Raisman: Revolting conditions, vulnerable athletes

by Sally Jenkins

To Aly Raisman, there is culpability in the crummy little details. The showers were moldy, she says, and the food was so repulsive that it seemed calculated to give them eating disorders. “It didn’t sit well in your stomach. Something wasn’t right,” she says. If U.S. Olympic authorities couldn’t be bothered to care about the dirty showers and the lousy diet at the Karolyi Ranch, no wonder they didn’t catch the sexual molester who preyed on her and her gold medal gymnastics teammates for years.

From 2001 to 2017, Bela and Martha Karolyi’s Texas ranch was the designated national team training center for gymnastics, an engine that generated gold medals and million-dollar salaries for officials such as former USA Gymnastics president Steve Penny. But for the gymnasts it was a shabby, penny-pinching place, Raisman says, of dorm rooms jammed with old bunk beds covered with stained blankets and sometimes crawling with...
bugs. “Honestly, it was disgusting,” she says.

U.S. Olympic Committee head Scott Blackmun called it “an excellent model for the Olympic movement.”

Raisman, now 23, is suing the USOC and USA Gymnastics over that disconnect, alleging the organizations “willfully” refused to “implement appropriate safeguards” at the ranch and in other settings that left her and her teammates vulnerable to the sex crimes of USA Gymnastics’ head trainer and medical director Larry Nassar.

The gymnasts were the faces of the Summer Olympics, who brought home individual all-around gold medals in four straight Summer Games and team golds in 2012 and 2016. Yet at the monthly Karolyi camps, “The shower smelled like eggs, and we would bring sandals to wear because it was so disgusting,” Raisman says. “After you showered you were like, I almost feel dirtier than before.” Training camps are supposed to be spartan — even unpleasant — but Raisman said they weren’t even provided with bottled water, and those bathrooms lacked soap. When they ran out, they were terrified to ask for more because U.S. coaches and officials made them believe those who were noncompliant or complained would be left off the team, Raisman says.

“Nobody wanted to be the one who was difficult,” Raisman says. “Now that I’m away from the sport it makes me so angry that we were that afraid to ask for soap.”

Asked about conditions at the ranch, a USA Gymnastics spokesman said the organization could not respond “due to pending litigation.” Attorneys for Penny and for Bela and Martha Karolyi, the Romanian-born gymnastics coaches who built the U.S. team into a world powerhouse, also did not respond to queries. USOC spokesman Patrick Sandusky, asked why the ranch was considered “a model,” said the Olympic committee relied on USA Gymnastics to supervise conditions at the training center, though he added:

“It is clear that in the future, more due diligence can be done to ensure that third-party facilities uphold their end of the agreement on how the facilities are run and maintained.”

The USOC and USA Gymnastics severed ties with the Karolyi Ranch in January.

Raisman’s account of the monthly camps is bolstered by that of a former athletic trainer, Melanie Seaman, who worked with the national team from 1993 to 2006 and is currently with the Tulsa Ballet. Seaman, who predated Raisman and whom the gymnast says she does not know,
tacted me after watching young women testify at Nassar’s sentencing in February, when he received 40 to 125 years. “I’ve been quiet and haven’t said a word all these years, but I thought people need to hear it from more than just the kids,” Seaman says.

Gymnasts trained for six or seven hours a day on “frozen carrots and peas,” according to Seaman. There was no nutritionist, though eating disorders are a long-recognized scourge in the sport. “No one helped them,” Seaman says.
Breakfast at the ranch cafeteria was powdered eggs and a spray butter substitute, Raisman recalls. “Those things are so bad for you,” she says. “Everything seemed the cheapest, not real food.” Dinner was rice and mushy vegetables and a piece of frozen chicken of uncertain texture, “and everyone felt they were being fully watched” with every bite, Raisman says. If you performed poorly, the reason was invariably that you had eaten too much.

“The food was awful, really, really awful,” Seaman confirms. “Nasty . . . They finally got a salad bar, but it was just sparse. Gross.”

The gyms lacked even a rudimentary medical facility — even though gymnastics has a well-documented injury rate that is on par with hockey’s. “If I taped someone, I did it on the bleachers,” Seaman says. “If I needed to work on calves or stretch them, it was on the floor.”

Nor were there even supplies. “There was no water, and you couldn’t store anything,” Seaman says. “You had to bring your own training bag.”

