

Lt-Col Rinette HULME, Namibia



My input is not based on statistics from my own Force, neither can it be proofed by scientifically, but it is my own experiences in CISM over the 11 years I have been part of this family.

The year 1928 : women are for the first time allowed to participate in the Olympic Games, but with restrictions.
1964, women I the Olympics are allowed for the first time to participate in track and field distances longer 100m.

All of this now seem so long ago, as women nowadays are no more regarded as the weaker sex and the physical demands for us are equally challenging.

We are allowed to participate in all Olympic Events, we are allowed a career in the Military in all sectors; and it is acceptable to a mother, wife and career women all at once.

BUT,

Then why is the challenge for a top sport man so much different from that of a top sport women?

I don't need to explain the physical changes I a woman's body when she is training very hard or fall pregnant and this is most probable one of the biggest challenges a top woman athlete is faced with.

She knows she will face emotional turmoil, a focus move from sport and career to motherhood. She is faced with the dilemma of support from her coach, commander and family. Will she receive the much needed support?

In the expecting father's case, he will not experience any physical changes. He might be exposed to emotional turmoil, due to his wife's emotional changes.
He will also have a focus change, but none of this is as drastic as in the women's case.

This is why it has become a trend for women to enter the Force solely to do sport. They have opportunity to practice their sport and reach to highest goal, but this is done only for a few years. Once they become older and decide to start a family, they resign and then your Force loses a top athlete and worker.

Then how can we as Military leaders ensure that our top women athletes will be able to couple their sport career with a working career and a family?

The current situation differ from country to country. In some, women are supported in all sectors, while in others support is limited.

How can we improve this situation?

Coach

Understanding your athlete body and its function.

- Then you can support your athlete in deciding when and if to get pregnant,
- decided together until when your athlete will continue with her training programme and how soon after birth she will resume training.

Support of and understanding your athlete's family environment

- ensure that you, your athlete and her spouse work together with any decisions made
- understanding her and her family's background.

You athlete's career

- the amount of support provided by you will depend on whether you athlete entered the Force to do sport or to do both sport and develop a career
- you should ensure that you are kept up to date to changes in her career such as promotion, transfer, courses and workload
- to succeed, close ties between her immediate commander and you are very important
- ensure that your athlete knows that you will continue to coach and support her once she gave birth.

Commander

- support for the athlete's training programme
- understanding the need of a woman to become a mother
- understanding that it's her decision to become a mother or not
- form close relationship with her coach
- any form of assistance from you will be highly respected
- it is important that the athlete knows that her career will not be influenced by her decision to become a mother

Athlete

- the decision to become a mother, remain a career woman and having a family is solely your decision
- inform your coach and spouse immediately, once you have made any decision that will influence your sport career
- always be honest about the state of your health and mind. This is not only important for the coach, but also yourself and your baby.

In conclusion, all women in the Force should be able to take this challenge of being a top sport woman, career woman and mother as these future mothers will give birth to future top sport members and leaders in your respective Forces.

A perfect example comes from Turkey in the form of top athlete, Capt Erten, Ayşe. She is a former Olympic Athlete and is still participating top level. She is the mother of one child. She was pregnant during the CISM World Shooting Championships in Ankara in 2004 with her second child and this did not prevent her from winning a bronze medal.

In her own words,

I can handle my professional sport career, career womanship and motherhood together. I am proud to be a member of the Turkish Army and being a soldier affects my sports life positively. I feel happy to being successful. My husband, son and expected daughter give my energy of life.