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# American Women and the Modern Summer Olympic Games: A Story of Obstacles and Struggles for Participation and Equality

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

AMERICAN WOMEN AND THE MODERN SUMMER OLYMPIC GAMES:  
A STORY OF OBSTACLES AND STRUGGLES FOR  
PARTICIPATION AND EQUALITY

By

Cecile Houry

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty  
of the University of Miami  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2011

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American Women and the Modern Summer Olympic Games:  
A Story of Obstacles and Struggles for Participation and Equality

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This dissertation focuses on American women and the modern summer Olympic Games. It retraces the history of women's participation in this significant and global sporting event to study the obstacles generated by social, economic, political, and cultural gender patterns while providing a forum for female Olympians to give voice to their journeys and how they dealt with and eventually overcame some of these obstacles. The findings herein support other scholarly works, arguing that despite progress, the Olympic Games, and by extension the institution of sport in general, is and will remain a hegemonic space that allows men to maintain and reinforce their dominant position in society. It does show, however, that even though this global athletic event did not, at the collective level, result in an egalitarian redefinition of gender roles, the benefits of training and participating in the Olympics remain indisputable for the women involved--benefits no different than these enjoyed by male athletes. The Olympic Games, then, empowers women as it simultaneously reinforces their position of subordination.

**Dedicated to Mamie Denise**

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## List of Abbreviations

- AAFLA – Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles
- AAGBL – All American Girls Baseball League
- AAU – Amateur Athletic Union
- ACLU – American Civil Liberty Union
- AIS – Androgen-Insensitivity Syndrome
- AOA – American Olympic Association
- AOC – American Olympic Committee
- ASA – Athletics South Africa
- DSD – Disorder of Sex Development
- FSFI – Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale
- HEW – Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
- IAAF – International Athletics Amateur Federation
- IF – International Federation
- IOC – International Olympic Committee
- IRC – International Runners’ Committee
- IWAC – Illinois Women’s Athletic Club
- LA84 Foundation – Los Angeles 84 Foundation
- LAOOC – Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee
- LPGA – Ladies Professional Golf Association
- MBL – Major Baseball League
- NASCAR – National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing

NBA – National Basketball Association  
NFL – National Football League  
NOA – National Olympic Association  
NOC – National Olympic Committee  
NOG – National Olympic Games  
NWAU – National Women’s Amateur Athletic Union  
OCR – Office of Civil Rights  
OPHR – Olympic Project for Human Rights  
PRC – Polymerase Chain Reaction  
UCLA – University of California, Los Angeles  
US – United States  
USC – University of Southern California  
USGA – United States Golf Association  
USOC – United States Olympic Committee  
USTA – United States Tennis Association  
WNBA – Women’s National Basketball Association

## Introduction

Despite women's increasing role in the Olympics and the significance of this event in our society, no comprehensive history has yet been published that documents and analyzes the obstacles American women encountered in trying to participate in the Games. Statistics on women in the Olympics are quite revealing. No American woman competed in the first modern Games held in Athens in 1896, but during the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, 257 females (along with 274 males) represented the U.S. And in Athens, two women, Dawn Staley (basketball) and Mia Hamm (soccer), led the U.S. delegation during the opening and closing ceremonies. As these numbers indicate, the role American women play in the most global of sports events has significantly evolved throughout the last century. Yet, no one has examined this evolution and there has been no forum for female Olympians to voice their opinions about the journey of women Olympians, how they dealt with and eventually overcame the obstacles along the way, and where they stand today.

### **Review of the literature**

It took scholars a very long time to pay attention to the institution of sport, its evolution, and its economic, political, social, and cultural implications. Prior to 1960, only three scholarly books had been written on American sports history. As Steven Riess noted in 1992, "The scholarly study of sport is one of the newer historical subfields, a subject once neglected because of intellectual snobbery, a lack of recognition of the importance of sport in the United States, and a failure to recognize its heuristic values."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Steven A. Riess, "The Historiography of American Sport," *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* 7, No. 1, History of Sport, Recreation, and Leisure (1992):10.



In the early 1970s, scholars did finally focus on that marginalized institution. Riess explained this change as follows:

The fundamental factor that encouraged sport scholarship was that historians began to realize that the internal history of sport and the history of sport's interaction with the broader society elucidated certain central themes of American history, particularly class, ethnicity, race, and gender issues.<sup>2</sup>

Thanks to these new investigations, the study of sports has become a legitimate field of scholarly research and publication. We can now even decipher trends in the historiography of sport history. In a recent article, Thierry Terret, former President of the Society for the History of Physical Education and Sport, explained this evolution:

During the 1970s, sport history was dominated by three major trends: the history of ideas, the history of mentalities, and social history. During the 1980s and early 1990s, especially in North America, scholarly enquiry moved toward political and cultural history before confronting the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological inflexions of the linguistic turn, gender studies, and postmodernism.<sup>3</sup>

It has taken longer, however, for scholars to focus on women and sport. In "On Being Female in Sport," physical educator Marie Hart explains that this is because "it seems well established that sport is male territory; therefore participation of female newcomers is studied as a peripheral, non-central aspect of sport."<sup>4</sup> As a result, for a long time the only works dealing with women and sports came from medical experts, physical educators, the popular press, and a few athletes. These writings subjectively manipulated readers in a battle for social control: medical experts and the press tried to control women's bodies and behaviors; physical educators fought to control women's sports

<sup>2</sup> Steven A. Riess, ed., introduction to *Major Problems in American Sport History* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), VIII.

<sup>3</sup> Thierry Terret, "The Future of Sport History: ISHPES, Potential, and Limits," *Journal of Sport History* 35, No. 2 (2008): 303-304.

<sup>4</sup> Marie Hart, "On Being Female in Sport," in *Out of the Bleachers: Writings on Women and Sport*, Stephanie L. Twin (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1979), 24.

programs; and female athletes struggled to control their lives and careers. These early works did not offer any historical information about women's sports practices; they only offered arguments as to why female athletes should or (more typically) should not practice sports or certain types of sports. The goal was not to document and analyze women's sport practices but to convince readers of a particular point of view--that is, they were almost exclusively works of advocacy, rather than scholarship.

Following the 1960s, the literature on women and sports took new directions. During the Sixties, often referred to as the most turbulent years of the twentieth century, the nation was riven over several issues, including the civil rights of African Americans, Native Americans, and women; gender and sexuality; lifestyles; and the Vietnam War. During the decade women joined the protesters' ranks and actively fought against their limited role in American society. This women's movement linked women's political and economic rights with an emphasis on women's control over their bodies. Since athletics concerns issues of the liberation of women sexually and politically, this wave of feminism resulted in a renewed interest in the sportswoman. Women translated these efforts at expanding their roles into tangible results, including more participation in sports, and ultimately gained the passage of Title IX in 1972, which legislated gender equality in athletic programs at educational institutions receiving federal funding. Thanks to that act, girls progressively enjoyed greater access, better equipment, and more numerous opportunities to practice sports. The numbers speak for themselves. According to the Women's Sports Foundation, only one in 20 high school girls played varsity sports in 1972, while one in 2.5 did in 2001.<sup>5</sup>

Even though Title IX only concerns schools receiving federal funding, it impacted the whole institution of sport, sending the message that girls (and by extension, women) have

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<sup>5</sup> "Title IX Quick Reference," Women's Sport Foundation (2002).

or should have equal rights in the world of sport. Because of this message and because of the increasing number of girls and women practicing sports, historians, sociologists, psychologists, and other scholars began to take women's sports participation seriously in their respective fields of study. Today, diverse approaches to women's sports history have been published, providing a better understanding not only of female athletes' performances so far, but also of women's lives in twentieth-century America.

These authors first concentrated on the medical arguments used to prevent women from practicing sports. Works such as Stephanie Twin's *Out of the Bleachers: Writings on Women in Sport* and Gregory Kent Stanley's *The Rise and Fall of the Sportswoman: Health, Fitness, and Athletics, 1860-1940* were written with this goal in mind.<sup>6</sup> Scholars later emphasized several factors to explain America's reluctance to promote female athleticism. In *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport, and Sexuality*, Helen Lenskyj focuses heavily on the medical arguments presented by Twin and Stanley, but places her study in a broader historical and cultural framework.<sup>7</sup> She argues that women's move into sport represented a severe threat to American society's gender order--specifically, a threat to men's hegemony and to women's health, femininity, and heterosexuality.

S.W. Pope's *The New American Sport History: Recent Approaches and Perspectives*, like Lenskyj's work, provides readers with a more global analysis of the history of sport than earlier historiographical works, including a more comprehensive social and cultural framework.<sup>8</sup> This collection of articles does not focus exclusively on women and sport, but rather on the institution of sport, its function, and its evolution in American society.

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<sup>6</sup> Stephanie L. Twin, *Out of the Bleachers: Writings on Women and Sport* (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1979) and Gregory Kent Stanley, *The Rise and Fall of the Sportswoman: Women's Health, Fitness, and Athletics, 1860-1940* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Helen J. Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport, and Sexuality* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> S.W. Pope, ed., *The New American Sport History: Recent Approaches and Perspectives* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

Along with sections on the emergence of sport as a key element in the shaping of American culture, the meanings of sport for people of different classes and races, and the rise of sports commercialization, this book offers an enriching section on the controversies over gender and the athlete's body.