The ranch did have a relationship with a hospital, and eventually some improvements and renovations were made to the rooms when USA Gymnastics entered into an agreement with Hilton Hotels. By 2014, a small training room with a cold tub had been added in a back hallway. But it had just “one or two tables for 30 or 40 girls,” Raisman says, and became a place where Nassar could more easily work alone on gymnasts behind a closed door.

There were no cutting-edge therapies available, just Nassar’s “treatments.” When Raisman had an ankle injury, he told her he needed to access it through her pelvis.

At the end of the day the gymnasts went back to their rustic dorms, where they slept four or six to a room, while the coaches and staff disappeared en masse into town for dinner. “At night most of the coaches would just leave,” Seaman says. If a gymnast was injured, Nassar or a trainer treated them in their rooms at night, Seaman confirms.

Raisman wants to know, what kind of decent medical director would find that setup appropriate? “The fact that Nassar was fine working on us on our beds without a table, that 100 percent should’ve been a red flag to USA Gymnastics,” Raisman says.

Both Raisman and Seaman suspect that Nassar was promoted by USA Gymnastics not because he was well qualified but because he looked the other way when athletes were pushed through injuries that should have sidelined them. Seaman describes having to buck multiple USA coaches (none of them named Karolyi), who discouraged her from even giving
them ice. “They were withholding treatment when they were hurt,” Sea-
man alleges. “That happened more times than I want to admit.” She saw
athletes perform with fractures in their feet and tibias.

Later, when Raisman was an established gold medalist and old enough
to question, she began to realize how out of bounds it all was, she says. She
hired a sports physical therapist, Boston-based Joe Van Allen, who intro-
duced her to a dietitian, Ted Harper, as well as up-to-date treatments such
as compression boots and laser therapies, none of which USA Gymnastics
provided. “Imagine if we’d actually had a good doctor who was helping us
and not traumatizing us,” she says.

Most galling to Raisman is that out front, officials acted as if the gym-
nasts were pampered. In 2011, when USA Gymnastics entered into a spon-
sorship with Hilton Hotels, it made Raisman appear at a news conference in
a luxe Hilton-monogrammed robe, with her hair wrapped in towels. Penny
had the brass to tell the media, “We have spa days, and they get manicures
and their pedicures. . . . These are the types of comforts our friends from
Hilton are going to help us provide for the ladies while they’re here work-
ing their fannies off trying to be the best team in the world.”

Raisman says, “We didn’t get any of it.”

Most people might have reasonably assumed then that American offi-
cials would keep a sharp eye on them, that they would make sure Hunts-
ville, Tex., didn’t turn into Romania and would give gymnasts the support
they needed to mitigate the essential unhealthfulness of the sport. That
apparently was a bad assumption. “It goes way deeper than just Larry Nas-
sar,” Seaman says. “It allowed Larry to operate, but there was way more
dysfunction than just Larry.”

It also goes deeper than the Karolyis. Karolyi champions such as
Dominique Moceanu have said they were abusive; others, such as Mary
Lou Retton, have praised them. Raisman is in the middle; she found Mar-
tha too demanding at times but did not characterize her as harmful. “She
was tough, as everyone would expect out of her,” Raisman says.

Everyone knew what they were getting with the Karolyis: uncompromising and even harsh methods by a couple who had worked in East-
ern Europe without basic resources and who got unparalleled results. But
where were the people at the federation and the USOC who should have
been a check to them? Where was the quality control to ensure decent
medical and nutritional standards? Where were the basic protocols to keep
young girls in a dormitory safe and the basic education on recognizing
classic signs of a predator?
After listening to Raisman’s and Seaman’s accounts, one thing is clear: Not a man or woman should be left standing at the upper reaches of USA Gymnastics or the USOC. This was a pervasive problem. Not a Nassar problem or a Karolyi problem. It was an American problem.

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Raisman: Conditions at the Karolyi Ranch left gymnasts vulnerable to Nassar

By Sally Jenkins

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WASHINGTON — The sexual abuse of Olympic gymnasts by Dr. Larry Nassar, a former team USA national team doctor, was not an isolated incident. It was a core element of the system that governed gymnastics and affected not just the athletes on the national team but anyone who dared to enter the Stars and Strikes Ranch in Texas — a hotbed of the gymnastics movement.

Nassar was a gymnastics coach at the ranch, where he operated under the watchful eye of Martha Karolyi, the former head of USA Gymnastics. It was a place where gymnasts were expected to perform their best, but it was also a place where they were subjected to sexual abuse.

Gymnasts were the faces of the USA Gymnastics scandal, but they were also the result of a system that failed them. The gymnasts were the ones who were targeted and silenced.

