

# University of Arizona Stars Write Letter to NCAA on Lia Thomas

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Swimming World Editorial Staff

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## University of Arizona Swimmers Write Letter to NCAA on Lia Thomas

Following last week's NCAA Women's Championships, when Penn swimmer **Lia Thomas** [captured the NCAA title in the 500 freestyle](#) and swam in two other championship finals, members of the swimming community continue to issue public statements on the controversial presence of Thomas, a transgender female, at the women's meet. The latest comments come from a group of University of Arizona swimmers that includes longtime head coach and USA Swimming national team director **Frank Busch** and 2008 Olympian **Lacey Nymeyer**, plus others from the Wildcats' 2008 national championship group.

The USA Swimming Network

The letter, sent this week to the NCAA Board of Governors, expressed significant questions of the fairness of Thomas participating. The letter says that [the collegiate governing body](#) "has successfully failed everyone" by allowing Thomas to compete against cisgender women while trying to "appease everyone." The letter states that Thomas "catapulted a team to a top-20 program in the country after failing to score a single point last year," although it's worth noting that the Ivy League and Penn cancelled all athletics last year and thus had no swimmers in the running to qualify for NCAAs.

The letter goes on to contrast Thomas' situation with that of **Iszac Henig**, a transgender male who remains eligible for women's competition and swam alongside Thomas in the 100 freestyle final last week. The letter concludes with an offer to help the NCAA in discussing "potential steps it can implement to create new solutions for the expanding athletic family."

Read the full letter from Arizona swimmers below:

March 24, 2022

Dear NCAA Board of Governors,

Do we have a voice?

It's hard to express the anguish the women's swim community has experienced this past week watching the 2022 NCAA Swim & Dive Championships. On one hand, we feel we are witnessing irrevocable damage to a sport that has transformed our own identities for the better. On the other, we have reconnected with each other in sisterhood after many busy years living our lives beyond the water's edge. We are grateful for the many women who have stood up to publicly speak up in protest of your policies including UT's swim alumni who penned a thoughtful letter to their Athletic Director and inspired us to write from the University of Arizona alumni perspective. We have collected some of our own thoughts on paper to plead to swimming leadership at every level to take immediate action to protect our women athletes.

In 2008, USA Swimming chief **Chuck Wielgus** was asked to comment on a "culture of fair play" regarding a female swimmer who had tested positive for a banned anabolic agent called Clenbuterol. He claimed at the time "within the culture of swimming, if you're doing something you shouldn't be doing, we want to catch you and throw you out of the sport. In other sports, it's about excuses and justifications and being innocent until you're proven guilty." According to the USADA website, Clenbuterol is prohibited in sport because it "promotes muscle growth through anabolic properties." The Mayo Clinic reports "the main anabolic steroid hormone produced by the body is testosterone" and that it "has anabolic effects promoting muscle building." In a little over a decade, USA Swimming, the leading organization of swimming in the world has surrendered its firm stance on fair play. This has encouraged other organizations such as the NCAA to make accommodations for biological men who have had the benefits of testosterone throughout natural development and beyond.

According to Duke's Center for Sports Law and Policy, "there is an average 10-12% performance gap between elite males and elite females" in sport. What advantage does testosterone have for natural born men in swimming specifically? This year in the 500 freestyle the men's A standard qualifying time is 4:11.62. The women's A standard qualifying time was 4:35.76. That is a difference of 24.14 seconds. To put that into perspective, the male swimmer in the last seed going into the meet would be two full laps ahead of his female counterpart in this event. This one example alone demonstrates the advantages a biologically male swimmer has over a female. Physiological advantages exist.

Looking back on another moment in swim history, in 2010 FINA banned the use of high tech performance swim suits as the "shiny suit era" saw "records falling at an alarming rate" due to a competitive advantage given to swimmers who had the suits available to them. This

year at the fastest short course swim meet in the world, the body inside the suit is what raises cause for concern.

The decisions of the NCAA this year hoped to appease everyone by allowing **Lia Thomas** to compete directly with women. Instead, the NCAA has successfully failed everyone. A target was placed on the back of a trans athlete subjecting this person to devastating national outcry and humiliation. This swimmer's lone points for Penn this March catapulted a team to a top-20 program in the country after failing to score a single point last year. Additionally, women athletes competing in the meet were forced to swim in unfair direct competition therefore eliminating all integrity of the entire championship meet.

We are celebrating the 50th anniversary of Title IX this year. From the birth of the NCAA in 1906 until 1972, women had to fight to earn the law that provided equal opportunities for women in sports. It took a male to female transgender person one year to take the women's swimming national championship title. This is not equality. Women's standings, titles, records, and scholarships are suddenly at risk again. Opening the door to allowing natural born men to acquire precious, life altering financial aid packages often split up between multiple women per team defeats the very essence of the flagship legislation we are ironically celebrating this very year.