Works written during the last decades, then, have presented more thorough analyses, especially emphasizing gender relations and sexual identity, along with discussions of class and race. Excellent examples of this trend include Susan Cahn's *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Sport* and Michael Messner and Don Sabo's *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*.<sup>9</sup> In *Coming on Strong*, Cahn focuses on America between the 1920s and the 1960s, highlighting how physical educators, leaders of athletic organizations, sports promoters, the media, and female athletes dealt with the prevalent beliefs on women's sporting abilities and rights. As Cahn explains, these constituents, with different backgrounds, moral values, and priorities, debated which sports were appropriate for women, with what intensity women were supposed to practice and play, and notions of health, femininity, and womanhood. One of the most interesting aspects of Cahn's work is her argument that the discourse surrounding women's athletic participation shifted from medical opposition at the turn of the century to physical appearance in the 1920s-1930s, and then to sexual orientation and identity in the 1950s-1960s. In other words, American society first feared that sports would impair women's reproductive capacities, then that athletic women would become masculine and consequently unattractive, and finally that practicing manly sports would lead women to lesbianism. To illustrate that progression, Cahn started her introduction with the case of former tennis star Martina Navratilova, explaining that people could not

<sup>9</sup> Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1994) and Michael A. Messner and Don F. Sabo, eds., *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1990).

accept and embrace her as an athlete because her masculine look and her spectacular achievements in a male domain made her, in society's eyes, "an extraordinary product of science, technology, or--worse--chromosomal defect."<sup>10</sup>

As the discourse about female athleticism has become, over the years, more sexualized, scholars have also paid more attention to that issue. Of special interest is Pat Griffin's work, *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport*.<sup>11</sup> The book opens with her story as a lesbian athlete and coach. It then combines stories of fifty female athletes and coaches with her analysis of how American culture, especially the media, perceives athletic women. She argues that female athletes who look feminine and endorse feminine products are accepted because they do not pose a threat to the prevailing gender order. More masculine female athletes, however, are perceived as deviant. Griffin also addresses the problem of homophobia in women's sport, highlighting how it negatively affects both lesbian and non-lesbian athletes and coaches.

Recently, many aspects of American culture and society have also been studied from a postmodern perspective, trying to explain the evolution of the political, social, economic, and cultural struggles that occurred in America between the dominant group(s) and subgroups during the last decades of the Twentieth Century. This reactionary movement to modernism insists on its inclusionary character, focusing not only on the dominant group(s), but also on minority groups and the relationships between all agencies, including people, government, and corporations. Because the institution of sport plays an essential role in the shaping of American culture and because it is based on power, domination, oppression, and resistance among different groups of people, it attracted the attention of postmodernists and resulted in works such as Genevieve Rail's *Sport and*

<sup>10</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Pat Griffin, *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1998).

*Postmodern Times*.<sup>12</sup> Rail gathers diverse articles by American, Canadian, and French scholars from different fields of study including sociology, kinesiology, communication, and cultural studies. The articles especially focus on issues of gender, bodies, and corporations, and generally denounce one or several characteristics of American society, including patriarchy, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and capitalism.

Though the number and variety of books on women and sport has grown tremendously in the last decades, there are still historiographical gaps. One concerns American women and the Olympic Games. Many scholars have focused on the institution of sport or on a specific aspect of the institution, such as women and sports, African Americans and sports, and the Olympic Games. Usually, these books have offered a comprehensive survey of a general topic. A study on women and sports, for instance, explained how women's sports developed. This represented the main point of the work and in the margins were sub-topics, such as African American women, women and the Olympic Games, etc. Though mentioned, these sub-topics were not studied in-depth. The following examples efficiently highlight this historiographical issue.

Books on sport in America, for instance, often contain only one or two chapters on women or on the Olympic Games. Benjamin Rader, for instance, focused on the overall development of sports in America. Among the twenty-one chapters in his work, *American Sports from the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports*, only two chapters are on women and only one deals with the Olympic Games.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in books on African Americans and sport, there are often only one or two chapters on

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<sup>12</sup> Genevieve Rail, ed., *Sport and Postmodern Times* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Rader, *American Sports From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1983, 1990, 1996, 1999, 2004) - Chapter 13 "The Rise and Decline of Organized Women's Sports, 1890-1960" and Chapter 19 "The Quest for Equity in Women's Sports" concerning women and sport, and Chapter 17 "American Sports in a Global Arena" concerning the Olympic Games.

women and on the Olympic Games. This is the case, for example, in *The Unlevel Playing Field - A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport*, in which the words “women” and “Olympic Games” do not appear in any of the chapters’ titles and are only addressed incidentally throughout the book.<sup>14</sup> This is also the case in Amy Bass’s work, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, which focuses on African Americans’ attempts at challenging stereotypes and discriminative practices in the twentieth century sport institution and culminating in the Black power protests at the Mexico City Olympics of 1968.<sup>15</sup> Though this study includes women, and actually argues that African American women were not included equally in the protest movement and all the decisions taken regarding this movement, it does so mostly in Chapter 5 while the rest of the work deals primarily with male African American athletes.

Works on the U.S. and the Olympic Games also often have only one or two chapters on women. In Mark Dyreson’s book, *Making the American Team - Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience*, only one chapter focuses, in part, on women’s Olympic experiences.<sup>16</sup> Finally, books on women and sport include, at most, one chapter on the Olympic Games. In Lissa Smith’s *Nike is a Goddess - The History of Women in Sports*

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<sup>14</sup> David K. Wiggins and Patrick B. Miller, *The Unlevel Playing Field - A Documentary History of the African American Experience in Sport* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois, 2005). Concerning women, we only find the following entries: Chapter 3.11 “African American Women Make Their Mark in Sport,” Chapter 3.12 “Women’s Basketball and the Shape of Things to Come: Bennett College vs. the Philadelphia Tribunes,” Chapter 5.18 “Althea Gibson / What Now?,” Chapter 7.5 “Marian E. Washington / ‘Black Women in Sports: Can We Get Off the Track?’”, Chapter 8.2 “Anita DeFrantz / Overcoming Obstacles,” Chapter 8.3 “Welch Suggs / ‘Left Behind’: Title IX and Black Women Athletes,” Chapter 8.5 “Jackie Joyner-Kersey, a Woman Substance,” and Chapter 8.11 “Venus Williams’s Star Endorsements.” Concerning the Olympic Games, we only find the following entries: Chapter 4.7 “Walter White to Jesse Owens on Race Pride and the Nazi Olympics” and a section of Chapter 6 entitled “The Politics of Protest: The 1968 Olympic Games.” Two entries are included in that section. The first one entitled “Harry Edwards: ‘Mounting the Revolt,’” and the second one entitled “The Boycott Debate: Tommie Smith on ‘Why Negroes Should Boycott’ the Olympics, and Ralph Boston on ‘Why They Should Not.’”

<sup>15</sup> Amy Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Mark Dyreson, *Making the American Team - Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois, 1998). Chapter 5 “The Limits of Universal Claims: How Class, Gender, Race, and Ethnicity Shaped the Sporting Republic.”

and in Cahn's *Coming on Strong - Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport*, no chapter specifically focuses on American women and the Olympics.<sup>17</sup> In most works, then, female athleticism and the Olympic Games are treated as peripheral factors.

In addition, the few works that do focus specifically on women and the Olympic Games do not necessarily shed light on gender, sporting, and socio-political, cultural, and economic trends in the U.S. because their scope is global. Uriel Simri's *Women in the Modern Olympic Games*, for instance, looks at women's Olympic experiences in general, with an interest in the Eastern versus Western differences.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Silvia A. Sheaffer's *Olympic Women - The Best in the World* and Jane Leder's *Grace and Glory - A Century of Women in the Olympics*, addresses only the participation of women in general.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the writings focusing on American women and the Olympic Games, mostly articles, have considered the topic only for specific time periods. Linda Borish's "Women at the Modern Olympic Games: An Interdisciplinary Look at American Culture" does focus on American women and the Olympic Games but is too short for a comprehensive study or for many personal testimonies.<sup>20</sup> Welch's work, *The Emergence of American Women in the Summer Olympic Games - 1900-1972*, also looks at American women and the Olympic Games, but only from 1900 to 1972, not reflecting the evolution of gender roles after the 1970s feminist movement or the impact of Title IX on American female athletes and American women in general. Mark Dyreson's article, entitled "Icons

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<sup>17</sup> Lissa Smith, ed., *Nike is a Goddess - The History of Women in Sports* (New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998) and Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong - Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Uriel Simri, *Women in the Modern Olympics* (Netanya: Israel: Wingate Institute for Physical Education and Sport, 1977).

<sup>19</sup> Silvia Anne Sheaffer, *Olympic Women - The Best in the World* (Mariposa, CA: Journal Publications, 1984) and Jane Leder, *Grace and Glory - A Century of Women in the Olympics* (Washington, D.C.: Multi-Media Partners, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Linda Borish, "Women at the Modern Olympic Games: An Interdisciplinary Look at American Culture," *Quest* 48, No. 1 (1996): 45.



of Liberty or Objects of Desire? American Women Olympians and the Politics of Consumption,” focuses specifically on the female athletes after the 1920s and the role their Olympian status played in the nationalist ideology of the time.<sup>21</sup>

This dissertation therefore focuses on two neglected topics in sports history. First, it offers an in-depth study of the evolution of the participation of American women in the Olympic Games and uses it as a barometer to measure American women’s advancement in sport and in society. Second, it provides American female Olympians with a venue to talk about their experiences and share their Olympic stories.

### **The Olympic Games - A case study**

Focusing on the Olympics as a tool for assessing the progress of women in sport is well justified. The Olympic Games indeed allow us to analyze changing social, economic, political, and cultural patterns because it is the most significant and global sporting event. In his work on Pierre de Coubertin, Yves Pierre Boulongne underlined this: “Olympism or at least the Olympic Games have become an unavoidable fact of mankind.”<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey O. Segreave and Don Chu also highlighted the importance of the Olympic Games in society: “Few other events attract our collective attention as much as the Olympics. They impact upon our social, political, economic, educational, and ideological lives. ‘If there exists, in the Hegelian-Marxian phrase, a ‘world-historical process,’ writes MacAloon, ‘the Olympics have emerged as its privileged expression and

<sup>21</sup> Mark Dyreson, “Icons of Liberty or Objects of Desire? American Women Olympians and the Politics of Consumption,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, No. 3 (Jul., 2003): 435-460.

