

Ultimate. Period.

By Taryn Morris and CT ultimate ladies

When you ^{ultimate} sneeze on the second day of your period



Between the ages of 12-50, the average woman spends 17-20% of her life leaking blood out of her vagina ... oops sorry, I meant having her period. While, this is the price to pay for the sheer joy of being a woman, and the possible gift of childbirth ... many wish we could celebrate our femininity without the debilitating and down-right annoying side effects of periods.

From the cramps and headaches, to the worrying that you have “bled through”, to panicking because you forgot your tampons at home ... not to mention the sarky comments about PMS ... periods can sometimes be a little bit of a pain in the butt.

Despite their pain-in-the-buttness, periods are a normal, healthy biological phenomenon that we as females have come to accept and sometimes even celebrate! It begs the question of why then talking about periods remains so taboo. Whether in the media, or between friends, periods are seldom talked about without euphemisms or hushed voices.

In the sporting world, the side effects that periods bring are seldom given due gravitas even though female athletes feel performance, concentration and even enjoyment can be affected.

A conversation recently sparked between women ultimate players in Cape Town regarding playing with a period ... and here is what they had to say ...

Having your period while playing Ultimate is like ...

“Being sick or injured but still being expected to perform at 100% by both yourself and your peers”.

Having your period while playing Ultimate is like ...

“Trying to run a marathon with a stick up your bum”.

Having your period while playing Ultimate is like ...

“Constantly worrying you just sharted ... on a first date”.

One kickass female player had this to say ... *“I struggle with fatigue, cramps and pain that comes with my periods (especially when we play at night and it's really cold). I feel I don't have the strength to give my all in a game but I also feel like I don't want to sub more at the expense of my teammates 'just because I'm on my period'.*

Somehow it always seemed like a feeble excuse. However, after this conversation I'm seeing there is value in acknowledging this reality and sharing what it means to be a woman athlete as opposed to pretending it doesn't happen.

Attitudes of both men and women often put periods in a negative light but I feel it is something to be celebrated.”

Women are finally starting to speak up. Not because we want a medal of bravery, special treatment, or a box of homemade double chocolate cupcakes (just kidding on that last one) but because we feel it is important that this is understood, accepted and respected. It's just us standing up and saying *"Hey, there is this thing, it happens every now and then, okay it happens every month. It might affect my athletic performance but hey – that's just the way it is. I am okay with it so I hope you are too."*

Some bad-ass, brave woman athletes have recently been standing up and saying just that.

Chinese swimmer Fu Yuanhui became an overnight sensation at the Rio 2016 Olympics for openly admitting that she thought her period affected her performance.

Uninhibited Chinese Swimmer, Discussing Her Period, Shatters Another Barrier

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Similarly, Kiran Gandhi chose to bleed freely while running the London Marathon in 2015 because she thought running 42 km "with a wad of cotton material wedged between her legs" seemed "absurd".



Kiran Gandhi (left) ran the London Marathon whilst bleeding freely on her period
Photo: Kiran Gandhi

So how do we make female athletes on our teams feel understood, accepted and respected?

1. Aim for clean bathrooms with TOILETPAPER, dustbins and soap at practices, matches and tournaments.
2. Create an environment where woman feel respected and unjudged if they feel a bit off 'because of their periods'. Let it be okay. It is not an excuse and it is not a weakness.

And ladies – while there is no need to go into any gory details – let's accept for ourselves that it's okay to admit that your period might affect your performance. That it's okay to let your team know you aren't feeling your best. That It's okay to have your period. Because in fact it's better than okay. It's your inalienable feminine right – so celebrate it!

THE BAFAZI DEVELOPMENT FUND

Established by members of Bafazi Bafazi to support the development of women's ultimate in SA by:

- Increasing the diversity (socio-economic, racial and geographic) of female ultimate players;
- Increasing participation of female ultimate players;
- Developing female athletes, coaches and leaders.

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