

3/78

The Girls of Santa Cruz

Fight Back

"The girl thing is more than financial," said the club president. "We feel there is a definite need for a program where young boys are separated from the rest of society..."

BY KELLY GARRETT

Naomi Goldfrank (cover) is nine years old and cute as a button. But Naomi Goldfrank would like to be more than nine years old and cute as a button.

She likes basketball and ping pong, and her mother — a library media specialist at Bayview Elementary School — encourages the kind of physical and social development of her daughter that only one institution in Santa Cruz has to offer: the Boys' Club on Center Street.

That's why Lois Goldfrank and several other parents tried to get their daughters memberships in the Boys' Club last summer, and the resulting denial sparked a local version of the classic battle of the 70's.

The lines are clearly drawn. The girls and their parents want access to the only place in town with recreational facilities for youth. The club's Board of Directors insist firmly that the Boys' Club is for boys, and cite financial and philosophical reasons for keeping it that way.

The issue came to a head last week when a group of local parents and their sympathizers tried to convince trustees of the United Way charity campaign to withhold funding of the local Boys' Club until a non-discrimination policy is adopted. The trustees went ahead with the funding (\$19,330, about 20% of the organization's budget, the rest coming from a trust fund, donations and membership fees), but said they would send a letter protesting the no-girls-allowed policy.

That was something of a moral victory for the pro-girl side, loosely organized as Action for Girls in the Boys' Club (AGBC), but the activists are saying that they won't stop fighting until girls are admitted, even if that means taking the matter to the courts.

The position of Boys' Club officials is adamant enough to make a legal war probable. Al McCommon, Jr., president of the club's Board of Directors, expressed sympathy for the girls' plight but made it clear they'd have to look elsewhere for what they

want.

"We feel that anything we do beyond the scope of what we're doing would dilute our services," McCommon said. "Otherwise we'd be doing it."

McCommon also said that there are philosophical — as well as financial — reasons for excluding girls.

"The girl thing is more than financial," he said. "We feel there is a definite need for a program where young boys are separated from the rest of society (for a few hours), which is a situation that you don't get in school or anywhere else."

McCommon cited crime statistics and social theories to defend concentrating development efforts on boys, but reverted back to economics with another argument.

"Not only would it be tremendously expensive in terms of converting facilities, but the programs would vary, too," he said. "Obviously the programs developed for boys would not necessarily be right for girls."

But that's not so obvious to some of the parents.

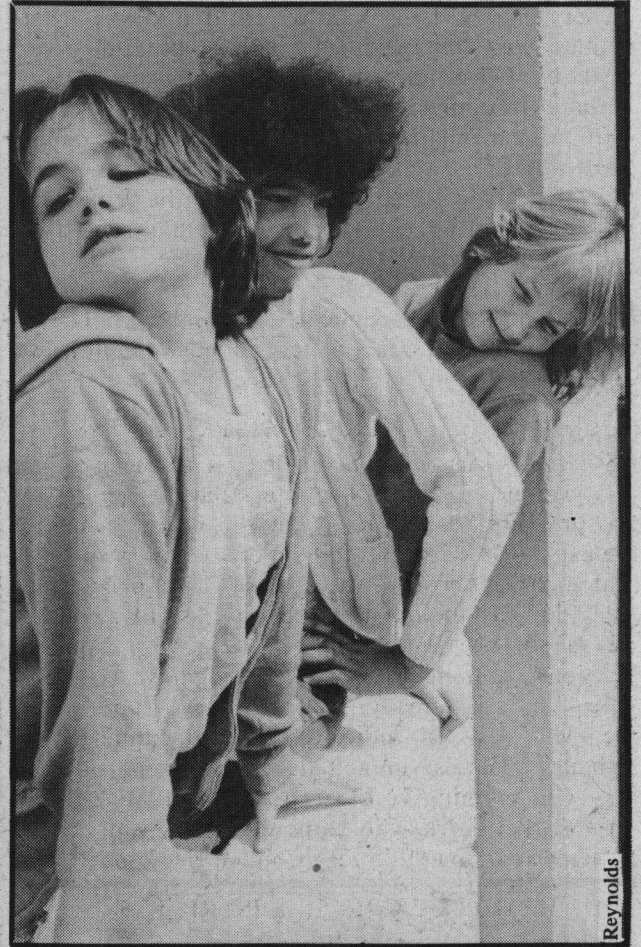
"We consider it most important that girls and boys be able to play together," said Nancy Shaw, a professor of sociology at UCSC whose nine year old daughter Gwendolyn was denied membership. "Girls in the community are denied the same opportunities to develop physically."

Daughters Naomi and Gwendolyn offer eager proof of their parents' contention that girls want and need the same programs as boys. Asked why she wanted in the Boys' Club, Gwendolyn replied, "There are no other facilities available for girls, like a swimming pool, gym, bumper pool..."

"... basketball courts, ping pong, darts..." added Naomi.

McCommon said he and many other trustees had daughters, and gave support to the idea of a separate facility for girls.

"It's too bad the girls don't have a facility like that," he said. "It would be very nice. I don't mean it to sound like 'We've got ours — it's not our fault' — but it's a different issue."



Enjoying their status as a cause celebre are Naomi Goldfrank, Gwendolyn Shaw and Heather Dietz.

The ACBG people aren't buying the separate but equal girls' club idea. Their position paper spells out some reasons: "When young people work and play together, they learn to know and respect each other as individuals, friends and team members. In a voluntary program such as the Boys' Club offers, each could pursue his or her favorite interests, while at the same time getting to know each other in a healthy, supervised setting."

Nancy Shaw goes a little farther. "The basic idea of a separate club is the exclusion of girls," she said. "That's what it really means. We feel that's insulting, and it has detrimental psychological effects on both the boys and the girls."

More practically, the women point out that business and community interests are already in the Boys' Club, and the chances of getting together money for a girls' club aren't good.

"The fact is that people don't give that kind of money to things for girls," Nancy Shaw said.

The Boys' Club enjoys the tax advantages of a charitable non-profit institution, but its officials are claiming — and have been receiving — exemption from state and federal non-discrimination statutes. That's a beef with the parents.

"They want to be private when it comes to excluding girls but they want to be public when it comes to getting money," Shaw said.

The parents point out that a number of boys' clubs have integrated around the nation, but McCommon has an explanation.

"The only reason that there are clubs with girls in them is because they were in financial trouble," he said. The implication is that the inclusion of girls allows struggling clubs to apply for public funds that would have been denied to a boys-only club.

The AGBC people are convinced that club officials, parents, boys and girls will all be happy if an integrated club is given a chance.

"We took the girls there a while back and the boys were apprehensive at first," Lois Goldfrank said. "By the end of the time they were teaching the girls how to play pool. It was clear that there wasn't going to be much of a problem."

What the boys think of having the girls share their facility is another question, but Gwendolyn Shaw, age nine, probably has the answer when she was asked if she thought the boys would mind.

"Some of them might, some of them might not," she said. ■



Right, some might not.