Throwing Like a Girl

By James Fallows

From the *Atlantic Magazine*, August 1996

MOST people remember the 1994 baseball season for the way it ended—with a strike rather than a World Series. I keep thinking about the way it began. On opening day, April 4, Bill Clinton went to Cleveland and, like many Presidents before him, threw out a ceremonial first pitch. That same day Hillary Rodham Clinton went to Chicago and, like no First Lady before her, also threw out a first ball, at a Cubs game in Wrigley Field.

The next day photos of the Clintons in action appeared in newspapers around the country. Many papers, including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, chose the same two photos to run. The one of Bill Clinton showed him wearing an Indians cap and warm-up jacket. The President, throwing lefty, had turned his shoulders sideways to the plate in preparation for delivery. He was bringing the ball forward from behind his head in a clean-looking throwing action as the photo was snapped. Hillary Clinton was pictured wearing a dark jacket, a scarf, and an oversized Cubs hat. In preparation for her throw she was standing directly facing the plate. A right-hander, she had the elbow of her throwing arm pointed out in front of her. Her forearm was tilted back, toward her shoulder. The ball rested on her upturned palm. As the picture was taken, she was in the middle of an action that can only be described as throwing like a girl.

The phrase "throwing like a girl" has become an embattled and offensive one. Feminists smart at its implication that to do something "like a girl" is to do it the wrong way. Recently, on the heels of the O. J. Simpson case, a book appeared in which the phrase was used to help explain why male athletes, especially football players, were involved in so many assaults against women. Having been trained (like most American boys) to dread the accusation of doing anything "like a girl," athletes were said to grow into the assumption that women were valueless, and natural prey.

I grant the justice of such complaints. I am attuned to the hurt caused by similar broad-brush stereotypes when they apply to groups I belong to—"dancing like a white man," for instance, or "speaking foreign languages like an American," or "thinking like a Washingtonian."

Still, whatever we want to call it, the difference between the two Clintons in what they were doing that day is real, and it is instantly recognizable. And since seeing those photos I have been wondering, Why, exactly, do so many women throw "like a girl"? If the motion were easy to change, presumably a woman as motivated and self-possessed as Hillary Clinton would have changed it. (According to her press secretary, Lisa Caputo, Mrs. Clinton spent the weekend before opening day tossing a ball in the Rose Garden with her husband, for practice.) Presumably, too, the answer to the question cannot be anything quite as simple as, Because they *are* girls.
A surprising number of people think that there is a structural difference between male and female arms or shoulders—in the famous "rotator cuff," perhaps—that dictates different throwing motions. "It's in the shoulder joint," a well-educated woman told me recently. "They're hinged differently." Someday researchers may find evidence to support a biological theory of throwing actions. For now, what you'll hear if you ask an orthopedist, an anatomist, or (especially) the coach of a women's softball team is that there is no structural reason why men and women should throw in different ways. This point will be obvious to any male who grew up around girls who liked to play baseball and became good at it. It should be obvious on a larger scale this summer, in broadcasts of the Olympic Games. This year, for the first time, women's fast-pitch softball teams will compete in the Olympics. Although the pitchers in these games will deliver the ball underhand, viewers will see female shortstops, center fielders, catchers, and so on pegging the ball to one another at speeds few male viewers could match.

Even women's tennis is a constant if indirect reminder that men's and women's shoulders are "hinged" the same way. The serving motion in tennis is like a throw—but more difficult, because it must be coordinated with the toss of the tennis ball. The men in professional tennis serve harder than the women, because they are bigger and stronger. But women pros serve harder than most male amateurs have ever done, and the service motion for good players is the same for men and women alike. There is no expectation in college or pro tennis that because of their anatomy female players must "serve like a girl." "I know many women who can throw a lot harder and better than the normal male," says Linda Wells, the coach of the highly successful women's softball team at Arizona State University. "It's not gender that makes the difference in how they throw."