<sup>22</sup> Pierre Yves Boulongne, *Pierre de Coubertin: Humanisme et Pédagogie - Dix Leçons sur l’Olympisme* (Lausanne, Switzerland: IOC, 1999), 21. Original: “L’Olympisme ou du moins les Jeux Olympiques sont devenues un fait incontournable de civilization.”

celebration.”<sup>23</sup> Statistics confirm this statement: “In 2000, the Olympic Games became the most watched sports event ever, with more than 3.7 billion viewers across 220 countries tuning in to watch more than 3,500 hours of coverage produced by the host broadcaster over the 17 days of competition.”<sup>24</sup> No other event reaches so many people in so many countries at the same time. The Sydney Games attracted more than 4,800 accredited print journalists, 3,000 non-accredited journalists, and 1,100 accredited photographers; the television coverage totaled 29,600 hours, the equivalent of 1,220 days or nearly 3.5 years of continuous twenty-four-hour per day programming. Before the Games began, more than 24,000 web sites were using Olympic imagery for news, editorial, and other purposes. The website Olympic.com experienced more than 11.3 billion hits during the Games. Ticket sales generated Au\$787 million and the top sponsorship program generated more than US\$550 million in revenue and technology support for the Olympic Movement. And 79% of the Sydney Olympic spectators surveyed agreed that “the Olympics represent the very best of sport.”<sup>25</sup>

The Games’ popularity impacts the way athletes experience this event. For most of them, competing in the Olympics represents the ultimate achievement of a career. When asked what the Olympics meant for them, several female Olympians offered similar responses. For Madeline Manning-Mims, a four-time track and field Olympian, “When you go to the Olympics, you’re in dreamsville.”<sup>26</sup> For Pat McCormick, a quadruple gold-medal diving champion, “Your first Olympic Games competition is like your first kiss. You’ve made it. It’s a dream.”<sup>27</sup> Susie Atwood, a two-time swimming Olympian, said

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey O. Segrave and Don Chu, “Introduction - The Modern Olympic Games: A Contemporary Sociocultural Analysis,” *Quest* 48 (1996): 3 and John MacAloon, *This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 242.

<sup>24</sup> *Sydney 2000: Marketing Report of the XXVII Olympiad* (The International Committee, 2001), Introduction.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Madeline Manning-Mims, phone interview (January 26 and January 28, 2007): 2.

<sup>27</sup> Pat McCormick, oral history conducted by Dr Margaret Costa (March 22, 1991): 7.

“[t]he Olympic Games was the pinnacle, the most important, most prestigious event that you could be involved in.”<sup>28</sup> For Nancy Lieberman, who competed in the first Olympic women’s basketball competition in 1976, “[t]he Olympics is a dream come true for every athlete.”<sup>29</sup> Nancy Hogshead-Makar, three-time gold medalist in 1984, remarked that “the Olympics represents the best human beings have to offer. It’s where people see the best in the world and appreciate it.” She then added, “there is a thrill in the air. People celebrate the best in humanity. I’ve been to many of the best competitions--the Superbowl, the Soccer World Cups, etc.--but all those competitions are not on the same plane as the Olympic Games. The Olympic Games are another animal.”<sup>30</sup> For Carla McGhee, a basketball gold medalist in the 1996 Atlanta Games, the Olympics represents “the ultimate goal, the ultimate challenge. The Olympics gather the best of the world so when you’re there, you’re part of the best of the world. Not state, not region, the world.”<sup>31</sup> Going to the Olympics, then, is the greatest possible achievement for most athletes.

The Games’ popularity also impacts the way people perceive Olympians. As Segrave and Chu point out, “successful Olympians themselves become household names and cultural icons. Their images routinely appear on stamps and clothes; their names adorn buildings, bridges, and streets; their personas sell commercial products from foodstuffs to deodorants; and national holidays are granted in recognition of their exploits.”<sup>32</sup>

The Olympic Creed Pierre de Coubertin adopted in 1908--“the most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part”--can therefore no longer be applied to

<sup>28</sup> Susan Atwood, phone interview (March 2007): 2.

<sup>29</sup> Nancy Lieberman, phone interview (January 5, 2009): 2.

<sup>30</sup> Nancy Hogshead-Makar, phone interview (February 23, 2007): 4.

<sup>31</sup> Carla McGhee, phone interview (January 6, 2009): 1.

<sup>32</sup> Segrave and Chu, “Introduction - The Modern Olympic Games: A Contemporary Sociocultural Analysis,” 3.

this event.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the Olympic Games no longer simply involves sports competition and international brotherhood; it is a political, economic, social, and cultural product that is marketed, sold, interpreted, appropriated, redefined, and so on, by the different constituents involved.

### **Theoretical considerations**

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz argued, after witnessing several cockfights during a trip to a Balinese village in 1958, that “cultural forms [such as a cockfight or the Olympic Games] can be treated as texts, as imaginative works built out of social materials.”<sup>34</sup> For Geertz, the cockfight represents “a simulation of the social matrix.”<sup>35</sup> A cockfight is not just a cockfight, but a view of Balinese society in action. The cockfight illuminates the different Balinese social classes, the role of the government, the way people relate to each other and to the government, what matters to these people, and so on.

A great example--actually, according to many sport historians, the best example--of this approach is C.L.R. James’s 1963 work, *Beyond a Boundary*.<sup>36</sup> This book is about cricket. But because James places this game within the context of society as a whole, it is about much more. It is about the West Indies, colonialism, poverty, social classes, loyalty, power, and control. In other words, “cricket is James’s microscope and through it he magnifies whole areas of life and thought. He presents cricket as both sport and

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<sup>33</sup> The complete Olympic Creed stipulates: “The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph, but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered, but to have fought well.” Pierre de Coubertin adopted this creed as the official Olympic Creed after he heard a sermon by Bishop Ethelbert Talbot at a service for Olympic athletes in 1908.

<sup>34</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973), 449. Chapter 15: “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.”

<sup>35</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 436.

<sup>36</sup> C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1963, 1983, 1993).

metaphor, the property of colonizers and colonized, in which struggles over culture, power, hegemony, and resistance are played out.”<sup>37</sup>

The Olympic Games function along the same lines. Analyzing its history provides more than scores and race results; it illustrates the evolution of human relationships, technology, marketing, media, and other changes in society. The Olympics, like Geertz’s Balinese cockfight and James’s cricket game, represents a “simulation of the social matrix.” As such, it is a contested space and such spaces are not neutral.

Through political, economic, social, and cultural maneuvers, spaces are assigned certain characteristics and values that can include class, racial, or gender statuses. Concerning the latter, some spaces, such as the home or the beauty parlor, are considered feminine, while other spaces, such as a political or business office, are considered masculine. Certain spaces, such as amusement parks, are considered mixed, meaning that they welcome men and women together or alternatively. The dominant social class is often able to impose its values and expectations on members of other classes, making these values and expectations the socially desirable standards.

The fact that no woman competed in the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 indicates that this sporting event was defined and functioned as a homosocial space at the end of the nineteenth century. A homosocial space is strictly reserved for persons of one sex, such as a men-only (or women-only) club, or a space in which persons of the opposite sex play a minimal or negligible role. In a masculine homosocial space, men join other men in order to develop and maintain their masculine values, as well as their masculine hegemony. According to Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, cultural hegemony exists when the dominant class, the middle class, relies on everyday practices and shared

<sup>37</sup> Elliot Gorn and Michael Oriard, “Taking Sports Seriously,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 24, 1995): A52.

beliefs to dominate other classes. The norms become so ingrained in society that people consent to these standards, even though by doing so, they actually contribute to their own subordination and marginalization. This is what happened with the Olympic Games at the end of the nineteenth century. This athletic event was designed as a men-only space and the exclusion of women became part of the socially shared values. In that context, a female aspiring to compete in the Olympics represented an abnormality, a body out of space.

A body, like a space, is not neutral; it is a socio-cultural product constructed through power relations. In other words, a body is not only a representation of sex, but also of ideologies. Institutions, such as schools, religious establishments, the state, the military, our working places, and even our families, normalize these ideologies. Because bodies and spaces are cultural products, they are never static and a range of power relations are constantly being played out, altering the existing race, gender, and class roles and definitions. The fact that 4,329 women representing 201 nations took part in the 2004 Athens Olympic Games shows that at some point, women challenged the established spatial ideology and that, from a purely homosocial space, the Olympics became a contested terrain: a space in which men and women figuratively fought, consciously or unconsciously, to maintain or alter the prevalent gender structure. It is therefore interesting to look not only at the obstacles women faced but also at how women's participation and achievements in that contested sporting space have impacted gender relations in sport and more generally, in American society.

In addition to providing an in-depth portrayal of the struggles American women faced in the Olympic arena, this dissertation attempts to add to our knowledge in another way. The few studies focusing on American women and the Olympics are not women-centered: they look at women obliquely from some ancillary perspective rather than

taking women as a starting point for analysis. This dissertation departs from previous studies in that, while it does look at women etically, highlighting what men in general, and certain men in particular, thought about female athleticism and about women's entrance into the Olympic arena, it also offers a rare emic view of women's participation. Therefore, it provides a women-centered viewpoint that shines light on the meaning of Olympic participation for women, individually and/or collectively. Documenting the experiences and impressions of female Olympians gives critical insight into what the obstacles these women faced, and what they gained in self-esteem; family and public recognition; and human, cultural, professional, and financial opportunities. This also highlights the impact their participation had on the overall institution of sport and more generally, on American society. It especially attempts to show that the increasing presence of female athletes in such a global showcase helped force such societal changes as a progressive redefinition of notions of space and gender roles in America. This approach brings new perspectives to both sports history and women's history.

### **Overview**

Chapter one highlights the first obstacle women faced in their journey to Olympic participation--namely, the inflexible gender roles defining nineteenth century European and American society. It provides the historical context in which organized sports in the West developed and during which Baron Pierre de Coubertin renovated the Olympic Games. That historical context, and especially the prescribed gender roles of the time, is essential to an understanding of society's reactions to women's athleticism and why, when Coubertin organized the first modern Olympic Games, women were automatically excluded.

