

# Who says girls can't compete athletically with boys?

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An Indiana University study that looked at performance differences between male and female childhood athletes found little difference in certain age groups, even though boys and girls rarely compete against each other in the U.S.

Joel Stager, professor in the School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation at IU Bloomington, said he is not suggesting that boys and girls compete against each other, but he said his findings indicate they could.

"It's the whole perception that girls can't compete fairly with boys," he said. "Well, at certain ages, they can."

The study analyzed data provided by USA Swimming that consisted of the best 50-yard freestyle performances for all USA Swimming-registered male and female swimmers ages 6 to 19 who competed from 2005 to 2010. This included 1.9 million swims.

The study found no difference in swim performance in children younger than 8. It also found little difference in 11- and 12-year-olds. The effects of puberty began showing in the older swimmers, as the [boys](#) began experiencing accelerated growth in height, weight and strength typical of age 13 and older.

Researchers chose to analyze children's performance in the 50-yard freestyle because the swimmers' performances were less influenced by

training per se and more likely to be influenced by [muscle function](#). A second study further characterizes the "distribution of [performance](#)" within the entire U.S. Swimming database, something that has never been done before for a competitive event.

"[Sex Differences](#) in Childhood [Athletic Performance](#)" will be discussed at 3:30 p.m. Thursday, May 31, in the Exhibit Hall. Co-authors are lead author Andrew Cornett and Karen Kafadar, Eastern Michigan University.

Provided by Indiana University

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