SO what is it, then? Since Hillary Clinton's ceremonial visit to Wrigley Field, I have asked men and women how they learned to throw, or didn't. Why did I care? My impetus was the knowledge that eventually my sons would be grown and gone. If my wife, in all other ways a talented athlete, could learn how to throw, I would still have someone to play catch with. My research left some women, including my wife, thinking that I am some kind of obsessed lout, but it has led me to the solution to the mystery. First let's be clear about what there is to be explained.

At a superficial level it's easy to tick off the traits of an awkward-looking throw. The fundamental mistake is the one Mrs. Clinton appeared to be making in the photo: trying to throw a ball with your body facing the target, rather than rotating your shoulders and hips ninety degrees away from the target and then swinging them around in order to accelerate the ball. A throw looks bad if your elbow is lower than your shoulder as your arm comes forward (unless you're throwing sidearm). A throw looks really bad if, as the ball leaves your hand, your wrist is "inside your elbow"—that is, your elbow joint is bent in such a way that your forearm angles back toward your body and your wrist is closer to your head than your elbow is. Slow-motion film of big-league pitchers shows that when they release the ball, the throwing arm is fully extended and straight from shoulder to wrist. The combination of these three elements—head-on stance, dropped elbow, and wrist inside the elbow—mechanically dictates a pushing rather than a hurling motion, creating the familiar pattern of "throwing like a girl."
It is surprisingly hard to find in the literature of baseball a deeper explanation of the mechanics of good and bad throws. Tom Seaver's pitching for the Mets and the White Sox got him into the Hall of Fame, but his book *The Art of Pitching* is full of bromides that hardly clarify the process of throwing, even if they might mean something to accomplished pitchers. His chapter "The Absolutes of Pitching Mechanics," for instance, lays out these four unhelpful principles: "Keep the Front Leg Flexible!" "Rub Up the Baseball." "Hide the Baseball!" "Get it Out, Get it Up!" (The fourth refers to the need to get the ball out of the glove and into the throwing hand in a quick motion.)

A variety of other instructional documents, from *Little League's Official How-to-Play Baseball Book* to *Softball for Girls & Women*, mainly reveal the difficulty of finding words to describe a simple motor activity that everyone can recognize. The challenge, I suppose, is like that of writing a manual on how to ride a bike, or how to kiss. Indeed, the most useful description I've found of the mechanics of throwing comes from a man whose specialty is another sport: Vic Braden made his name as a tennis coach, but he has attempted to analyze the physics of a wide variety of sports so that they all will be easier to teach.

Braden says that an effective throw involves connecting a series of links in a "kinetic chain." The kinetic chain, which is Braden's tool for analyzing most sporting activity, operates on a principle like that of crack-the-whip. Momentum builds up in one part of the body. When that part is suddenly stopped, as the end of the "whip" is stopped in crack-the-whip, the momentum is transferred to and concentrated in the next link in the chain. A good throw uses six links of chain, Braden says. The first two links involve the lower body, from feet to waist. The first motion of a throw (after the body has been rotated away from the target) is to rotate the legs and hips back in the direction of the throw, building up momentum as large muscles move body mass. Then those links stop—a pitcher stops turning his hips once they face the plate—and the momentum is transferred to the next link. This is the torso, from waist to shoulders, and since its mass is less than that of the legs, momentum makes it rotate faster than the hips and legs did. The torso stops when it is facing the plate, and the momentum is transferred to the next link—the upper arm. As the upper arm comes past the head, it stops moving forward, and the momentum goes into the final links—the forearm and wrist, which snap forward at tremendous speed.

This may sound arcane and jerkily mechanical, but it makes perfect sense when one sees Braden's slow-mo movies of pitchers in action. And it explains why people do, or don't, learn how to throw. The implication of Braden's analysis is that throwing is a perfectly natural action (millions and millions of people can do it), but not at all innate. A successful throw involves an intricate series of actions coordinated among muscle groups, as each link of the chain is timed to interact with the next. Like bike riding or skating, it can be learned by anyone—male or female. No one starts out knowing how to ride a bike or throw a ball. Everyone has to learn.