The second chapter focuses on Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the author of the modern Olympic Games, who himself can easily be considered one of the greatest obstacles women faced in their quest for Olympic access. A short biography identifies Coubertin and the period in which he grew up, discussing the essential role his familial background and the historical context played in shaping the key elements of his Olympic vision, including notions of honor, amateurism, masculinity, and internationalism. His upbringing also greatly impacted his beliefs concerning women, their social roles, and their athletic abilities. Coubertin's project emanated from a belief that French men were weak, especially compared to German men. He was consequently particularly interested in strengthening young French men to develop both a strong national army and society. It is thus no wonder that women had no place in his project. The first Olympic Games were clearly organized and marketed as a male athletic competition. Coubertin and the first men involved in the Olympic establishment were straightforward about their expectation that women would be spectators only.

The third chapter chronicles how women overcame this primary obstacle, how they entered into the homosocial Olympic institution, and the sexist attitudes they encountered upon doing so. It especially analyzes the debates surrounding female Olympism to determine what stimulated women's introduction into Olympic competition, why they were tolerated in certain sports and rejected in others, how the International Olympic Committee (IOC) reacted to the increasing female presence, and how this debate impacted female athletes' experiences.<sup>38</sup>

The fourth chapter focuses on another major obstacle women had to deal with after Coubertin left the IOC leadership--his successor, Avery Brundage. This American track

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<sup>38</sup> From now on, the International Olympic Committee will be referred to as the IOC and the United States Olympic Committee will be referred to as the USOC.



and field athlete stepped into the IOC leadership during the 1930s, getting increasingly involved in the 1940s, and becoming President of the IOC in 1952. Through the different positions he held, and especially as IOC President for twenty years, Brundage played an important role in the debates over female Olympism, taking strong stands about the appropriate role of women in sport and in society--and therefore impacting female athletes' Olympic experiences. Despite Brundage's position, women did achieve some progress under his presidency, mostly because the historical context, specifically the Cold War and the 1960s Civil Rights and feminist movements, favored equalizing gender relations.

Chapter 5 focuses on a major consequence of this advancement. With an increasing number of women gaining more access to sports competitions, including the Olympic Games, women's athletic achievements improved significantly, and women thus became a threat to men's domination of sport. The tactic adopted to reduce this threat was to question female athletes' sexual identity. This rapidly led to the development of a new obstacle to Olympic participation and equality--femininity tests, which referred to the medical visual and/or tactile exams female athletes had to endure from 1968 to 1992 in order to compete in the Olympic Games. This relatively unknown part of Olympic history shines light on conceptions--or misconceptions--about female bodies and athletic abilities. The chapter examines the reasons behind these tests, the way they were conducted, and the impact they had on female athletes. A review of the latest gender verification efforts, including the recent case of South African track and field athlete Caster Semenya, illustrates that the issue of femininity and the need to prove one's womanhood is, even today, a key issue for female athletes.

The final chapter highlights the remaining obstacles. Women's athletic abilities, for instance, continue to be questioned, especially in sports considered manly. In the 1980s,

for example, a group of runners had to sue the IOC to add some middle and long distance running events for women to the Olympic program. Also, Title IX, which was passed to guarantee gender equality in athletics at federally funded educational institutions, had unintended negative consequences for female athletes and became an obstacle to further advancement. This chapter then documents the negative impact of the clear lack of female leadership within the major sports organizations. It then focuses on the omnipresent issue of femininity and sexuality, arguing that the media and society in general still trivialize and sexualize female athletes and their performances. Finally, it explains that the rigidity of the gender hierarchical system still defining the institution of sport remains a major obstacle for female athletes.

### **Methodology**

The primary research method adopted throughout this dissertation is qualitative, focusing on the meanings participants give to situations or events. In using this method, “the investigator does not gain knowledge by espousing a rigid theory but forms it inductively from views and experiences of participants in the research. The researcher, in turn, writes a study that reflects personal views of the phenomenon being studied.”<sup>39</sup> This approach is especially useful when focusing on American female Olympians and the meanings they attributed to their Olympic participation and performances.

An ideological method is also employed. In *Rethinking the Dissertation Process*, Goodchild, Lester, Green, and Kluever define the word “ideological” as “an umbrella term for action and social change research that includes feminist, critical theory, and

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<sup>39</sup> Lester F. Goodchild et al., eds., *Rethinking the Dissertation Process: Tackling Personal and Institutional Obstacles* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1997), 37.

postmodern approaches,” and to which one can also add cultural, neo-Marxist, or lifestyle aspects.<sup>40</sup> They explain that “researchers using an ideological methodology either build or use a theory to explain the issues of marginalized or endangered people in society. This change may be only to deconstruct a situation, or it may be more active, such as to enlighten or emancipate individuals.”<sup>41</sup> They continue, “this ideological approach often challenges the modern view of society’s progress, growth, and linear development and advocates a sensitivity to people who are marginalized, oppressed, and denied ‘a voice.’”<sup>42</sup> This method is especially useful to assess the impact of American women’s Olympic participation on the prevalent societal gender structure.

This research relies heavily on primary and secondary documents found at the Lausanne Olympic Studies Centre, the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles (now known as the LA84 Foundation), the University of Illinois’ Avery Brundage Collection, and the University of Notre Dame’s Sports Collection. The collection of Pierre de Coubertin, the correspondence of IOC members and former IOC Presidents, the minutes of IOC Sessions, papers related to the organization of Summer Olympic Games, these Games’ official reports, the IOC correspondence with the USOC, and material printed on the role of sport, the Olympic Games, and female athletes were of prime interest.

The earliest sources were essential, not so much in terms of what they directly tell us about women’s Olympic roles and participation, but more importantly for what they do not directly tell us. Indeed, the earliest sources do not mention women at all. On the IOC agendas, in correspondence between the IOC and the USOC, in official material printed about the Games, women are totally absent--a silent but telling commentary on their

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<sup>40</sup> Goodchild et al., eds., *Rethinking the Dissertation Process*, 38.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

place in the Olympic project. Later sources mention women more regularly, though still only after issues considered more important, such as amateurism, doping, and events for men. Most of these entries refer to debates about how to prevent more female participation and events, or to the foolishness of letting women take part. Post-World War II sources, and especially recent ones, demonstrate a change in the governing bodies' view of women's athletic abilities and rights, discussing how to decrease the existing gender disparity in the Olympic Movement. Taken together, these documents highlight the kind of competition the Olympic establishment intended to create and maintain, as well as the evolving place of women in that competition.

This study also relies on existing historical resources showcasing the viewpoints of American female Olympians. These include documentaries, biographies, autobiographies, and oral histories of American female Olympians. Of special importance were twenty-three oral histories conducted by the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles (LA84 Foundation).<sup>43</sup> These cover the years 1920 to 1968 and four sports--diving, swimming, track and field, and fencing.

Finally, new historical data gathered through a series of interviews was also crucial. I contacted about two hundred American female Olympians, mostly through the USOC.<sup>44</sup> Approximately thirty of them responded. The interviews were conducted in different ways--over the phone, by email, and in person. Overall, these athletes participated in Summer Olympic Games from 1948 to 2008. They competed in basketball, canoeing and kayaking, cycling, diving, equestrian events, rowing, soccer, swimming, table tennis, tennis, track and field, and weightlifting. Some won medals; some did not. Some

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<sup>43</sup> The list of oral histories can be found in Appendix I. Also included is general information about the conduct of the interview and the Olympic participation and success of each athlete.

<sup>44</sup> A list of the athletes interviewed can be found in Appendix II. Also included is general information about the conduct of the interview, and the Olympic participation and success of each athlete.

quickly ended their athletic careers, while others continued to compete or work within the sports institution as coaches, TV commentators, and so on. I also interviewed three non-Olympians--a marathon runner who did not compete in the Games because there was no marathon event for women during her career, an elite gymnast who failed to qualify for the Olympics, and a sports journalist who covered the last twelve Winter and Summer Olympic Games.

The LA84 Foundation's oral histories and the interviews I conducted proved essential, helping to paint a comprehensive picture of the obstacles American women faced to participate in the Olympic Games. The significant inclusion of female Olympians' voices helped portray how they overcame these obstacles and what it meant for them to compete in the Olympic Games, while the historical data and analysis shed light on how their participation impacted gender roles in America. These new insights represent an important contribution to the sport history and the gender studies fields.

## Chapter 1 – Historical Context: Gender Roles during the Nineteenth Century--An Obstacle to Female Athleticism

The historical context in which organized sports developed in Europe and in the United States is essential to understanding society's reaction to women athletes and why, when Coubertin renovated the Olympic Games, women were automatically excluded. The earliest and greatest obstacle to female athleticism was presented by nineteenth-century commonly accepted misperceptions about differences between men and women in physical attributes, abilities, and needs and the consequent, gender-specific roles prescribed by society.

### **The social construction of gender**

In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner declares that gender is a “costume, a mask, a straitjacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance.”<sup>45</sup> The anatomy of sex is more or less universal, but the behaviors, rights, responsibilities, and expectations considered appropriate for men and women are social constructions that can differ significantly from one culture to another. These gender norms are not arbitrary, but rather the product of economic, political, and socio-cultural realities. In nineteenth century Europe and in the United States, men and women were assumed to have completely different natures. Stereotypically, a middle class or upper class man of the time was described as powerful, active, brave, and competitive. In contrast, the middle or upper class woman of the time was supposedly weak, passive, timid, domestic, emotional, innocent, and pure. In *Womanhood in America*, Mary P. Ryan explains that because of these accepted biological and psychological differences, men and women had

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<sup>45</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 238.

different roles in society: “the social roles and workplaces of the two sexes became segregated: men journeyed away from the household to secure cash income, while women’s work, influence and consciousness moved centripetally inward toward a tight nucleus of relations to her husband and children.”<sup>46</sup> Men’s roles revolved around the public space--economics, politics, and “masculine” socio-cultural activities and places such as sports and taverns. Women’s sphere, on the other hand, was private space. Women were in charge of the home, of taking care of their husbands, and of raising children. Women enjoyed very few rights: they could not vote, could not sue or be sued, could not testify in court, had limited control over personal property after marriage, and had no access to institutions of higher education. About the only allowable outside-of-the-home activity approved for women of that time was charitable and religious work. Barbara Welter captured efficiently the gender expectations of the time:

The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues-piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife-woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power.<sup>47</sup>

Sport, which was characterized as brutal, animal, and competitive, did not fit this domestic picture and was therefore especially reserved for men. This was the realm where boys became men and where masculinities were formed and maintained. This was no place for women.

