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WHAT WOMEN REALLY THINK

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The Trans Boy Who Won the Texas Girls' Wrestling Title Exposes the Illogic of Anti-Trans Policy

By [Christina Cauterucci](#)



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A transgender boy won the girls' state wrestling championship in Texas on Saturday after the league forbade him from competing against other boys. The spectacle of an undefeated

teenage boy demolishing his female opponents—or advancing after they forfeited—because officials won't validate his trans identity has caused a confused uproar in the Texas high-school wrestling community. And, in the process, it has exposed the farcical conundrums that arise from trying to impose hard, abstract boundaries on the messy reality of gender.

Mack Beggs, a 17-year-old junior, began testosterone therapy in October 2015, and asked to be allowed to wrestle in the boys' division instead of the girls'. The University Interscholastic League, the officiating body of Texas school sports, turned down Beggs' request. (UIS requires each athlete to play in the division that matches his or her birth certificate, and changing the gender on a birth certificate in Texas requires a court

order.) Parents and coaches in the Texas division in which Beggs competes are arguing that testosterone, often used as a steroid performance enhancer, gives Beggs an unfair advantage.

The *Washington Post's* [detailed account](#) of Beggs' no-win situation and the jeers that met him at the state championship includes a few prime examples of the contradictions people create by confining others' public lives to the gender they were assigned at birth. James Baudhuin, the parent of a girl wrestler who used to be friends with Beggs, refuses to recognize Beggs as a boy and insists on using *she* and *her* when talking about him. Baudhuin is also the lawyer behind the suit brought against the UIL to ban Beggs from the girls' wrestling division. This leaves Baudhuin staking out the very bizarre ground of claiming that Beggs, who has identified as a boy for about two years, is a girl, but somehow not enough of a girl to wrestle against girls.

Baudhuin, at least, acknowledges that the league has put Beggs in an impossible position that hurts him as much as the female competitors that can't beat him. (It's worth noting that Beggs was a top-notch wrestler before starting testosterone therapy, and the school district has said his testosterone levels are well within the accepted range for high-school athletics—plus, it's prescribed to him for a “valid medical purpose.”) Some parents and coaches aren't so even-handed. “She's not winning. She's cheating,” one parent of a boy wrestler told the *Post*, referring to Beggs by the wrong pronouns. One girls' coach claimed his players were asking him why they couldn't take testosterone, too, as if transitioning were a ploy Beggs used to get better at his game. Meanwhile, attendees at Saturday's championship matches booed at Beggs whenever he stepped up for a match, as if it were his fault the league kept him from his appropriate gender division. Adults who boo at a teenager for participating in school sports should question where their empathies lie and why.

The hubbub around Beggs' win comes at a pivotal time for transgender rights in Texas, which is [mulling an anti-transgender “bathroom bill,”](#) and the country, as Donald Trump, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, and Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos [rolled back federal guidance protecting trans children](#) last week. The knots Baudhuin and his fellow parents tied themselves in to justify their opposition to Beggs' wrestling career—he's a girl, but not girl enough to wrestle my kid—echo the weird scenarios that inevitably unfold when states pass laws restricting bathroom use by biological sex. Under these laws, transgender men end up in women's restrooms, a queasier prospect for anyone truly concerned with gender separation. ([Richard Linklater's ad](#) opposing the Texas bill drives this point home.) And few men who love to claim that trans women put cis women in danger by using adjacent bathroom stalls would be cool with those women hanging out in their locker rooms. Laverne Cox and Mara Keisling, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, [rebuked anti-trans activist Travis Weber on this point on *Hardball*](#) last week. “Travis knows that if Laverne and I came into the men's room with him, he would be entirely freaked out. Laverne and I cannot use the men's room, should not use the men's room,” Keisling said.

In other words, when anti-trans activists say they want trans women out of the women's room, they mean they want trans women out of the public sphere, period. People who propose strict biological requirements for using gendered public accommodations or wrestling on gendered sports teams open a ridiculous can of worms. What makes a person “boy” enough to wrestle on the boys' team or “girl” enough to use the girls' locker

room? Will there be genital and hormone tests? Measurements of facial hair and breasts? Once you stiffen the gender boundaries, the boundaries start to look a lot blurrier than they did before.

For a better system of accommodating trans students, the Texas UIS should look to Harvard University. There, [transgender swimmer Schuyler Bailar](#) was allowed to switch from the women's team, to which he was recruited as a breaststroker, to the men's team when he transitioned. Both teams' coaches approached Bailar's transition with empathy and grace, giving him the option of continuing to compete against women without testosterone therapy or starting on testosterone and moving to the men's team. For Bailar, it was a decision between keeping his record-breaking streak on the women's team—even without testosterone, he was a star—or competing against fellow men and placing lower in the rankings, but staying true to himself. It was a no-brainer for Bailar, and a non-issue with the players and coaches on the men's team. The answer to trans and gender-nonconforming people playing gendered sports isn't boos and bans and rigorous adherence to letters on birth certificates that mean little in real life—it's rational empathy. Listen to [Bailar on his transition](#) or [Beggs on his victory](#), and it's a lot harder to claim they're looking for an advantage. They just want a fair chance to play the sports they love as the people they are.