helped Schroeter put on a t-shirt reading '100% Pure Woman Champ'.
  - The Canadian Cycling Association suspended Schroeter for her actions.
  - However, in a controversial move, the CCA announced that Schroeter's time off the race course would be served during the off-season when it would have no impact on her.

# Case Questions

- What does this case highlight in terms of the positive elements of athletics in transition?
- What does this case highlight in terms of the negative elements of athletics in transition?
- Why were her cycling peers (who knew from the beginning of her SRS history) initially supportive then not supportive?

# Case Questions (cont.)

- What impact does it have to have the world put a microscope on your gender?
- What are the challenges for an athlete in transition who has competed as an elite male and is now looking to compete as an elite female?

# Case 2: Caster Semenya

- Caster was born on January 7, 1991
- Semenya won gold in the women's 800 metres, in the August 2009 World Championships in Athletics with a time of 1:55.45 in the final.
- Following her victory, questions were raised by both the media and by fellow athletes about Semenya's gender.
  - *"Just look at her"* barked Mariya Savinova (5<sup>th</sup> place finisher, Russia)
  - Italian Elisa Piccione (6<sup>th</sup> place finisher) was equally severe: *"These kinds of people should not run with us. For me, she's not a woman. She's a man."*

# Case 2: Caster Semenya

- Not all female athletes undergo gender verification testing.
  - The IAAF (International Association of Athletic Federation) allows for gender verification testing, but their policy does not indicate who should be tested and on what grounds.
  - The IAAF does say an athlete will be examined if “there is any ‘suspicion’ or if there is a ‘challenge’ “ to her sex.
- In an email to Ariel Levy (a reporter covering this story), the IAAF noted two things triggered {Caster’s gender verification} investigation
  - Firstly, the incredible improvement in this athlete’s performance, and more bluntly,
  - The fact that SOUTH AFRICAN sport Web sites were alleging that she was a hermaphrodite athlete



# Case 2: Caster Semenya

- On September 11<sup>th</sup>, Australia's Daily Telegraph, reported that they had obtained a leaked copy of Semenya's test results.
  - These results showed that Semenya, though she was brought up as a girl, and had Semenya was born with “undescended testes, external female genitalia, and did not have ovaries or a uterus”.
- In November 2009, it was announced that Caster would be allowed to keep her medal and prize money.

# Case 2: Caster Semenya

- To date, it remains unclear if Caster will be allowed to continue to compete as a woman.
- Thus far, there is no official report on what the results of Caster's medical test showed.
- On April 14, 2010, Athletics South Africa ASA administrator Richard Stander told the Associated Press *"I have some suspicion that Caster, herself, will release the results of the medical process"*.

# Case Questions

- Should intersex athletes be allowed to compete as females?
- Do you think the IAAF handled this situation appropriately?
- Does gender verification have a role in sport?

# Case Questions (cont.)

- What “buttons” does Caster push for people? (For example, these are the ten most recent comments on a youtube video showing Caster’s win):
  - She is a malformed man.
  - I do feel VERY sorry for her because she believed she was a woman and externally, parts may have looked female.
  - This must be devastating.
  - THAT IS A MAN!!!!!!!
  - He’s a good athlete (sic) either way.
  - There’s absolutely nothing that would give you the idea that Semenya is a woman. Nothing at all.
  - This is ridiculous.
  - “She” has a stache.
  - He’s hot.
  - This “it” and Britney Griner are DUDES .... the media needs to stop referring to them as girls.

# Case Questions (cont.)

- Is gender “socially constructed” or a “fact”?
- What role does the media play in Caster’s case?

# Case 3: Roger S.

- Roger is an FTM athlete.
- He is interested in transitioning, but has a number of concerns related to his athletic endeavours:
  - Roger is currently one of the star players on his (all female) varsity volleyball team. He feels a real sense of loyalty to his team. He is worried about losing that camaraderie and also not being able to compete at a varsity level as a man.
  - Sports play a big role in Roger's life but many of the sports Roger enjoys involve the use of locker rooms. He is doubtful if he would feel comfortable in a male locker room even after SRS (which at this point, he is not even sure he wants).

# Case Questions

- Does being transgendered alter one's athletic choices both in terms of the choice to engage in sport and also the sports one chooses to engage in (i.e. avoiding certain sports because of locker rooms, or being more drawn to "stereotypically" hyperfeminine/ hypermasculine sports in an effort to help establish new gender identity?)

# Case Questions (cont.)

- Do we as health practitioners do everything we can to help support our patients with exercise?
- Do trans individuals face unique social and/ or image fears in terms of exercise?
- What is the role of exercise/ physical recreation in the lives of transgendered persons?