The system was built on the idea of excellence, but it was always a utopia. Excellence meant that athletes had to train more than they were allowed to, and that meant that they were left vulnerable to abuse.

Karolyi was the face of the system. She was the one who had the brass to tell the U.S. Olympic Committee that USA Gymnastics was in crisis, and she was the one who had the brass to tell the USA Gymnastics executive committee that USA Gymnastics was in crisis.

Karolyi was not a monster, but she was a woman who was in charge of a system that was designed to make her look good.

Karolyi was also a woman who was in charge of a system that was designed to make her look good.

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Karolyi was also a woman who was in charge of a system that was designed to make her look good.
Patriotism and football: A volatile mix

by Sally Jenkins

The most interesting question in the NFL’s national anthem controversy always has been, why is it so potent? How is it that the small gesture of a handful of players taking a knee in a pregame ceremony creates national reverberations and outrage? The answer lies in the fact that, somewhere along the line, NFL football became a kind of “liturgy of empire,” to borrow a phrase. It’s a brand of civil religion, and if you think not, then count how many Americans think it’s more important to get to the game than church on a Sunday morning.

Set aside for the moment whether you want your NFL teams to be mindlessly obedient cogs in the machinery of a paternal patriotic state. Set aside the question of who is the truer American, the man on the field who reads and thinks or the one at the big desk who demands that anyone who disagrees with him be exiled. To their credit, Commissioner Roger Goodell and the NFL players’ union have decided they won’t be dictated to by Donald Trump. “Thanks for your thoughts, but we’ll take it from here,” player representative Eric Winston tweeted in reply to the president’s demand that any player who doesn’t stand at attention with hand over his heart during the anthem be suspended. Instead NFL owners and players will try to agree on a new policy in confidential meetings.

But to find a resolution, the various NFL factions first need to understand why the controversy burned so hot in the first place. Billionaire owners and players alike have been dumbfounded and tin-eared, failing to comprehend how a protest involving just 12 percent of players seeking to comment mildly on racial injustices has swamped the league and alienated a large chunk of the audience. Hence the failed appeasement policies and inability to foresee that leaving it to individual teams whether to discipline a player for an on-field protest could turn into 32 separate wildfires.
The volatile marriage of patriotism and football is as old as the sport. The rise of the game closely followed the American frontier wars: Harvard, Princeton, Yale and Columbia formed the Intercollegiate Football Association in 1876, just four months after the annihilation of Custer at Little Big Horn. The game steadily grew in the 1890s after Frederick Jackson Turner declared the frontier officially vanished. Football was a reaction to the fear that American men, with nothing left to conquer once the primal wilderness was gone, might become neurasthenic and overcivilized. If you were wondering where North Carolina Coach Larry Fedora got his idea that if football goes, “the country goes down, too,” there you have it. He got it from the Victorians.

American football always has been a game of clout. It’s about taking possession by moving others out of the way. In that respect it has an unbreakable hold on the American imagination and American emotions that no other game has. At its heart is a quality shared by its greatest presidential advocate, Teddy Roosevelt: “a righteous ruthlessness.” It was Roosevelt who defended football against concerned university presidents who thought it was corrupting rather than strengthening America’s youth in the early 1900s. Harvard’s Charles William Eliot wanted to ban it as “more brutalizing than prizefighting, cockfighting or bullfighting.” University of Chicago divinity school professor Shailer Mathews called it a “boy-killing, man-mutilating, moneymaking, education-prostituting gladiatorial sport.”

To which Roosevelt countered: “I have no sympathy whatever with the overwrought sentimentality that would keep a young man in cotton wool. I have a hearty contempt for him if he counts a broken arm or collarbone as of serious consequences when balanced against the chance of showing that he possesses hardihood, physical prowess, and courage.”

From Roosevelt on, presidents have interested themselves in football as the receptacle of America’s values and basic hardihood. Woodrow Wilson was so invested in Princeton football that when his alma mater lost to Penn, his wife remarked, “Really I think Woodrow would have had some sort of collapse if we had lost in politics, too.”

Tim Suttle, a pastor and writer from Olathe, Kan., has surveyed this history and described it as “sport as the liturgy of empire.” Suttle hit on the phrase when he returned to his alma mater, Kansas State, for a football game and realized that the Pledge of Allegiance and singing of the national anthem had all the elements of a church service. Hats were removed, and crowds stood in reverence, recited from sacred texts and sang a hymn of praise.
“The liturgies of sport,” Suttle has written, “teach us that America is a singular beacon in a world of hackneyed impostors. . . . The ceremony and the game embody the belief that this nation stands above all other nations as more powerful, virtuous, righteous, and more justified in our actions, even our most violent ones.”

