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Lesbian Culture, Politics, and Entertainment

July 2001

Girlfriends

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Athletes star in these ring, rink, and track films.

by Candace Moore

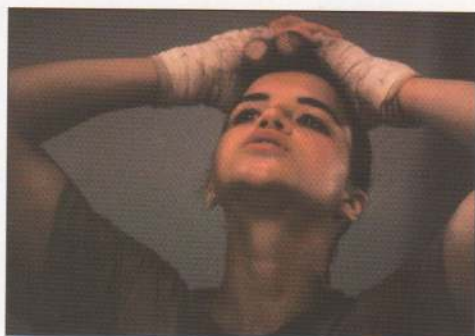
The hottest new sports film on video is *Girlfight*, Karyn Kusama's ode to the female boxer. Angling in on the fancy footwork and left-hook prowess of a high-school girl from the projects as she painstakingly trains and fights

Girlfight

Karyn Kusama
Columbia Pictures, 2000

gender-blind in a shadowy Brooklyn gym, the cinematography is brutally close-up. The sweaty proximity to surly Diana is made

sweetly salty by actress Michelle Rodriguez, accurately touted as young Marlon Brando's female reincarnation: controlled fury and depth cohabiting a lovely, handsome face. Grade: **A**



Girlfight's Michelle Rodriguez exhibits the contradictory charms of a young Brando.

Red Rain (Culture Q, 1999)

Providing insight into the real world of women's boxing, *Red Rain* smothers viewers with the gorgeous, brawly potency of an International Female Boxers Association junior middleweight champion. Focusing on Gina "Boom Boom" Guidi, Laura Plotkin's documentary is a testament to how athletes who give years of their all can achieve a soft-but-solid Zen quality. In one bout, the tattooed towheaded dyke and her opponent beat the shit out of each other. When the two fighters embrace, Gina gives a big sweetie-pie smile and says, "Give me your address, we'll write." Grade: **B+**

Thin Ice (Wolfe Video, 1994)

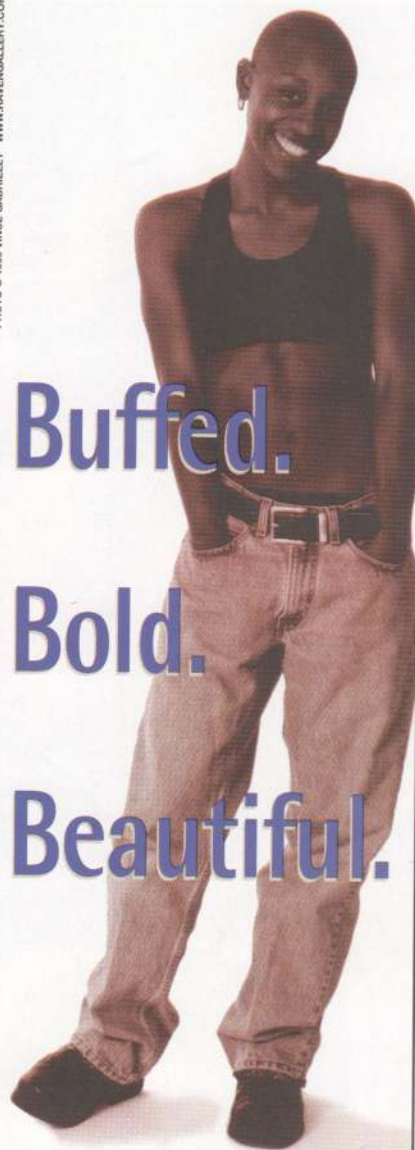
When Steffi's girlfriend dumps her during ice-skating couples training for the Gay Games, the Londoner is desperate to find another partner. Enter awkward, pretty Natalie, a presumed-to-be-straight ex-aud pair with little foreseeable sex life. The love story that progresses as Steffi (charismatic Sabra Williams) and Natalie (empathetic Charlotte Avery) twirl in circles around each other is cute, engaging, and reasonably fraught with difficulty. If you want to go "Awww," as you cuddle in your pj's, throw this in the old VCR. Grade: **B**

Personal Best (Warner Home Video, 1982)

This gluttonous steam bath was box-office-crafted by Robert Towne, screenwriter of *Chinatown* (1974), as a track-and-field version of *Breaking Away* (1979). With just one twist: lesbians! Girl-loving, high-jumping, and short shorts curdle in Towne's evil-genius brain into a crotch-shot carnival, replete with blatant heterosexism. Mariel Hemingway as pentathlete Chris takes waif naïveté to a new level and, while fetching, is whiny compared to strong-willed lover Tory (Patrice Donnelly). Still, this raunchy riot has the Gatoraded adrenaline of any fine Olympic-stakes movie, and reveals new dubious psychoanalytic layers each time you watch. Grade: **B**

Candace Moore, co-editor of the small press *Runcible Spoon*, lives in LA.

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Let's Get Physical

One of my first lovers was an athlete. She competed on my school's track team and introduced me to the crisp, bronzy smell of a New England dawn on an early spring run. In bed, she felt as unyielding as stone and as soft as panther's fur. She loved her body because it performed for her, not because a women's studies book told her to.

Our relationship was not fit for a marathon. I'd joined a gang of feminists whose idea of fun was a same-sex kiss-in. Her women's community was her team, most of whom didn't know she was gay. I saw my lesbianism as a paradigm shift; she saw hers as a private non-issue. Lacking the backbone of a Juliet, I retreated to the smug safety of the scornful Capulets, and we broke up.



Joan Jett loved our March cover story, and I loved her show.

take for granted. And I've finally realized how jocks "get" the personal, political, and cultural importance of sports, physicality, and our bodies.

Part of my enlightenment was achieved through reading: books like *Sportsdykes*, *The LPGA: The Unauthorized Version*, and *Martina* convinced me that lesbian athletes have consistently opposed the notion that women are uncompetitive, weak, and (even) straight. Part was due to meeting sports activists like Roxxie, who published the inspired *Girljock*, a now-defunct 'zine about lesbians and sports, and the great Martina herself—whose monumental thigh, sporting a post-match bag of ice, draped on the table in front of us, rendered me speechless during an interview.

Although *Girlfriends'* editorial staff favors the pen over the softball bat, we made a concerted effort to cover the stories our sportier readers are hungry for. In the interests of bridging the jock-brain divide, we present our annual Sports Issue. Enjoy. We're especially proud that Elissa Perry takes you into the ring with boxing sensation Laila Ali. Would-be world champions, watch out! Gay or straight, she says, she'll kick your ass.

Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief

Girlfriends

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