Another social construction that limited women defined them as the more refined of the sexes and therefore the guardian of morality, civic values, and social cohesion;

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<sup>46</sup> Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present* (New York, NY: Viewpoints, 1975, 1979), 116.

<sup>47</sup> Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1966): 152.

society thus ensured that women would not be encouraged and accepted into the rough, competitive, and aggressive world of sports. Entering such a world, it was assumed, would only corrupt women and, by extension, the nation. Thus women were excluded from public life, including sports, and confined to the private space of home and church.

Virtually every aspect of society reinforced this gender structure. Nancy F. Cott, for instance, explains that a new kind of literature reiterated women's limited role in society, which "was to be wives and mothers, to nurture and maintain their families, to provide religious example and inspiration, and to affect the world around by exercising private moral influence."<sup>48</sup> Because this approach valued a role for women in society, it seemed like progress at the time. Indeed, as Cott states,

The doctrine of women's sphere opened to women (reserved for them) the avenues of domestic influence, religious morality, and child nurture. It articulated a social power based on their special female qualities rather than on general human rights. For women who previously held no particular avenue of power of their own – no unique defense of their integrity or dignity – this represented an advance."<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, it confined women to certain very specific tasks and spaces, or as Cott explains, "in opening certain avenues to women because of their sex, it barricaded all others."<sup>50</sup> That included the institution of sport.

Several changes that took place in American society during the second half of the nineteenth century altered the way sport was viewed, but not women's exclusion from it. In fact, these changes actually strengthened the determination to keep women out of the newly organized institution.

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<sup>48</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 8.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.



### **Societal changes and their impact on notions of femininity and masculinity**

The first significant change in attitudes toward sport came after the Civil War, when educators, physicians, and social reformers began to see it as a positive tool to enhance health, morality, the mind, and citizenship values. This change of definition was important. From then on, sport was no longer an activity without a goal or impact. It was no longer an activity performed by immigrant working class people trying to find something to do with their spare time. Now, sport offered a utilitarian perspective--a key value for the traditional American middle class. It was now perceived as helping Americans to be healthier and better citizens--according to the current white, middle-class definition of a good citizen. This new approach to sport and health, though, was drastically gendered with different recommendations for men and women. While men were supposed to practice sports to develop strong bodies and mind, women were to avoid such strenuous activities to focus their limited energy on their families and homes.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson's vision reflected the function of sport for men during the nineteenth century. Like several other educated middle-class social reformers of the time, Higginson believed that antebellum Americans' health was declining to an alarming level so he began to promote sport through a concept called "Muscular Christianity."<sup>51</sup> This concept reflects the belief that sport could contribute to the "the

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<sup>51</sup> The term "Muscular Christianity" first appeared in an 1857 review of a book by Charles Kingsley. Thomas Hughes then used it in the sequel to *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, called *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1860). In *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920*, Clifford Putney explains that Thomas Hughes and Charles Kingsley were dissatisfied with what they perceived as the feminizing characteristics of the Anglican Church. They therefore decided to incorporate more manly activities to prepare British men for their role in society. Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). Another interesting piece on the concept of Muscular Christianity is William E. Winn's "Tom Brown's Schooldays and the Development of 'Muscular Christianity,'" *Church History* 29, No. 1 (1960): 64-73.

development of moral character, virtue, discipline and patriotism, and that these experiences could be transferred to other institutions in society.”<sup>52</sup>

Muscular Christianity did not apply to women. Higginson was convinced that physical health, which could only be developed and maintained through vigorous and manly physical activities, was a fundamental necessity only for American men. Historian Linda Borish explains that “[f]or Higginson, robust health, achieved through appropriate sport, enabled man to perform his role as a businessman and leader in the world. The career preparation for men therefore included sport.”<sup>53</sup> Several other educated middle-class reformers advocated physical activities for men for the same reasons. Men, they contended, were not active enough; as a result, the health and the manliness of the nation were in danger. Practicing strenuous sports was the solution. Men who did not engage in manly activities therefore risked being seen as effeminate and unproductive citizens. Historian Ellen Gerber explained the relationship between sport and masculinity as follows:

Sport institutionalizes a behavioral mode that is understood to conform to an image of masculinity no less strong in contemporary America than in Ancient Greece. Sport represents the American tendency toward association, drastically reserved for men; the opportunities to aggress and prove self, believed to be inherent male instincts; and the demand for perseverance and comparison, elements of male assertiveness.<sup>54</sup>

From that perspective, the exclusion of women made sport all the more masculine and therefore valuable for society.

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<sup>52</sup> Linda Borish, “The Robust Woman and the Muscular Christian: Catherine Beecher, Thomas Higginson, and Their Vision of American Society and Physical Activities,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* (1987): 147.

<sup>53</sup> Borish, “The Robust Woman and the Muscular Christian,” 151.

<sup>54</sup> E. Gerber et al., *The American Woman in Sport* (Reading, MA: Addison - Wesley Publishing Company, 1974), 184.

This view of sport also explains why educators and social reformers of that time insisted on men engaging in sports that showcased masculinity.<sup>55</sup> It clarifies, for instance, why boxing, which was first seen as low-class and degrading, became a popular middle-class sport for men during the second half of the nineteenth century. As Elliott Gorn underlines in *The Manly Art*, for antebellum middle-class Americans, boxing, which emphasized violence, force over reason, disorder, and unproductive use of time, was repulsive and represented everything that was wrong about the working class.<sup>56</sup> With the war, though, the middle class's perception of boxing changed remarkably, as it now came to be seen as an efficient way to get men ready for war and combat. Gorn writes that, after the Civil War, boxing "became a more businesslike, quasi-respectable recreation, one that upper- and middle-class men found fascinating."<sup>57</sup> At this point, boxing intersects with muscular Christianity and gender issues. With social reformers claiming that American men were in poor physical health and advocating, as a solution, more rigorous and manly sport for men, boxing became a fashionable middle-class activity.

The social function assigned to boxing, then, ensured that women were not to practice this sport. Gorn emphasizes this, writing: "The ring countered effeminizing tendencies, preparing men for the life of strife."<sup>58</sup> In other words, boxing's greatest appeal was the fact that it emphasized how manly the participants were. Masculinity, as exemplified with boxing, was thus constructed in strict opposition to feminine moral and physical characteristics.

<sup>55</sup> Joane Nagel, "Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21 No. 2 (March 1998): 242-269.

<sup>56</sup> Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986, 1989), 12.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

The claim, then, by mid-century social reformers, that health, and by extension society, was in decline and that men therefore needed sports to develop strong bodies and minds while women needed rest to focus their limited energy on what mattered most-- family and home--made it even more important for sport to remain a male-only institution.

The second significant change that took place in American society and impacted the social function of sport and by consequence women's role in the sport institution was the increasing immigration, urbanization, and industrialization in Europe and the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Industrial Revolution, which started in England, reached the United States following the Civil War, resulting in the mechanization of the production system, a higher percentage of the labor force in manufacturing, increasing numbers of unskilled immigrants in the labor force, the growth of large enterprises, greater economic specialization, and an increase in the size and predominance of cities. The socio-economic consequences were dramatic. Workers were no longer hired because they were gifted or smart, but because they would repeat a set of gestures for long hours, without questioning or complaining. These new labor conditions were extremely dehumanizing. Before, the work a man did gave him status in his family and society. That occupation also allowed men to develop and maintain their masculinity. As history scholar Stephanie Twin explains, "changes in the work world brought about by industrialization created the fear that effeminacy was sapping male vitality."<sup>59</sup> Now, these workers had to find other venues to achieve that, to exercise some autonomy, and to find a sense of

<sup>59</sup> Stephanie Twin, "Women and Sport," in *Sport in America: New Historical Perspective*, Donald Spivey (Westport, CT: Greenwood press, 1985), 199. John F. Kasson, in *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America*, also argues that the industrial revolution had an impact on masculinity. (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1983).

fulfillment and satisfaction.<sup>60</sup> It is no surprise, then, that taverns, public entertainments, and sports boomed at the same time that mechanization and mass production began to predominate: men had to find new areas in which to cultivate their masculinity.<sup>61</sup> Sport served this function well because it had been defined on an opposition between masculinity and femininity. For sports to maintain its masculine character, however, women had to be excluded.

### **Pseudo medical theories and their impact on women's athletic aspirations**

During the second half of the nineteenth century, male physicians used medical theories to deny women access to sport. Having relegated female physicians to the role of midwives, male physicians' conclusions went unchallenged for years, defining America's perception of women's biological and social functions. As Patricia Vertinsky explains in *The Eternally Wounded Woman*, "women were socialized by the medical profession to see their bodies and view their functions in particular ways."<sup>62</sup> In fact, not only women had these perceptions; American society was socialized to see women through very specific, gendered lenses. As a result, until the 1890s, women were seen as fragile creatures prone to periodic illnesses and nervous disorders. Female biological

<sup>60</sup> In "The Rise of the Saloon," Roy Rosenzweig depicts efficiently how the Industrial Revolution impacted the working-class and the immigrant people and how it contributed to the development of a saloon culture. In that specific historical context, the saloon came to play a socio-cultural role, in similar ways to the rise of organized sports in America. Roy Rosenzweig, "The Rise of the Saloon," in *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 35-64.

<sup>61</sup> In "The Technological Revolution and the Rise of Sport," John Rickards Betts analyzes in depth the relationship between industrialization and the rise of organized sport in America. He concludes that "By 1900 sport had attained an unprecedented prominence in the daily lives of millions of Americans, and this remarkable development had been achieved in great part through the steamboat, the railroad, the telegraph, the penny press, the electric light, the streetcar, the camera, the bicycle, the automobile, and the mass production of sporting goods." (232). John Rickards Betts, "The Technological Revolution and the Rise of Sport, 1850-1900," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 40, No. 2 (Sep., 1953): 231-256.