Look at the anthem controversy in this light, and you can see why taking a knee so upsets a large segment of the audience: because it’s a denial of American exceptionalism. That in turn is why there is no explaining to those offended that the protesters don’t mean to insult the flag but merely to comment on social injustice. Or that players didn’t even take the field for the anthem until 2009, when the Pentagon made a marketing deal with the NFL for patriotic displays.

A righteous ruthlessness: As football goes, so goes the country.

There is a high irony in all of this: The NFL’s brand of civil religion serves to highlight just how un-Christian this nation can be on a Sabbath. Games have become the chief rival for Sunday morning worship in this country. If folks aren’t tailgating in an NFL parking lot, they’re at children’s soccer practices. “For most American families, when a conflict arises between sports and church, it is no contest,” Suttle notices.

Suttle also observes, “The opposing liturgies of competition and Sabbath lead human beings to draw very different conclusions about life and what it means to be human.” Competition teaches us “that resources are scarce, conflict is our natural state, and we must work seven days a week to get ahead,” he writes. “Competition teaches us we are generating our lives and we can’t slow down.” The Sabbath, on the other hand, “tells us that we are receiving our lives . . . that we are precious and deeply loved — win lose or draw.”

You don’t need to be a Christian to read something true in Suttle’s message. Or to feel that the entire NFL debate is about a profoundly misplaced emphasis. Enforced patriotism, of course, is not patriotism at all. Regardless of love of country or religious persuasion, surely we all have something better to do than argue over a false, commoditized civil religion that has hijacked peaceful Sundays and days of rest.

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Petroleum and football: A volatile mix

Leaders on the clubhouse? Hard to find many with the Nationals.

Washington waits out the rain and picks up a drama-free win.

Molinari outlasts them all

The spotlight was on Tiger Woods, who ended up tied for sixth, but playing partner Francesco Molinari stole the show with a two-shot triumph.

He repeatedly made those, arming those six frothing beneath — good way tie for the lead at one point so on a day that became impossible.

Washington wins out over Los Angeles in overtime, 27-24, taking their third straight.

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

You don’t need to be a football fan to understand why the entire NFL debate is in Suttle’s message. Or to feel human beings to draw very.

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

Brian Beach

Washington wins out over Los Angeles in overtime, 27-24, taking their third straight.

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

No. 2 overall selection from Florida State.

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

Moreau after it drafted him in the supplemental draft.

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

As the Ravens’ extra week of practice today, the weather making for a workday.

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

Sally weeks more to heal a stress.

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

Trailing the Philadelphia Eagles.

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

The season is kind of in the right direction for a team

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

The Ravens’ extra week of practice.

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

Ras Jackson is already fan favorite.

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

NATIONALS

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

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NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

BRAVES 2

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

T9 Tony Finau

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

T12 Five golfers

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

F. Molinari

NFL’s national anthem debate is a matter of misplaced emphasis

Tiger Woods, who ended up tied for sixth, but playing partner Francesco Molinari stole the show with a two-shot triumph.

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A
As Ogunbowale dances on TV, NCAA sidesteps issue

by Sally Jenkins

Arike Ogunbowale is still dancing, and the NCAA is still standing. Buildings didn’t collapse, Mark Emmert didn’t crumble into chalk dust, and the golden dome of Notre Dame didn’t topple. On the contrary, the only thing damaged by Ogunbowale’s turn on ABC’s “Dancing With the Stars” is the NCAA’s ability to rationalize an unconstrained monopoly that illegally controls the stage and box office for college athletes.

“You make me really want to join you, baby!” judge Bruno Tonioli crows at Ogunbowale.

Every athlete in the NCAA should join her in the rumba line.

This is what the NCAA fought so hard for so long to forbid? A sneakered kid doing a spangled salsa in 4-4 time on a cheap mirror-ball set for a chance to make some extra prize money? But, of course, it was never about the kid. If it were about the kid, the NCAA would be more worried about Ogunbowale’s sleep patterns: She took a red-eye flight from Los Angeles after the show’s season premiere Monday night to make a 9:30 a.m. class in South Bend, Ind. The NCAA has never worried about overburdening its athletes. It’s too preoccupied with raking off their earnings.

