Review of

*As Fast As Her--*Kendall Coyne

Alan Zaremba

Northeastern University

*As Fast As Her* (Zondervan 2022) is a memoir authored by Kendall Coyne, currently the captain of the United States Women’s Ice Hockey team. Coyne has won two Olympic Silver medals, has one Gold, and is a six-time world champion. She is also an active member of the Professional Women’s Hockey Players Association. (PWHPA)

The book is sometimes, but not always, catalogued as a “Teen” or YA book. The YA cataloguing is unfortunate. While the book can be read and enjoyed by younger readers, the message within would be inspirational for anyone who reads this well-written memoir. The book compares favorably to recent adult sports memoirs such as Megan Rapinoe’s *One Life, and* Carli Lloyd’s *When Nobody was Watching.*  A theme in Rapinoe’s book is the importance of using your “one life” constructively. Lloyd emphasizes the need to work indefatigably at your craft in order to excel. Coyne makes these points as or more powerfully.

Ms. Coyne describes her evolution as a hockey player from her years as a toddler through her staggering feat in the 2019 NHL All-Star speed competition. In that event, Coyne, a last-minute replacement for a male contestant, came in second with an astonishing time that startled the hockey establishment. Those 14.346 seconds have changed attitudes about women in sports, and women in society. It will take time to assess the relative impact of the feat, but one could argue that the speed competition will be, in the context of gender equity, as pivotal as any other sport contest including the Billie Jean King-Bobby Riggs 1973 tennis match referred to as the “Battle of the Sexes.” Coyne devotes a chapter to the speed skating competition. She writes: “My life exploded with e-mails, messages, mail, appearances, speeches, and interview requests, hearing from so many people how that moment changed their lives too.”

Coyne recounts her early battles with gender discrimination. She played on boys’ teams but at times was prohibited from competing because of her gender even when her skills surpassed her teammates’. She recounts the derisive chatter from spectators—including parents—who did not want her to compete with boys. Readers learn of her industrious approach to the game and remarkable dedication to excellence. She was fortunate to have loving parents and siblings who supported her ambition even when to do so was costly and an enormous time sap. The parental support is in contrast to what is depicted in Lloyd’s book (not referenced in Coyne’s memoir) where issues of family tensions for the soccer player had to be overcome.

The consistent inspirational message in *As Fast As Her* is that athletes can achieve despite obstacles if there is sufficient energy dedicated to the pursuit of goals. The author speaks to all, but clearly wants young women to see hockey as an activity not reserved for men. She is deservedly proud of being a trailblazer and is clear to identify women in hockey who were role models for her. I am many years removed from my years of sports competition, but the pervasive message in the book made me consider how important it is to not let obstacles stop those who desire to achieve. I believe it will have the same effect on most readers regardless of their vintage or even how much they participate in sports.

There are some remarkable stories of how good fortune was a result of being in the right place at the right time because of dedication and perspective. Coyne was a victim of a bait and switch with a college recruiter and while that was distressing and disappointing, she was able to take another route, attend a different university, and find the value of the new hand she was dealt. A few times she arrived for a competition and her equipment did not; each time serendipity, focus, and the largesse of others allowed her to compete. The sections dealing with how she and other women athletes negotiated for wages comparable to their male counterparts provided other examples of how energy and focus can result in success.

The writing in this memoir is conversational yet the messages are substantive. Pithy quotes appear throughout. There is a recurring feature called “Golden Coyne.” These are pieces of advice which could be off-putting if they were simply banal platitudes, but the comments will resonate with anyone who eschews pompous disdain and has ever competed. The book concludes with a timeline that identifies how women’s hockey has evolved. The events in the timeline are interspersed with Coyne’s own activity and participation in the evolution of hockey.

Billie Jean King wrote the foreword for *As Fast as Her*. In it, King includes this commentary: “…in this book [Coyne] reveals her character—the root of her inner success.” The excerpt is an apt and concise summary of a book that is a valuable read. College students interested in sport, even those who are non-athletes will enjoy the read. Those who examine sports history and the sociology of sport will find the book valuable as a contribution to the evolution of women’s battle for equality. This is not, nor was it intended to be, an academic monograph. It will, however, contribute to what academics know about the evolution of women in sports.

*As Fast As Her*—(Kendall Coyne with Estelle Laure)

Zondervan (2022)