<sup>62</sup> Patricia Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Doctors and Exercise* (New York, NY: 1990), 7.

functions, including menstruation, childbirth, and menopause, were interpreted as illnesses rather than natural occurrences. Doctors then cited these illnesses to keep women in place--meaning at home.<sup>63</sup> In other words “ostensibly basing their views upon new scientific evidence influential medical practitioners, many of whom were men, utilized pseudo-scientific theories about the effects of the reproductive life cycle upon women’s physical capabilities in order to rationalize the life choices of middle-class women and define limits for their activities.”<sup>64</sup>

The emergence of a “vitalist theory” in the 1840-1850s reinforced the belief that women should not venture into male areas. This theory “held that energy for the human organism was derived from a ‘vital force,’ which being limited and non-renewable, should therefore be expended only in the service of family, god or country.”<sup>65</sup> For year, numerous newspapers and magazines published articles about this vitality issue. The *New York Times*, for instance, ran an editorial titled “College Sport and Motherhood.” It stated: “Every girl, it seems, has a large store of vital and nervous energy upon which to draw in the great crisis of motherhood. If the foolish virgin uses up this deposit in daily expenditures on the hockey field or tennis court, then she is left bankrupt in her great crisis and her children have to pay the bill.”<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, women were not supposed to waste any energy on any activity that would not benefit the future of the nation. In short, the medical establishment constructed a supposedly medical paradigm to impose, maintain, and justify the need to exclude women from many educational, political,

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<sup>63</sup> In *Nymphomania: A History*, Carol Groneman looks at nymphomania, a medical term referring to abnormal or excessive female sexuality, and the way this condition was perceived and treated by male doctors during the nineteenth century. She reaches a similar conclusion, explaining that nymphomania was diagnosed, looked at, and taken care of based on cultural ideas about gender, and especially female body and sexuality, more than medical ones. Male doctors used this medical claim to control female sexuality. Carol Groneman, *Nymphomania: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2000).

<sup>64</sup> Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman*, 39.

<sup>65</sup> Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds*, 19.

<sup>66</sup> E. L. Wolven, “College Sport and Motherhood,” *New York Times* (July 3, 1921): 42.

professional, and sports settings. As historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg explains, this containment of the female body became especially intense when girls reached puberty.<sup>67</sup> She for instance argues that “physicians routinely used this energy theory to sanction attacks upon any behavior they considered unfeminine; education, factory work, religious or charitable activities, indeed virtually any interests outside the home during puberty were deplored, as were any kind of sexual forwardness such as flirtations, dances and party-going.”<sup>68</sup> This medical approach to the female body continued after puberty, ensuring that women would follow prescribed gender norms.

The life of Charlotte Perkins Gilman shows that men had no problem using medical claims to control women’s social roles. Her experiences and her works are excellent examples of the social and medical attitude towards women and athleticism during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup> Gilman was born in 1860 in Hartford, Connecticut. She grew up in a progressive environment, with three feminist aunts--Harriet Beecher Stowe and Katherine Beecher, who advocated a certain kind of domestic feminism, and Isabella Beecher Hooker, who was involved in the suffrage movement. In 1878, she enrolled in classes at the Rhode Island School of Design. During those years, exercising became part of Gilman’s life. Gilman realized that gender roles and expectations confined women, leaving them little leeway for anything not directly related to housekeeping, wifehood, and motherhood. In *The Man-Made World*, published in 1911, Gilman clearly stated her opinion on this, explaining that society had taken men’s activities and proclaimed them as the standard human activities because society viewed

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<sup>67</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Puberty to Menopause: The Cycle of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Feminist Studies* 1, No. 3/4, Special Double Issue: Women’s History (Winter -Spring, 1973): 58-72.

<sup>68</sup> Smith-Rosenberg, “Puberty to Menopause,” 62.

<sup>69</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s work, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, illustrates perfectly the way men (in this case especially husbands and doctors) used medical theories to constrain women to certain roles they perceived as appropriate for women. *The Yellow Wallpaper* was first printed in *The New England Magazine* in 1892.

men and women differently, “man being held the human type; woman a sort of accompaniment and subordinate assistant, merely essential to the making of people.”<sup>70</sup> For Gilman, women needed to step out of the prescribed gender norms to increase their activities and responsibilities. Vertinsky explains that “Gilman declared early in life that physical fitness could function as an important strategy for emancipation, since embracing physical culture seemed one way to remove the badge of female dependence.”<sup>71</sup> For her, sport was a tool to challenge the current gender structure and uplift women’s condition.

Gilman also admired certain characteristics generally considered masculine: “Seeing conventional femininity as symbolized by her mother’s dependence and vulnerability, Gilman viewed her father’s traits of creativity, strength, independence, and worldliness as infinitely more desirable.”<sup>72</sup> Her attraction to aspects of life not considered appropriate for women, such as sport, explains why during her adolescent years and her early twenties, Gilman considered rejecting society’s expectations regarding women and domesticity. In 1884, however, she married Charles Stetson, an artist. A year later, she gave birth to their first child, a daughter, but she suffered from post-partum depression. In 1887, her husband, with her approval, asked the nation’s premiere nerve specialist, Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, for help. Not surprisingly for the time period, Dr. Mitchell diagnosed Gilman with neurasthenia and prescribed the “rest cure,” a treatment he pioneered. This medical cure included isolation from family, bed rest--with no reading, sewing, talking--overfeeding to increase fat volume, massage, and occasional use of electricity on the muscles to offset the effects of prolonged confinement in bed. This

<sup>70</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Man-Made World* (New York, NY: Charlton Company, 1911), 134.

<sup>71</sup> Patricia Vertinsky, “Feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Pursuit of Health and Physical Fitness as a Strategy for Emancipation,” *Journal of Sport History* 16, No. 1 (Spring 1989): 8.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*



diagnosis and treatment coincided with the gendered social and medical beliefs of the time, when doctors argued that “neurasthenia” was a nervous disorder common in women who deviated from their prescribed social role. Gilman recognized this in her autobiography, stating that the rest cure was designed for “the business man exhausted from too much work, and the society woman exhausted from too much play.”<sup>73</sup> Women who pursued personal, ambitious ventures normally reserved for men supposedly used amounts of energy with which they were not naturally endowed and, consequently, suffered neurasthenia. Vertinsky relates that “new women and nervous illness seemed to go together, and neurologists readily fashioned treatments which were designed to ease the anxieties of female patients by defusing their ambitions and re-socializing them to their traditional sphere and its familiar obligations.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, “the rest cure was a behavior modification treatment designed to make nervous, over-active and dissatisfied women more passive, feminine and healthy, and to help them learn that domesticity was the cure, not the cause, of their problems.”<sup>75</sup> There was, then, a conscious use of medical theories to ensure that women would remain in their place.

Jonathan Crewe, professor of English and comparative literature at Dartmouth College, summarized the situation efficiently, concluding that “the oppression consists in the woman’s subjection to an ostensibly caring yet abjecting regime in which male conjugal and medical authority fully coincide.”<sup>76</sup>

Deprived of any intellectual and physical activities and ordered what to do by her husband and doctor, Gilman came to see the cure as a punishment. Gilman was so

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<sup>73</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* (New York, NY: Arno, 1935, 1972), 95.

<sup>74</sup> Vertinsky, “Feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Pursuit of Health and Physical Fitness as a Strategy for Emancipation,” 13.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>76</sup> Jonathan Crewe, “Queering *The Yellow Wallpaper*? Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Politics of Form,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 14, No. 2 (Autumn, 1995): 276-277.

convinced that this approach was detrimental for women's wellbeing that she later wrote a book about this. *The Yellow Wallpaper*, which is probably Gilman's most famous piece, relates the story of a woman whose is ordered the rest cure by her husband/doctor as a remedy for her supposed neurasthenia.<sup>77</sup> The longer the woman is isolated, the more depressed and obsessed with the yellow wallpaper the woman becomes. She uses the wallpaper to resist the cure and stimulate her imagination. She studies the patterns, deciphers some human figures, gives life to certain forms, and so on. At night, the woman even starts peeling the paper off the wall. The more interested and focused on this wallpaper she becomes, the better she feels, thus showing that depriving women of intellectual and physical stimulation is not an appropriate method to improve women's health.<sup>78</sup>

After a month of confinement, Gilman was allowed to go home and ordered to live as domestic a life as possible. The result, once more, was disastrous. Her depression worsened. In 1888, she therefore decided to separate from her husband--a rare occurrence in the late nineteenth century--and moved to California, where she pursued a successful writing career and determined to regain her health through intellectual and physical activity and friendships with other women. Vertinsky explains that separation as follows:

Gilman realized that she could never be truly 'healthy' in the traditional female role. Abandoning the role that had caused her such pain and disclaiming a prevalent male medical model that had tried to re-fit her for that role, she began a new search for self-definition and wholeness as a female writer. Confident that self-assertion and personal growth through reading, writing, exercising, and meeting and talking with other women provided a better chance than medical intervention of improving her health she left her husband and moved to California in 1888.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

<sup>78</sup> Jane F. Thrailkill, "Doctoring 'The Yellow Paper,'" *English Literary History* 69, No. 2 (Summer 2002): 526.

<sup>79</sup> Vertinsky, "Feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Pursuit of Health and Physical Fitness as a Strategy for Emancipation," 19.

Gilman and Stetson were officially divorced in 1894. The newspaper articles announcing the divorce reported that Stetson blamed Gilman's anomalous activities, arguing that her visits to the gymnasium and her attendance at suffrage meetings made her dissatisfied and stimulated her rejection of traditional gender roles.

Gilman's story highlights how the turn-of-the-century medical system reflected a male view of proper gender roles. Women who practiced sports were especially seen as threatening because they were blatantly deviating from the prescribed gender roles that limited them to the domestic sphere.