You may wonder why you should watch “Dancing With the Stars” in the midst of the spring rush of NBA and Stanley Cup playoffs. The simple answer is because Ogunbowale’s performance has a chance to change the college sports landscape (and along the way Josh Norman will enchant you with his attempt to turn muscle into rhythm and line).

For years, the NCAA has fought clench-fisted, mean-spirited court battles to control the names, likenesses and activities of college athletes. Just last summer, it declared Central Florida kicker Donald De La Haye ineligible because he monetized his own YouTube channel. But in a move more sudden than a cha-cha sidestep, the NCAA suddenly reversed course and granted Notre Dame’s buzzer-beating Ogunbowale a tentative “waiver”
to trade on her new stardom on DWTS. Why this liberal new precedent with Ogunbowale? Because for once, the NCAA needed a kid more than the kid needed the NCAA. The tilt in that leverage may become permanent.

For years, the NCAA has acted as if professionalism is worse than isotope poisoning. But now we know that was just a cover story to protect all the illicit coin. What a racket: Under NCAA Bylaw 12.4.1, an athlete is forbidden from compensation for “publicity, reputation, fame or personal following that he or she has obtained because of athletics ability.” Meanwhile, coaches, athletic directors and vice chancellors make seven-figure salaries off the kids’ sweat and take the skim from $10 billion in deals with television and apparel companies. An ongoing FBI investigation has led to 10 arrests for bribery and money laundering in men’s college basketball. What’s that smell? It’s the stink of the books cooking.

So the NCAA desperately needs Ogunbowale. It needs her clean-scented stardom. It needs the afterglow of those last-second shots she hit in the Final Four to beat Connecticut and Mississippi State. It needs her unaffected lamplit smile and her playfulness as she tries to master promenade steps and high heels with her partner, Gleb Savchenko, all the while finishing up her spring semester.

“I don’t know how he thinks I’m going to dance in high heels when I can barely walk in ’em,” she said.

But most of all, the NCAA needs Ogunbowale to remind the public that the collegiate model is worth defending and that the enterprise is more than just crockery.

So laugh at “Dancing With the Stars” if you want or call it a guilty pleasure, but it’s not a trivial exercise. The charm of the show lies in the fact that it explores whether certain skills and confidence are importable from one field to another. The answer is, not always. It’s fascinating which celebrities are remarkably liquid and which are cringingly stiff doing a fox trot.

But one thing it demonstrates for sure is that athletes are better than most at transference. And Ogunbowale, the first college athlete on the show, is a master class in transference. Her combination of energy and ease, her can-do-ness in the moment, is the direct result of 80 hours a week of dual responsibilities and pressures. This is a kid who brought a 3.5 GPA out of high school in Milwaukee while winning four state club titles in soccer.

Those remarkable shots she hit to beat U-Conn. and Mississippi State to clinch a national championship were no freaks. She worked for them, she had confidence in them, and she deserved for them to go in. She is jug-
gling the academic load of a junior at Notre Dame while sporting a national championship ring for one of the most demanding programs in the country, and on top of that, in the space of just a week she learned a highly trained dance and performed it on national television.

In doing so, she drove an absolute stake in the heart of the NCAA’s fallacious old reasoning. This is the NCAA’s first tentative experiment with allowing an athlete a little commercial liberty, and it’s an aggravatingly stingy one. She is not allowed to so much as promote “Dancing With the Stars” on social media or appear with the rest of the cast on “Good Morning America.” Why? Why should this glittering advertisement for the term “student-athlete,” this extremely special brand of multifaceted achiever, this credit to her school and undeserved boon for the NCAA, have to suppress her light?

If the system were anything other than rigged, she would be allowed to cash in on her moment commercially and lay away for her future. Is there really any question left as to whether forbidding such an athlete to profit does “harm” to anyone but her? Should she really need the NCAA’s permission to show off the very best of herself and what she brings to a university? Should such a beautifully ephemeral creature really have to truncate her fleeting cultural moment so some functionaries in suits can protect their revenue flow?

Watch Ogunbowale. Watch her try to master the cross-body lead and the copa and high heels. Watch her because she is everything college athletics could be — and should be.