Readers who are happy with their throwing skills can prove this to themselves in about two seconds. If you are right-handed, pick up a ball with your left hand and throw it. Unless you are ambidextrous or have some other odd advantage, you will throw it "like a girl." The problem is not that your left shoulder is hinged strangely or that you don't know what a good throw looks like. It is that you have not spent time training your leg, hip, shoulder, and arm muscles on that side to work together as required for a throw. The actor John Goodman, who played football
seriously and baseball casually when he was in high school, is right-handed. When cast in the 1992 movie *The Babe*, he had to learn to bat and throw left-handed, for realism in the role of Babe Ruth. For weeks before the filming began, he would arrive an hour early at the set of his TV show, *Roseanne*, so that he could practice throwing a tennis ball against a wall left-handed. "I made damn sure no one could see me," Goodman told me recently. "I'm hard enough on myself without the derisive laughter of my so-called friends." When *The Babe* was released, Goodman told a newspaper interviewer, "I'll never say something like 'He throws like a girl' again. It's not easy to learn how to throw."

WHAT Goodman discovered is what most men have forgotten: that if they know how to throw now, it is because they spent time learning at some point long ago. (Goodman says that he can remember learning to ride a bicycle but not learning to throw with his right hand.) This brings us back to the roots of the "throwing like a girl" phenomenon. The crucial factor is not that males and females are put together differently but that they typically spend their early years in different ways. Little boys often learn to throw without noticing that they are throwing. Little girls are more rarely in environments that encourage them in the same way. A boy who wonders why a girl throws the way she does is like a Frenchman who wonders why so many Americans speak French "with an accent."

"For young boys it is culturally acceptable and politically correct to develop these skills," says Linda Wells, of the Arizona State softball team. "They are mentored and networked. Usually girls are not coached at all, or are coached by Mom—or if it's by Dad, he may not be much of an athlete. Girls are often stuck with the bottom of the male talent pool as examples. I would argue that rather than learning to 'throw like a girl,' they learn to throw like poor male athletes. I say that a bad throw is 'throwing like an old man.' This is not gender, it's acculturation."

Almost any motor skill, from doing handstands to dribbling a basketball, is easier to learn if you start young, which is why John Goodman did not realize that learning to throw is difficult until he attempted it as an adult. Many girls reach adulthood having missed the chance to learn to throw when that would have been easiest to do. And as adults they have neither John Goodman's incentive to teach their muscles a new set of skills nor his confidence that the feat is possible. Five years ago Joseph Russo, long a baseball coach at St. John's University, gave athletic-talent tests to actresses who were trying out for roles in *A League of Their Own*, a movie about women's baseball. Most of them were "well coordinated in general, like for dancing," he says. But those who had not happened to play baseball or softball when they were young had a problem: "It sounds silly to say it, but they kept throwing like girls." (The best ball-field talents, by the way, were Madonna, Demi Moore, and the rock singer Joan Jett, who according to Russo "can really hit it hard." Careful viewers of *A League of Their Own* will note that only in a fleeting instant in one scene is the star, Geena Davis, shown actually throwing a ball.)

I'm not sure that I buy Linda Wells's theory that most boys are "mentored" or "networked" into developing ball skills. Those who make the baseball team, maybe. But for a far larger number the decisive ingredient seems to be the hundreds of idle hours spent throwing balls, sticks, rocks, and so on in the playground or the back yard. Children on the playground, I think, demonstrate the moment when the kinetic chain begins to work. It is when a little boy tries to throw a rock farther than his friend can, or to throw a stick over a telephone wire thirty feet up. A toddler's
first, instinctive throw is a push from the shoulder, showing the essential traits of "throwing like a girl." But when a child is really trying to put some oomph into the throw, his natural instinct is to wind up his body and let fly with the links of the chain. Little girls who do the same thing—compete with each other in distance throwing—learn the same way; but whereas many boys do this, few girls do. Tammy Richards, a woman who was raised on a farm in central California, says that she learned to throw by trying to heave dried cow chips farther than her brother could. It may have helped that her father, Bob Richards, was a former Olympic competitor in the decathlon (and two-time Olympic champion in the pole vault), and that he taught all his sons and daughters to throw not only the ball but also the discus, the shotput, and the javelin.