During the nineteenth century, then, women were clearly not welcomed in the sports arena and men were able to use medical claims to justify this exclusion. However, starting in the 1890s, social reformers began to challenge the stereotype of woman as a "sick creature."<sup>80</sup> At the same time, women progressively reentered the medical profession, thus enabling them to reach their own medical conclusions about the female body. From that point on, an increasing number of women practiced sports. Nonetheless, it was only in the 1920s that the "new" woman--a more daring and athletic woman--fully emerged.<sup>81</sup>

When Coubertin launched his Olympic renovation project, then, female athleticism, as men knew it, was non-existent. It was in fact an aberration, something to be avoided for the welfare of the nation. This strict gender structure, which permeated all aspects of life, was the first obstacle women encountered in trying to participate in the Olympics. The

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<sup>80</sup> In *The Rise and Fall of the Sportswoman*, Kent Stanley focuses heavily on the post-1890s health and social reform movement that dictated more fitness activities for women as a means to improve the nation's wellbeing.

<sup>81</sup> "Typically defined as white, educated, and middle class, the New Woman appeared as a suffragist, progressive reformer, and woman's club member, and, in the popular press, as the independent consumer or the bloomer wearing bicyclist." In Martha H. Patterson, "Beyond Empire: The New Woman at Home and Abroad," *Journal of Women's History* 21, No. 1 (Spring 2009): 180.

second obstacle was Coubertin's strong approval of such a gendered approach to sports and life in general.

## Chapter 2 – A Major Obstacle to Female Olympism: Pierre De Coubertin

Another obstacle American women faced when trying to participate in the modern Olympic Games was Baron Pierre de Coubertin and his gendered Olympic vision. The latter is universally known because he presided over several sports organizations, left behind an enormous amount of scholarly work and, most importantly, revived the Olympic Games in 1896. Several scholars have already chronicled his life, beliefs, and achievements. This chapter consequently concentrates on Coubertin and his Olympic project in relation to gender issues. Demonstrably, as a result of the historical context and of his personal background, Coubertin always viewed sport as a male venture, and strongly opposed women's participation in the Olympics.<sup>82</sup>

The reinstatement of the Olympic Games was not a unilateral enterprise. Other educational leaders, sport administrators, and social reformers of the time contributed to the debates about the Olympic Games and, more globally, about the institution of sport and its function in society. Still, this chapter focuses primarily on Coubertin for two reasons. First, no individual was more important and had a greater impact on the future of the Games than Coubertin.<sup>83</sup> Second, Coubertin's approach to women's participation in the Olympics reflects the way the bourgeoisie perceived women and the role they

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<sup>82</sup> Both primary and secondary sources make it possible to reconstruct Coubertin's beliefs and discourse concerning gender and the Olympic Games. The primary documents were mostly found at the Lausanne Olympic Studies Centre, the LA84 Foundation, the University of Illinois' Avery Brundage Collection, and the University of Notre Dame's Sports Collection. Of special interest during these research trips were the collection of Pierre de Coubertin, the correspondence of IOC members and former IOC presidents, the minutes of IOC sessions, papers related to the organization of the Summer Olympic Games, these Games' official reports, the IOC correspondence with the USOC, and material printed on the role of sports, the Games, and female athletes.

<sup>83</sup> In "The International Olympic Committee: Tragedy, Farce, and Hypocrisy," Dwight H. Zakus, focuses on the importance of Coubertin: "More than any other person, he was responsible for the genesis of the movement and its Games. It was from his philosophical thoughts and ideals that the movement originally established a set of guidelines and an operational structure" *Sociology of Sport Journal* 9 (1992): 340-341.

should play in society. While he formed an Olympic committee with members from different countries, there seems to be no record that they disagreed with his gender views in any way. Focusing on Coubertin, then, provides interesting insights about this man and his Olympic project, but also about women, sport, and society in general.

### **Coubertin and education reform**

The historical context in which Pierre Fredy, Baron de Coubertin, was born and raised helps illuminate his beliefs and goals concerning the Olympic project and the role of women in it. Looking at that context is essential because it dictated the thinking concerning women and the Olympics. As noted earlier, the Industrial Revolution of the 1860s developed in England and spread throughout Europe and the United States. Along with that industrialization came urbanization and immigration. These changes significantly altered all aspects of life, including the relationships between classes and issues of gender. The old aristocracy, which now faced the increasing importance of industrial businessmen and the rising middle class, fought to retain its privileged status by resisting change. This often translated into a strong conservatism--shared by Coubertin's parents. Coubertin's father was an elegant man who lived off his inherited money, which allowed him to freely pursue his hobby of painting. His mother carefully followed the lifestyle expected for women of her social class. She played music, painted, was religious, and devoted time doing charitable works. Coubertin was raised in an educated, cultivated, and aristocratic environment. Boulongne argues that this background impacted Coubertin significantly: "The adult Coubertin was molded by an aristocratic culture in which the concept of chivalric excellence pushed forth strict

behavioral attitudes.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, Coubertin learned early in life that he belonged to the aristocracy and was expected to behave according to certain class values, including those regarding gender roles. For Coubertin, aristocratic men belonged to the public world and were in charge of economic and political decisions, the nation’s safety, and so on, while aristocratic women were part of the private world.

Coubertin was aware of this strictly defined gender structure when he entered a Parisian Jesuit school and began to reflect on society, the education system, and the role of sport in society. At school Coubertin developed an interest in history, including that of the ancient Greeks. The fact that the gender structure was strictly defined in ancient Greece and women there played a minimal role in society and none in sports reinforced Coubertin’s assumptions about women.

Coubertin’s parents had grand plans for his post-Baccalaureate years, envisioning a military or political career for him.<sup>85</sup> Instead, Coubertin decided to pursue a liberal arts education at the Ecole Supérieure des Sciences Politiques in Paris.<sup>86</sup> There, he particularly showed a liking for literature, history, and the education system in France and other countries. During these years, Coubertin became convinced that the French education system was constricting and did not allow students enough personal freedom, and should therefore be significantly revamped. As his writings indicated, “From that time on, he viewed the problem of education as the key to human happiness.”<sup>87</sup>

After 1883, Coubertin began traveling to England annually to observe the English and Irish educational systems and the role sports played in them. Coubertin found them more

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<sup>84</sup> Bouloungne, *Pierre de Coubertin*, 42. Original: “[...] le Coubertin adulte sera surdéterminé par une culture aristocratique ou le concept chevaleresque d’excellence oblige à des impératifs catégoriques de comportement.”

<sup>85</sup> The Baccalaureate is the French examination that students need to pass to graduate from high school and enter college.

<sup>86</sup> School of Political Science.

<sup>87</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, *Olympism: Selected Writings* (Lausanne, Switzerland: International Olympic Committee, 2000), 25.

active and engaging than the French system. Coubertin was particularly impressed by Rugby. Founded in 1567 in the town of Rugby, this school was one of the oldest public schools in England and one of the major co-educational boarding schools in the country.<sup>88</sup> Thomas Arnold, who headed the school from 1828 to 1841, instantly became a model and an inspiration for Coubertin. Arnold's goal was to develop "Christian gentlemen" who would be able to govern themselves efficiently. He believed this could only be achieved through an active education system that relied on equal doses of social constraint and personal liberty. At Rugby, sport, freely organized by students, played an essential role in the formation of students, building judgment, sensibility, and character. There, sport was quite different from the militarism inherent in the French system, which was based on German gymnastic drills and exercises; instead, in England, sport meant liberty. Arnold convinced Coubertin that efficient good education "was to be a constant field of action."<sup>89</sup>

Even though Rugby was a co-educational school, Arnold's concept of education through sport only concerned male students--"Christian gentlemen." Coubertin, as a man of his time, never questioned that, and it fit perfectly his own beliefs. He had no problem embracing Arnold's concept, developing his own educational model with only boys/men in mind. Again, Arnold's and Coubertin's exclusionary attitudes were not surprising, since at that time, neither education, action, nor sports were associated with women's social roles. Since the Olympic Games he later revived were an integral part of Coubertin's educational vision, it was logical that he did not include women.

Another element contributed to the development of Coubertin's gendered educational and sporting project--the humiliating defeat of the French military in the 1871 Franco-

<sup>88</sup> The town of Rugby is located in Warwickshire, a non-metropolitan county in the West Midlands region of England.

<sup>89</sup> De Coubertin, *Olympism*, 26.



Prussian War. Coubertin blamed this defeat on the French educational system, arguing that it did not develop and build men as strong as the German and Prussian schools did. Coubertin believed that the schooling system should help young boys develop into strong men, mentally and physically ready to defend the nation. This important military defeat was a clear sign that the French system was old fashioned, unimaginative, and inefficient. Coubertin's linkage of education and militarism clearly excluded women from his educational vision, since the key to his reformation plan was including sports competitions to develop French manhood. Conversely, sport, practiced strenuously, was a male activity. From the start, then, Coubertin's project was inscribed along gender lines.

In 1888, the Committee for the Propagation of Physical Exercise in Education was set up and Coubertin became its Secretary General. In 1889, Coubertin published *L'Education Anglaise en France*, in which he argued that since the English education system was better than that of France, the French should try to duplicate it.<sup>90</sup> During that year's World's Fair, Coubertin, with the French government's approval, organized the First Congress of Physical Exercises and School Competitions. The key word here is "competitions." Because of the time period, the gender roles, and the function assigned to sport in society, women were not included. Before reviving the Olympic Games, then, Coubertin had already been involved in the organization of sports competitions for men only.

Coubertin was determined to introduce Arnold's sports principles into French society. His plan to reform the French education system, however, met with resistance. He reflected later that "to shore up the frail edifice that I had just built, it seemed to me that restoration of the Olympic Games--this time as totally international games--was the only

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<sup>90</sup> Translation: *English Education in France*.

appropriate solution”<sup>91</sup> The renovation of the Games, was thus an integral part of Coubertin’s efforts to reform the education system to develop sound military boys/men. There was no place in his movement for women.