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James ensures Cavaliers head home with 2-0 lead

Expensive, aging roster hurts Wizards in a bind

As Ogunbowale dances on TV, NCAA sidesteps issue

Terps’ Whittle is an (almost) unstoppable scorer
‘The people in charge of this horror chamber must be exposed and punished. And replaced by real leaders’

Congress must launch investigation into how USA Gymnastics and USOC let Nassar prey upon girls for decades

by Sally Jenkins

A national organization with the initials USA on it forced young girls to submit to pelvic exams by a child molester. Literally hundreds of them were isolated in mandatory “camps” and were repeatedly assaulted by a barehanded pedophile for years on end, while nobody cared to notice that no decent doctor would perform such an exam on young girls, much less ungloved. Where in the fresh red hell is an independent investigation into USA Gymnastics, and why isn’t Congress threatening to smash the U.S. Olympic Committee’s charter into pieces with a gavel over this?

It’s only the worst sex abuse scandal in the history of sports — and maybe in the history of this country. USA Gymnastics not only allowed serial pedophile Larry Nassar unsupervised access to the scores of girls in its charge over 30 years, it required them to submit to him and his utterly unjustifiable vaginal examinations. There was no saying, “I don’t like this doctor. I want my own.” The organizations systematically deprived them of any right to say no, to ask for alternate treatment. It makes the Hollywood rapes look principled.

“I don’t think people understand just how bad this was,” gold medalist Aly Raisman said in a phone interview Wednesday morning, just before Nassar was sentenced up to 175 years. “I don’t think they have all the pieces and understand how USA Gymnastics and the USOC created the perfect environment for this monster.”
Let’s put those pieces together — and understand why Nassar’s trial should be just the start of the investigation and not an end. His years of criminal sexual assaults on gymnasts could have happened only with the assistance of U.S. sports officials and coaches, such as Martha and Bela Karolyi and John Geddert, who let Nassar violate basic medical norms on their watch. It could have happened only because they were willfully blind to his “pelvic adjustments” on young women athletes, for which there was no good reason. It could have happened only because they failed to exercise the most basic, common, fundamental good sense in protecting children, allowing him to probe girls ungloved and sequester himself with them without any nurse present. Here is how negligent they were: The girls were required to see him in their hotel and dorm rooms at night. Alone. On their beds.

“The only way he had access to us was in our rooms; that’s where we were instructed to get therapy from him,” Raisman says. “You were told, ‘This is where you have to get therapy.’ … When you’re a kid, you aren’t thinking, ‘I’m alone with a man, and this isn’t right.’ An adult would have said, ‘No way, we need a separate room with massage tables and a door open.’ An adult would have said, ‘That’s messed up, I’m not doing this.’”

Aly Raisman said of giving her victim impact statement, “I was terrified at first because I was so used to them having control. But I realize we’re fixing things for the next generation.”

DALE G YOUNG/ASSOCIATED PRESS
The adults who should have said it didn’t. They never said that it was unacceptable to treat girls anywhere but in a proper setting on an examination table. Instead, they told the girls it was unacceptable to turn him down, to refuse to answer his knock or let him shove his hands into them. “I had to see him. There was no choice,” Raisman says, “because if you didn’t, then it would be reported that we didn’t see him — and if you had a bad practice the next day, we’d get in trouble for not being ‘disciplined’ and not getting treatment from him.”

At least Hollywood actresses are adults with mature judgment with which to defend themselves. At least they have some small power of self-determination. The girls and young women who were abused by Nassar under the roof of USA Gymnastics and Michigan State had neither of those. I didn’t truly understand this until Raisman sat in that courtroom and fixed her gaze on Nassar, with an anger that could have set the air on fire. Only then did it hit home just how powerless they had felt all those years in the grip of USA Gymnastics. The price to be an Olympian was to submit to abuse — there was no other option. It was that or be cut from the program, abandon your talent, surrender your genius.

So it’s not enough that Nassar is going to jail for the rest of his life.
It is not nearly enough. If a major U.S. airline has an accident that injures hundreds of people, there is an investigation so the problem can be fixed. When the U.S. military has a scandal that harms its people, there are after-action reports and hearings so the problem can be fixed.

This was a national organization that had charge of other people’s children, under a charter approved by Congress. There must be a neutral independent investigation.

One thing such an investigation will reveal is the sick culture of obedience at USA Gymnastics that provided such a hothouse for an abuser. Other organizations recognized decades ago that boundaries and decencies must be observed when going anywhere near the pelvises and breasts of young women. Not USA Gymnastics. Why not? And who is responsible for not enforcing those decencies?

Camps were mandatory. Treatment was mandatory. Physical exams were mandatory. They were required to sign waivers, releases, agreements, indemnifications, a pile of paperwork that ceded their bodies to the control of others. “They always made us feel like if we ever said anything or complained we were being dramatic or high-maintenance or difficult,” Raisman says. “When you only have five girls who make the Olympic team — we were just conditioned from a young age not to say anything.”