IS there a way to make up for lost time if you failed to invest those long hours on the playground years ago? Of course. Adults may not be able to learn to speak unaccented French, but they can learn to ride a bike, or skate, or throw. All that is required for developing any of these motor skills is time for practice—and spending that time requires overcoming the sense of embarrassment and futility that adults often have when attempting something new. Here are two tips that may help.

One is a surprisingly valuable drill suggested by the Little League's How-to-Play handbook. Play catch with a partner who is ten or fifteen feet away—but do so while squatting with the knee of your throwing side touching the ground. When you start out this low, you have to keep the throw high to get the ball to your partner without bouncing it. This encourages a throw with the elbow held well above the shoulder, where it belongs.

The other is to play catch with a person who can throw like an athlete but is using his or her of hand. The typical adult woman hates to play catch with the typical adult man. She is well aware that she's not looking graceful, and reacts murderously to the condescending tone in his voice ("That's more like it, honey!"). Forcing a right-handed man to throw left-handed is the great equalizer. He suddenly concentrates his attention on what it takes to get hips, shoulder, and elbow working together. He is suddenly aware of the strength of character needed to ignore the snickers of onlookers while learning new motor skills. He can no longer be condescending. He may even be nervous, wondering what he'll do if his partner makes the breakthrough first and he's the one still throwing like a girl.

---

**Throw Like a Girl? You Can Do Better**

By Tamar Haspel

From *The Washington Post* September 10, 2012

There’s no way around it. I throw like a girl.
Luckily, it’s not difficult to avoid situations in which throwing is required, and I’ve managed to do it successfully my entire adult life. Except that one time.

A decade or so ago, in New York, a ball came flying over an 18-foot schoolyard fence just as I was passing by. There was no one I could hand it off to, and a gaggle of fifth-graders was waiting for me to toss it back. I had so little faith in my overarm throwing that I had to go underhand. The squeal of brakes was my first indication that the ball had ended up behind me, in the middle of Columbus Avenue. The best I can say about this incident is that nobody got hurt.

I know I’m not the only woman with that kind of story. As much as the expression grates, girls do, in general, throw like girls.

Janet Hyde, a professor of psychology and women’s studies at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, has studied the gender gap across a broad spectrum of skills. She believes that men and women aren’t as different as they are often portrayed, and she has mined data on social, psychological, communication and physical traits, skills and behaviors to quantify the gap. After looking at 46 meta-analyses, Hyde found what she defined as a “very large” difference in only two skills: throwing velocity and throwing distance.

The throwing gap has been researched for more than half a century, and the results have been consistent. According to Jerry Thomas, dean of the College of Education at the University of North Texas in Denton, who did the throwing research Hyde cites in her paper, “The overhand throwing gap, beginning at 4 years of age, is three times the difference of any other motor task, and it just gets bigger across age. By 18, there’s hardly any overlap in the distribution: Nearly every boy by age 15 throws better than the best girl.”

Around the world, at all ages, boys throw better — a lot better — than girls. Studies of overhand ball throwing across different cultures have found that pre-pubescent girls throw 51 to 69 percent of the distance that boys do, at 51 to 78 percent of the velocity. As they get older, the differences
increase; one U.S. study found that girls age 14 to 18 threw only 39 percent as far as boys (an average of about 75 feet vs. about 192 feet). The question is why.

Since boys generally learn to throw young and do more throwing than girls do, it would make sense that they’re better at it, and Thomas acknowledges the nurture component. “The gap is much larger than it should be, and it would be smaller if girls got more practice,” he says.

