

# Are Transwomen Transforming the World of Sports?

Last week New Zealand weightlifter Laurel Hubbard won gold medals at Apia's Faleata Sports Complex. She is now the Oceania senior champion, the Commonwealth senior champion, and the Pacific Games senior champion. She is looking forward to a spot in her nation's 2020 Olympic team.

The 41-year-old lifted a total of 268 kg in the women's 87 kg category. Samoans Feagaiga Stowers and Iuniana Sipaia were awarded silver and bronze with respective lifts of 261kg and 255kg.

But not everyone is happy. In fact, on the podium Stowers and Sipaia looked disheartened and disgusted. The chairman of the 2019 Samoa Pacific Games said that Hubbard's gold was unfair because Laurel (*née* Gavin) is a transgender woman. When she was a he in 1998, he set a New Zealand junior record in the 105 kg division.

*Another Gold for male-born weightlifter Laurel Hubbard this time at the Pacific games. Hubbard is on track for Olympic Gold at Tokyo 2020. It's not the women in this photo who should be hanging their heads. Sports policy makers must wake up. #FairPlayForWomen. [pic.twitter.com/CJ8sT4Qkub](https://pic.twitter.com/CJ8sT4Qkub)*

– FairPlayForWomen (@fairplaywomen) [July 13, 2019](#)

“They have allowed New Zealand transgender weightlifter Laurel Hubbard to lift in the women's category and there is nothing

we can do about it,” said [Loau Solamalemalo Keneti Sio](#). “We all know that it is not fair to the women lifters but that is a reality we face in the world of sports. The rules have changed and we cannot deviate from these rules.”

Although she was injured during the Commonwealth Games last year and failed to compete, Hubbard entered as the favourite. Some of her competitors resented her presence there as well. “It’s a little bit unfair given that she began weightlifting as a man and has that experience in weightlifting as a male, then to carry on as a woman we think is a little bit unfair and gives her an unfair advantage,” said a spokesman [for the Nauru team](#).

Hubbard’s invasion of women’s weightlifting is a neat example of the controversy over transgender people in sport. Sports associations around the world are trying to balance inclusion against fairness, seldom successfully and never without resentment from some participants. A recent article in [the Journal of Medical Ethics](#) by three Kiwi bioethicists analyses the issues and comes up with a novel solution.

International Olympic Committee guidelines from 2015 permit transwomen to compete against cis-women (ie, natal women who identify as natal women) if their testosterone is held below 10 nmol/L. However, this is much higher than that of cis-women. So should transwomen be allowed to compete in women’s events?

The University of Otago researchers believe that they should, but that “the existing male/female categories in sport should be abandoned in favour of a more nuanced approach satisfying both inclusion and fairness”. Their arguments are long and well worth reading in full. Their proposal is radical: dismantling gender segregated sport.

As they acknowledge, it is a very tricky question. Transwomen could be excluded from women’s sports, but this would not be

inclusive. Sportspeople could be allowed to compete in the gender with which they identify (like Laurel Hubbard), but this is not fair (to women, mainly). Or the mandated testosterone level could be lowered – but this might endanger the health of transwomen.

The best solution is to dump the male/female binary in sport altogether, and create an algorithm which takes into account gender identity, socioeconomic status and physiology. The physiological parameters might include height, weight, haemoglobin levels, transition before or after puberty, testosterone levels with and without testes, bone strength, and so on.

With all of these and more in mind, sports associations could create a handicap system, somewhat like golf, and replacing the male-female binary with multiple categories as in weightlifting. They conclude:

*it is important to both extend and celebrate diversity, while maintaining fairness for cis-women in sport. To be simultaneously inclusive and fair at the elite level the male/ female binary must be discarded in favour of a more nuanced approach. We conclude that the gender binary in sport has perhaps had its day.*

Whether or not this mind-bending proposal is adopted, Laurel Hubbard's gold is a sign that transgender ideology threatens to transform all competitive sport, not just weightlifting.

Take the 5000 metre race. The world record for men is 12:37.35, set by Kenenisa Bekele, from Ethiopia, in 2004. The world record for women is 14:11.15, set by Tirunesh Dibaba, also from Ethiopia, in 2008 – but men were already running that fast in 1939. The best men are better than the best women in nearly every sport.

Males invading female sports may regard themselves as

abolitionists carrying a flag of freedom for transwomen. What they really are is colonialists staging a coup for their own benefit. Just as in the days of Raj, when ne'er-do-well English gentlemen went to India to plunder its riches, transwomen are elbowing real women aside and grabbing their gold.

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