Female to male transgender athletes do not have the same opportunities as their male to female counterparts. They are heavily disadvantaged when it comes to earning a spot on the team they identify due to strength and speed differences between gender categories. This was represented this year in the 100 freestyle by Yale's **Iszac Henig**, a transgender male competing at the women's championship. This swimmer placed fifth in the event. Henig's time of 47.52 earned the swimmer an All-American award and added 13.5 points to Yale's team score. Had Henig chosen to swim at the men's competition however, the same time would have failed to even reach the men's A qualifying time of 41.71 by almost six seconds dashing the whisper of a chance this swimmer would even step up to the block.

There were many options the NCAA could have implemented to create a fair environment for women competitors. A trans athlete could compete in the meet that aligns with birth gender such as Henig did. At the championship level, there are 10 lanes available in the pool while only 8 swimmers compete per heat. Therefore, a trans athlete could have been added to any finals heat in addition to the 16 women who qualified without pushing any of the deserving women out of the finals such as VT's **Reka Gyorgy**, who personally spoke out about the inequality she was subjected to being shut out of the finals. Trans specific heats with separate awards categories and scoring was another alternative. The NCAA could have implemented the more stringent USA Swimming guidelines at the very least. Moving forward, trans swim meets could be organized and built into a new category of athletic competition similar to the Paralympic or Special Olympic platforms to continue to widen the umbrella of inclusion in athletics.

We are writing this letter to the NCAA who has a President at the helm responsible for cutting both the University of Washington's swimming programs in 2009. Mr. Emmert stood firmly by his decisions as "the right ones for us." The NCAA Board of Governors is predominantly men. Of the 65 Athletic Directors in the Power 5, only 5 are women. At the University of Arizona, our Athletics Director, Associate AD for Diversity, and Senior Women's Advocate have remained silent on this issue unfolding over the course of this entire season. These revelations and disparities alarm us when it seems there was no urgency in skillfully and educationally addressing how the scientific and biologic differences may impact women's competitions. Do we have a voice? The people responsible for protecting women's swimming should swiftly rectify the guidelines. The women from the University of Arizona will not quietly stand down while our victories and accomplishments float away.

We are eager and willing to discuss directly with the NCAA potential steps it can implement to create new solutions for the expanding athletic family. Please contact us with your next steps towards a fairer future.

Respectfully,

The Women of Arizona Swimming & Diving  
info@womenfins.com

Marshi Smith (02-06) NCAA Champion

Frank Busch 6-Time NCAA Coach of the Year for the University of Arizona  
(11-17) USA Swimming National Team Director

2008 National Championship Team Members:

Lacey Nymeyer-John (04-08) NCAA Woman of the Year, NCAA Champion, Olympic Medalist

Brandy Collins Maben (04-08) Team Captain

Lindsey Kelly (05-09) NCAA All-American

Taylor Baughman (05-09) NCAA All-American, Team Captain

Caroline Rollins (05-09) Team Manager

Lara Jackson (06-09) NCAA Champion, American Record Holder

Annie Chandler (06-10) NCAA Woman of the Year Finalist

Caitlin Iversen (06-10) NCAA All-American

Carley Beaudreau (06-10) NCAA All-American

Dana Christ (07-11) NCAA All-American

Susana Starbuck (07-11) Team Captain

Trina Jackson Falca (96-00) Olympic Gold Medalist, NCAA Champion

Lindsey Farella (97-02) NCAA Champion, Team Captain

Julie Manitt Andrew (99-03) NCAA All-American

Jenna Gresdal Davis (02-06) Olympian, NCAA Champion

Lisa Pursley Ebeling (02-06) NCAA All-American, Current Head Coach UNC  
Katie Willis (02-06) NCAA All-American  
Ryann Hackett (02-06) NCAA All-American Honorable Mention  
Danielle Erickson (05-06) Big-12 Conference Finalist (Nebraska)  
Emily Strouse (03-07) Olympic Trial Qualifier, Pac-10 Team Champion  
Kathryn Elofson (03-07) Pac-10 Champion  
Whitney Myers (03-07) NCAA Woman of the Year, 5x NCAA Champion  
Julie Stupp (08-09) NCAA Runner up, 2x Team Champion (Auburn)  
Grace Kittle (07-12) NCAA All-American  
Andrea Smith (08-13) Team Manager  
Monica Refsnyder (09-13) NCAA All-American, American Record Holder  
Ellyn Baumgardner (09-13) NCAA All-American, Team Captain  
Aubrey Peacock (10-12) NCAA All-American  
Megan Lafferty (12-13) American Record Holder, Pac-12 Champion  
Alana Pazevic (12-14) NCAA All-American, Pac-12 Champion  
Elizabeth Pepper (13-15) NCAA All-American  
Bonnie Brandon (12-16) NCAA All-American  
Emma Schoettmer (12-16) NCAA All-American  
Alexandra Martelle (14-18) Pac-12 Finalist  
Mackenzie Rumrill (15-19) NCAA Woman of the Year Nominee, NCAA All-American  
Mallory Korenwinder (16-20) NCAA All-American

Dennis Pursley (89-03) USA Swimming Team Director  
5x Olympic Coach, ASCA Hall of Fame Inductee