



# **Built to Win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon (Sport and Culture Series)**

*Leslie Heywood*

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The sculpted speed of Marion Jones. The grit and agility of Mia Hamm. The slam-dunk style of Lisa Leslie. The skill and finesse of these sports figures are widely admired, no longer causing the puzzlement and discomfort directed toward earlier generations of athletic women. Built to Win explores this relatively recent phenomenon—the confident, empowered female athletes found everywhere in American popular culture.

Leslie Heywood and Shari L. Dworkin examine the role of female athletes through interviews with elementary- and high school-age girls and boys; careful readings of ad campaigns by Nike, Reebok, and others; discussions of movies like *Fight Club* and *Girlfight*; and explorations of their own sports experiences. They ask: what, if any, dissonance is there between popular images and the actual experiences of these athletes? Do these images really "redefine femininity" and contribute to a greater inclusion of all women in sport? Are sexualized images of these women damaging their quest to be taken seriously? Do they inspire young boys to respect and admire female athletes, and will this ultimately make a difference in the ways gender and power are constructed and perceived?

Proposing a paradigm shift from second- to third-wave feminism, Heywood and Dworkin argue that, in the years since the passage of Title IX, gender stereotypes have been destabilized in profound ways, and they assert that female athletes and their imagery are doing important cultural work to that end. Important, refreshing, and engrossing, *Built to Win* examines sport in all its complexity.

Leslie Heywood is professor of English at Binghamton University. She is the author of *Pretty Good for a Girl: An Athlete's Story* (Minnesota, 2000), *Bodymakers* (1998), and coeditor of *Third Wave Agenda* (Minnesota, 1997). A former track and cross-country runner who is currently a competitive powerlifter, Heywood is a vice president of the Women's Sports Foundation.

Shari L. Dworkin is a sociologist and works as a research fellow at the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies at Columbia University.

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