To try to distinguish nature from nurture, Thomas studied aboriginal Australian children, who grow up in a culture where both men and women hunt, and both sexes throw from childhood. “Our hypothesis was that [the aboriginal] girls would be better throwers and not as different from the boys as in European, Chinese, Australian and all the U.S. cultures.”

The data bore him out. Aboriginal girls threw tennis balls at 78.3 percent of the velocity of boys — closer to boys than in most other cultures, but still significantly slower. (Throwing distance wasn’t measured.)

Size and strength undoubtedly also play a role, but girls and boys are about the same size as children, when there is a significant gap in overhand throwing skill. The gap widens at puberty, when the advantages of size and strength kick in.

Like a dart, not a ball
To understand why a girl “throws like a girl,” it’s necessary to define just what throwing like a girl is. According to Thomas, a girl throwing overhand looks more like she’s throwing a dart than a ball. It’s a slow, weak, forearm motion, with a short step on the same side as the throwing hand. A boy’s throw, by contrast, involves the entire body. Thomas describes a skillful overhand throw as an uncoiling in three phases: step (with the foot opposite the throwing hand), rotate (with hips first, then shoulders) and whip (with the arm and hand).

Girls don’t do any of those three steps as successfully as boys, but Thomas zeroes in on one aspect in particular: the rotation.
The power in an overhand throw — and in a golf swing, a tennis serve or a baseball swing — comes from the separate turning of hips and shoulders. The hips rotate forward and the body opens, and then the shoulders snap around. Women tend to rotate their hips and shoulders together, and even expert women throwers don’t get the differential that men get. “The one-piece rotation is the biggest difference,” says Thomas. “It keeps women from creating speed at the hand.” Even when women learn to rotate hips and shoulders separately, they don’t do it as fast as men.

There doesn’t appear to be a muscular or structural reason for the difference.

“Men have wider shoulders, which translates to higher velocity at ball release. They’re bigger and stronger, and you could argue they can rotate their body faster, but the women have less mass to rotate,” Thomas says. The difference, he suspects, isn’t in the arm or the torso or the shoulder. “I’d bet my bottom dollar there’s something neurological. It’s the nervous system.”

This explanation, while not explicitly provable, would make evolutionary sense. “Men threw rocks, and, if you could throw well, you got the women,” Thomas points out. “Women did the gathering, and often brought a baby with them. People have speculated that [one-piece] rotation came from women having to throw while holding a baby.”

Thomas points out that a biological explanation isn’t palatable to everyone. “If you say something is biological,” he says, “people think you should just give up and go home.” Janet Hyde agrees: “The more we argue for gender differences, the more we feed people’s stereotypes. A belief in large gender differences is incompatible with equal opportunity.” Still, Hyde readily acknowledges that there are some biological differences, and throwing is one of them.

Thomas doesn’t want to give up and go home. “People don’t like to talk about it because girls will give up, but perhaps if we talk about it, girls can learn. And they can learn.”

Taking a lesson
Jenny Allard, coach of the Harvard women’s softball team, is doing the teaching. “Overhand throwing is the most undertaught skill in softball,” she says. “Girls tend to keep their limbs close to their body, and not rotate at all. If they do rotate, they rotate their entire body.” She sees the problem even at the elite level. “I saw a potential recruit who was fast as lightning, and a great hitter. But she throws . . . ” Allard shrugs. “Like a girl.” She uses the expression without apology.

Allard, a former all-American softball player who has coached at Harvard for 18 years, believes women can and should be taught to throw. Could she teach me? “Absolutely.”

So I went to Harvard to learn. Allard met me with a ball and two gloves, and we walked out to the softball field.

After warming up by tossing the ball back and forth at a distance of about 20 feet, we needed to test how far I could throw so we could track my improvement. I went to home plate and gave it my all. I couldn’t get the ball to first base, 60 feet away. Fifty-five was the best I could do.