They were pulled away from their homes for weeks or a month at a time at these camps, isolated from their parents, discouraged from communicating with agents or lawyers. They were not allowed to have visitors. But Nassar could visit.

To read that paperwork now is nauseating. The National Team Agreement required them to “submit to all reasonable requests for examination or evaluation by medical personnel retained by USA Gymnastics.”

The chief medical officer was Larry Nassar.

Physical therapy was mandatory “to maximize your performance.”

The head trainer for USA gymnastics was Larry Nassar.

A 2000 memo at a national training camp for girls as young as 9 instructed them that if they had a problem at night in the hotel they were to call a list of three people. The first name on the list? Larry Nassar. The memo also instructed them, “Please do not call your personal coach.”

It’s still dawning on Raisman just how shoddy the training camps were and how fundamentally strange Nassar’s conduct was, how much was “extremely unprofessional, I now realize,” she says, and should have been flagged by adults. “He was so incredibly immature and giggly and weird with us.” But the rules said anyone who protested, who refused “verifica-
tion of her illness or injury by a physician (or medical staff) approved by USA Gymnastics . . . may be removed.” She’d be off the team. To speak up meant losing everything.

“When we would finish practice sometimes, I’d be so beyond exhausted or in tears,” Raisman says. “And then you’d go to treatment. Which makes it all the more disgusting and manipulative. . . . I can’t even fathom how he lived with himself, but then to take advantage when you were . . .” She pauses.

You can finish the sentence for her. Hurting. When you were hurting.

“We didn’t have a voice,” she continues. “And were just desperate to feel better, and he was the only access to getting treatment. Anytime you had an injury, you had to report it to him.”

Submit, submit, submit. Not until 2015 did USA Gymnastics acknowledge that Nassar was a horrific problem — and then tried to squelch it with a confidential settlement to McKayla Maroney. Another piece of paper, another girl’s submission.

Without a full, meaningful investigation of how Nassar was shielded by these institutions for 30 years despite the most obvious medical misconduct, the testimony of the more than 160 women over the last week will be for nothing. Otherwise there only will be another abuser after him.

The USOC and USA Gymnastics and their persistent cultures of evasion and avoidance and enforced silence have to be torn down. The people in charge of this horror chamber must be exposed and punished. And replaced by real leaders. And it’s probably going to take the pressure of a Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) or a Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) to do it, to remind the USOC and USA Gymnastics that they exist solely by virtue of an act of Congress. Here’s why:

When Raisman showed up in that courtroom last week to give her victim impact statement, “I was so terrified at first,” she says. Think about that. A two-time Olympic gold medalist, captain of the 2012 “Fierce Five” and the 2016 “Final Five,” renowned for her competitive courage, was terrified of the coaches and administrators of USA Gymnastics. “I was terrified at first because I was so used to them having control,” she says. “But I realize we’re fixing things for the next generation.”

Let’s be sure it really is fixed this time. Don’t waste her bravery.

“Inaction is inaction. Silence is indifference. Justice requires a voice,” Judge Rosemarie Aquilina told the courtroom Wednesday. “There has to be a massive investigation as to why there was inaction. Why there was silence. Justice requires more than what I can do on this bench.”

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The people in charge of this horror chamber must be exposed and punished. And replaced by real leaders.'

Congress must launch investigation into how USA Gymnastics and USOC let Nassar prey upon girls for decades.

People who let Nassar prey on these girls must be held accountable.
The Bible teaches that there are no real “shitholes,” of course, that the only things that defile us come from somebody’s mouth. But if that source isn’t persuasive enough for you, there is always the evidence you can acquire from firsthand acquaintance with someone from a faraway place.

Ngozi Anosike was one of those “why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here” immigrants. Coach Pat Summitt met her 15 years ago next this week, in a gymnasium on Martin Luther King Jr.
Day in 2003, when she recruited Ngozi’s daughter Nicky to play basketball at the University of Tennessee. Pat and Ngozi immediately recognized something kindred in each other: They both started from “holes.” “At the bottom, and I mean as far at the bottom as you can possibly go,” Nicky said.

At first, Nicky Anosike didn’t want the great Pat Summitt to see their Staten Island apartment in the projects, didn’t want her to see the cockroaches and the mice, and the mattress on the floor instead of a real bed. She was afraid the immaculate coach who wore diamond rings and was always on ESPN would take one look at the hole she was from and pull the scholarship offer. So she asked friends to let her entertain Pat at their home instead of her own.