Allard then gave me a straightforward lesson in the basic overhand throwing motion. It broke down Thomas’s three steps, in reverse order. I first practiced the whip of the arm and hand, then the extension backward and rotation forward, and then the step with the opposite foot. The lesson took about half an hour.

After it, we went back to home plate. Thomas had warned that simply learning the motion wouldn’t work miracles, so I didn’t expect one. And I didn’t get one. But I did get the ball to first base, and even a little beyond: That was a 10 percent improvement in just 30 minutes.

I told Allard that I’d been cautioned that instruction without practice doesn’t help much. “Neither does practice without instruction,” she said. She put a ball and a glove in my hand and sent me home.

I have been practicing. And although I’m not breaking any records, for the first time in my life, I can throw a ball with something resembling confidence. And how many girls can say that?
I was traveling so didn't get on the much-commented-upon Washington Post feature about "throwing like a girl" when it first appeared. I am reminded by Andrew Sullivan that the topic is still bouncing around, so here goes:

1) I am weirdly heartened to have other people treat this as a "real" subject. As I've mentioned elsewhere, the article I've most enjoyed doing in my Atlantic career was one called "Throwing Like a Girl," from some 15 years ago.

2) As you'll see if you compare my piece and the Post's, we come to somewhat different conclusions. We both agree that there is a such a thing as the throwing-like-a-girl motion. We disagree on its fundamental cause.

3) The Post piece talks about a variety of differences between the genders. Eg, "[a professor of psychology and women's studies] found what she defined as a 'very large' difference in only two skills: throwing velocity and throwing distance." I ended up being convinced that, apart from obvious gaps in size and strength, the only difference that mattered between men and women is that more males than females have spent time learning how to throw.

4) Learning how is the crucial concept, because throwing a ball "correctly" is like riding a bike, in this way. Virtually anyone can learn to do it, but virtually no one starts out knowing how. Once people learn, gender differences in strength take over. The average male bike rider will be stronger than the average female; the strongest male ball-thrower, like Randy Johnson, above, will throw faster than the strongest female. But they all can ride bikes the same way, or throw balls the same way, once they learn how.

5) Check my article for details (and this follow up), but here's the simplest try-it-right-now proof that throwing motion is a learned rather than an innate skill. Pick up a ball with your "off" hand -- for me, the south paw, since I am right-handed. Throw the ball with that hand. You will throw it "like a girl."
And it will take you hundreds, probably thousands, of throws before you feel as if you can do it naturally. As part of my article research, I threw left-handed with my sons and my wife. It was revealing and character-building. **UPDATE!** Here is a fabulous Vimeo clip of men throwing with their "off" hands. Every one of them throws like -- well, see for yourself. [Thanks to reader ER.]

6) Now we get to the other realm of gender differences. For whatever reason, most little boys spend more of their early years *learning* how to throw than most little girls do. They get better at it -- as they would be at bike riding, if only boys rather than girls were taken through the inevitable shakiness and falls of those first few rides. But that's where the boy/girl difference emerges -- from the thousands of instances of a boy picking up a rock to skip it across a pond and learning how the "kinetic chain" of a throw feels, while a girl, for whatever reason, is doing something else.

Below, as discussed in another item, is a great super slo-mo video with the Giants' Tim Lincecum, showing the "kinetic chain" of an effective throw. And after that, continued after the jump, is a note that came in just now on the very topic of *learned* rather than innate skills.

Now, below and after the jump, a touching letter that has just arrived, on this very topic. It is long but to me very interesting:

I loved your article, "Throwing Like a Girl." it. I loved that you even dared to point out this stinging little "euphemism" and all that it implies. I am personally guilty of using the expression (along with "you scream like a girl") and I AM a girl.

I think the part of this article that interested me most, however, was not that you pointed this out, but that you pointed out that throwing properly is something that can be learned by adults - and more importantly to me, by children.

I'm sure the reason my husband brought this article to my attention was to soothe my worried and inherently UN-athletic soul. I have managed to pass this inherent lack of athleticism down to my oldest son, despite ALL of the opposite genetic material encoded in my husband and his side of the family. It runs deep and strong on his side, but apparently not deep and strong enough.
When I realized that my tall and naturally strong boy, a boy who even looks graceful in repose, was not actually gifted with any grace when it came to running, throwing or hitting, I got very sad about it. All I could remember was being picked last for every team that was ever put together in grade school phys ed. I watched him reach the age when boys start to really be interested in balls and then watched his interest fade as he realized in his just-pass-toddler way that he couldn't do it like they could and that they quickly dismissed him when they realized he wasn't at their level. He wasn't so much wounded by it (as I was watching it unfold) as he was resigned. He realized he had a much greater talent for train track building and Legos and soon lost interest in things that involved balls or bats.

But I didn't want him to be resigned. I wanted him to try because I always wished I had tried harder and because I wanted him to enjoy his body in motion. I kept thinking something would just "kick in." So we put him in community basketball organizations and tried soccer too. Both things were utter failures. In two years of basketball he never once made a basket during a game and often we'd look up to see all the boys down at one end of the court under a basket fighting to score and him in the middle of the court either staring at the little 5 year old "cheerleaders" or looking up at the backside of the retractable backboards trying to figure out the mechanics.

At school, recess became a "Lord of the Flies" scenario where only the strongest and best were are allowed to play and the rest were kicked to the curb. On several occasions he was flatly told that "he couldn't play because he wasn't good enough." I was heartbroken watching him be rejected like this for something he seemingly had no control over. And then I got pissed about it because I realized that our education system would never accept children in the classroom telling other children that they didn't read well enough or that they were crappy spellers. Teachers and parents don't generally just throw in the towel and say, "well, my kid just wasn't given the gift of reading or spelling." NO! We TEACH them!

And I realized too that I myself had learned athletic skills as I got older. When I got to college I played intramural soccer with girls in my dorm the whole time I was there. I wasn't a star, but I did okay. [Later] I played beer league softball for years. Again - nothing to brag about, but the fact that I was comfortable enough to do it every year, around men I was probably interested in dating, without being embarrassed is telling of my confidence in my own ability to connect a bat to a ball with regularity.

Anyway - my whole long laborious point is that I think you should write a
follow up article that investigates why we dismiss kids who aren't gifted with innate athletic talent, instead of trying to teach them and/or why we don't realize that this stuff can, in fact, be taught! There is such a hierarchy surrounding athleticism - even in our supposedly enlightened, diverse, and compassionate society. It truly separates men from boys (to use another euphemism that stings) and at an age when, as I can apparently attest, the wounds may penetrate deeper than we realize until we're older. And then, of course, there is the whole issue of just getting up and getting moving. If you tell a kid he can't play because he doesn't know how to then he'll quite trying and he might sit on the couch, watch TV, eat and get fat. (Also, something I went through.)

For us and our outsized 9 year old, what made the difference was figuring out what sports were best suited to him physically, mentally and emotionally. By emotionally, I mean we found a sport that was less demeaning to a kid who struggled athletically because it didn't depend on children making all the decisions about where the ball was going to go during a game - or it didn't depend on a ball at all. He takes taekwondo which he loves despite his awkwardness and where they teach, teach, teach and encourage practice so that he gets better; and we put him in Optimist football, a sport where each kid has a predetermined position that they don't break out of during plays and where coaches decide who is going to get the ball.

Our kiddo is doing so well at these things - he's not scoring touchdowns yet, but he makes good plays regularly and he is enjoying himself, he's learning skills, he's out moving and breaking a sweat on a regular basis, and he's accepted as an integral part of a team. For me, it is like a salve on my own wounds.

Please write an article about how you CAN in fact be taught athletic skills! Every man, woman and child should be comfortable playing a pick up game of basketball or having a catch on a Sunday afternoon!