“I was just so embarrassed with where I had to live,” Nicky told me a few years ago. “She will think so low of me, maybe she won’t want me at her school. Will she still want me?” What the 18-year-old Nicky didn’t know was that Pat came from a cabin on a tobacco farm in Tennessee with no water except what came from the pump off the porch and chinks in the walls that let the weather in, so sometimes you had to throw frost off the blanket in the morning.

Over the next four years, I heard my friend Pat talk about Ngozi more than I ever heard her talk about any other player’s mother. She told me about how Ngozi had come from Nigeria in 1978 with a sixth-grade education and was a single mother working multiple jobs while raising eight kids — while studying to finish high school at night. How, in 2003, the same year Nicky went to Tennessee as a freshman, Ngozi got her nursing degree — at 40. It had taken her 26 years of working her way through night schools. “Can you imagine?” Pat said. “What a strong woman.” Which for her was the ultimate compliment.

It hit me: Pat admired her. Just as she admired her own mother, Hazel, who had to quit school after the eighth grade to go to work in an Acme boot factory.

In a way, Ngozi’s influence helped win Pat’s Tennessee teams two more championships. When Pat would run the Lady Vols through a three-hour practice that ended with sprints, sometimes the players would bend double and gasp that they were tired.

“We’re not tired,” Nicky would say. “My mother is tired.”

And everybody would straighten up and start running again.

Nicky never got tired. She moved into the starting lineup as a freshman and started 146 straight games over four years, while carrying a triple
major in political science, criminal justice and legal studies. She made the honor roll every semester for all four years. And in 2007 and 2008 she led the Lady Vols to back-to-back national championships.

Pat felt Nicky was probably the hardest worker she ever had, a kid who gave absolutely her all. “She just invests so much in everything she does,” Pat would say. In 2008, just after she graduated with those three majors, she was named the NCAA’s Woman of the Year for her combination of athletic and academic excellence and community service. She couldn’t collect the award in person, because she was playing basketball in Israel. Ngozi and Pat went to accept it for her, together. Two women who understood what tired really was stood on a stage together, holding hands.

Nicky went on to become a teacher — she teaches U.S. history to middle schoolers down in Florida.

So in answer to the question, why do we let all these people from holes into this country, I guess the answer is because they renew our energy and values, and help us combat our growing golf gut. This isn’t particularly debated in the sports world, where you can’t help noticing how many great American champions with Nigerian roots we have. You can’t help noticing how hard they play and how much they give, and how academic-minded they tend to be. And you also can’t help noticing that a lot of them go back to Nigeria, where it’s said that 70 percent of people live in poverty, yet education is cherished.

Lord knows the sports world has its corruptions and troubles, from concussions to Russian conspiracies to the exploitation that is the NCAA. But at times such as this, you go running back into that world thankful for the central virtue and balm it daily provides: the simple insight that the most beautiful wildflowers come from some of the deepest holes, that the strangest people from the strangest places can become the closest allies, and that prejudice is a matter of ignorance. It arises when people do not know one another, or where we’re from.

Sally Jenkins is a sports columnist for The Post and co-author of three books with Pat Summitt.
The most beautiful wildflowers come from some of the ‘holes’

T.‘s book, "From Where I Stand," is an illuminating chronicle of his journey from an impoverished childhood to a successful career as a bus driver, in addition to his advocacy for civil rights. Taking readers on a tour of the neighborhoods where he grew up in the South, "From Where I Stand" offers a deeply personal and insightful look at the forces that shaped Poitier’s identity and made him the trailblazing actor that he is today.

While Poitier was working his magic on screen, he was also pushing the envelope off of it. He was the first African American to win an Academy Award for Best Actor, a distinction he earned for his role in "Lilies of the Field." His performance in that film was a defining moment in the Hollywood history of African American actors, and it solidified Poitier’s status as a leading man.

Through his career, Poitier has been a vocal advocate for civil rights, using his platform to raise awareness about the struggles faced by African Americans. He has been a mentor and role model to countless others, inspiring them to pursue their dreams and make a difference in the world.

In 2009, Poitier was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama, the highest civilian honor that can be bestowed upon an American. The medal recognizes his contributions to American society and his commitment to social justice.

Poitier’s legacy is one of courage, dedication, and the power of hard work. His story is a testament to the fact that with determination and persistence, one can overcome any obstacle and achieve great things.

Ruth Marcus is a sports columnist for The Washington Post.