### **Revitalizing the Olympic Games**

The idea of launching a new Olympic Games was not original with Coubertin. Following the Renaissance, Europeans developed a renewed interest in ancient Greece. Women did not participate in the ancient Games so they were logically absent from these emerging romantic Olympic visions, including Coubertin’s.

Rapidly, the phrase “Olympic Games” was co-opted for several regional or national sporting, gymnastic, and folkloric festivals organized in Canada, Greece, France, Germany, Sweden, and Great Britain. At the time they aimed at showcasing the physical superiority of one ethnic or national group over others. In other words, their scope was only regional or national.

Of special importance among the earlier events were the Olympic Festivals organized in Much Wenlock, England. These are noteworthy for two reasons. First, during a trip to England in 1890, Coubertin met William Penny Brookes, a medical doctor and active local politician who launched these English Olympic festivals. A regular correspondence between them began following that meeting and lasted until Brookes’ death in 1895. Second, from the descriptions we have of these early Olympic festivities, it seems that women were included, at least in certain events. According to Findling and Pelle, “some forty-four diverse and colorful events comprised the program, including everything from cricket to foot races to archery to a wheelbarrow race. Other events, such as a Bible

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<sup>91</sup> Pierre De Coubertin during a lecture entitled “Olympia.” March 6, 1929, Festival Hall of the Paris’s 16<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement City Hall.

history contest, knitting, and an essay contest” were also part of these Games.<sup>92</sup> We do not know the extent of women’s involvement in these Olympic festivals but it seems likely that at least one activity, knitting, included women. One may argue that Brookes and Coubertin felt similarly about women’s role in society, since knitting carried heavy gender markers. Knitting was indeed the ultimate activity expected of “good” wives and mothers while taking care of their homes, raising their children, and being supportive companions to their husbands. Still, the fact that Brookes at least thought about women as willing or deserving to participate in his festival shows that his project differed substantially from Coubertin’s regarding gender. While women were competitors in Brookes’ project, they were only spectators in Coubertin’s.

Both Brookes’ and Coubertin’s Olympics were influenced by the ancient Greek games. Brookes’

were staged on the Olympian Field; Greek inscriptions decorated the ribbons; victors were crowned with laurel and olive wreaths; bronze, silver, and gold medals were coined, the latter with the effigy of Nike, the Greek goddess of victory, encircled by a Greek passage taken from Pindar.<sup>93</sup>

Despite this common point, these Olympic projects differed in scope. In 1865, Brookes formed the National Olympian Association (NOA) which, between 1866 and 1883, organized six National Olympic Games (NOG). Brookes considered taking his project a step further, but he was never able to expand it into an International Olympic Festival. Also unlike Coubertin’s Games, Brookes’ festivals allowed professional athletes to compete, something that was totally unacceptable to Coubertin.

<sup>92</sup> John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Modern Olympic Movement* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

Coubertin's project, then, was from the start very different than this previous Olympic venture. It never occurred to him to organize some kind of national Olympic games, to allow professional athletes, or to include women. He wanted to launch an international athletic competition, modeled on the ancient Greece Olympic Games but destined to strengthen young men and each country's positive energy and character. Coubertin was convinced that this would, in turn, stimulate international harmony.

In 1892, during one of the congresses on physical education he organized, Coubertin publicly called for a revival of the Olympic Games, but at time, nobody paid serious attention to his project. In 1894, he once more organized an international athletic congress and re-presented his revival plan. Again, though, many people in attendance did not take the project seriously. In 1894, the *Spectator* even called it an "inoffensive fantasy."<sup>94</sup> Despite these doubts, Coubertin's proposition was accepted and the International Olympic Committee was set up. The Greek Demetrius became its president and Athens was selected as the site for the first Games in 1896. In all, 241 male athletes from twenty countries competed in forty-three events, categorized as athletic sports, gymnastics, fencing, shooting, yachting, cycling, riding, and games.

Because several countries had previously tried to revive some kind of Olympiad, but always at a national level and with a nationalistic purpose in mind, several foreign personalities criticized Coubertin and his first modern Olympic Games. British imperialist Sir John Astley, for example, rejected the internationalism of the modern Olympic Games, urging instead the establishment of an Anglo-Saxon Olympic Games, with industrial, intellectual, and athletic components. In France, journalist Charles Maurat argued that the cosmopolitan aspect of the Games was negative for every nation involved, since it would lead to international chaos. In Germany, several public figures

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<sup>94</sup> Boulongne, *Pierre de Coubertin*, 21.

also opposed the internationalism of the Games. Despite these criticisms, the first Games were a political and athletic success. It is interesting to note that while these Games received several criticisms, none of them had to do with the absence of women. None of the commentators questioned that absence or criticized Coubertin and the IOC for it. Rather, the male-exclusive aspect of the Games seemed normal for the many national and international commentators.

### **The social, moral, and political implications of sport for Coubertin**

Right after the 1896 Games, Coubertin assumed the presidency of the IOC, a position he held until 1925. As president, Coubertin easily influenced and fashioned the Olympic Movement to implement his vision of sport as education. It is important to note that when laying down the theoretical foundations on which he built his project, he never refers to women. All his gender-neutral remarks only refer to the value of sport and/or Olympism for young men.

Like others of his time, Coubertin believed that the practice of sport was positive for men. First, it would lead to progress in health. Second, sport was important for Coubertin because it developed honesty. Third, sport had the ability to build character and contribute positively to society, in that the cooperative attitude and skills learned were essential in the development and functioning of democratic societies. Finally, at the personal level, Coubertin considered sport an important tool for self-discovery and self-control--or what he referred to as self-mastery. It was clear for Coubertin, then, that “sport places germs in men--germs of intellectual and moral qualities.”<sup>95</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, *Pédagogie Sportive* (127) in *Pierre de Coubertin*, Boulogne, 181. Translation: “Le sport dépose dans l’homme des *germes* de qualités intellectuelles et morales.”

The positive impacts of sport on individuals are obvious in Coubertin's writings. According to him, however, the positive aspects did not stop there; they expanded to society and humanity in general. An important element for him was the link between sport and democracy. As an avid history student, Coubertin rapidly noticed that the ancient Olympic Games emerged in parallel with the development of democracy in Greece. A supporter of a liberal democracy in France, Coubertin thought that the revival of the Olympic Games would help society become more democratic. Of course, he referred to the kind of democracy practiced in ancient Greece and nineteenth-century Europe. That democracy excluded women from many aspects of life.

Still, Coubertin found sport democratic for two main reasons. First, it promoted a practice whose participants were given space to be themselves, to push themselves to their limits, and to become who they wanted to be. Second, the institution of sport was in itself a little democracy. Coubertin for instance explained that "the practice of athletic exercise does not iron out inequalities in social conditions, but it does place relationships on an equal footing."<sup>96</sup> While sport does not erase the inherent inequalities in society, whether in social class or access to sport and its equipment (pools, tennis courts, golf courses), when a runner is at the starting line, the race is fair and equal. Class no longer matters; all that matters is how fast he can run.

Coubertin also reasoned that if class tensions diminished, people would be more positive and productive in society, instead of spending their energy on negative social "warfare." This, in a final step, would lead to general democratic progress.

Finally, Olympism, for Coubertin, would bring peace in the world. He was convinced that by allowing champions from different countries--and by extension, coaches, referees,

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<sup>96</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, "Le Sport et la Question Sociale," *Revue Olympique* (August 1913): 120-123, in *Pierre de Coubertin Olympism, Selected Writings*, Norbert Muller (Lausanne, Switzerland: International Olympic Committee, 2000), 214.

medical experts, sport administrators, journalists, and spectators--to meet in a joyful and fraternal environment, a better sociocultural and political understanding would emerge, leading to more peaceful relations. Improving world relations, then, was an integral part of Coubertin's Olympic project.

### **Coubertin and women in sport**

Based on Coubertin's vision of Olympism, one might conclude that everybody, including women, would benefit from practicing sport and from competing in events such as the Olympic Games. However, Coubertin's writings make clear that women were not only not included in his project, they were clearly rejected. This contradiction is puzzling. How can a movement based on democracy principles exclude a significant portion of the population? What is the value of liberating young men, but not young women, from the constraints of society? How could a movement on the cusp of modernism be so conservative concerning women? Several factors explain this seeming paradox, most with a result of historical realities and philosophical notions.

It is important to understand the role women held during quite different two historical periods and locations. First, the time, society, and socio-political customs of ancient Greece, as we noted, greatly influenced Coubertin's Olympic ideal. The role of women in the ancient Greek Games no doubt influenced the role he assigned women in his Olympics. Second, Coubertin was influenced by women's place in nineteenth-century industrialized nations.

Most of the extant written evidence concerning ancient Greece was produced by well-to-do and educated men, but even though the picture they portrayed is not completely objective, the people's values and beliefs can be inferred. From these writings, most

describing life in Athens and Sparta, it is clear that women in most ancient Greek city-states had few political and economic rights, and that socially, they were regarded and treated as inferior beings, more like children than adults. Women, obviously, deferred to men; they were under the control and protection of their fathers, husbands, or male relatives for their entire lives. A wife's duty was to bear children and to manage the household. Child care, spinning, and weaving were the most common activities in women's daily routine. Their social role was limited to the home. Wives were expected to remain inside, except for attendance at funerals and specific festivals open to women. Women seen in public on their own were assumed to be slaves, prostitutes, concubines, or so poor they had to work. Boulongne underlines the inferior status of ancient Greek women:

Democracy in Athens was a masculine thing. It discriminated against women. Even though it was not racial discrimination, it was as dramatic, in terms of psychological and social consequences, as racial ostracism. . . .A woman was a 'oikoureme' (an object 'made to take care of the home'). Logically, a woman could not take part in any cultural rituals. She could not assist to the Games' festivities: she was nothing. . . In the ancient world, the way women were considered was as bad a scar as the one created by slavery.<sup>97</sup>

This was the model admired by Coubertin as he built his Olympic ideal. The role of women in Coubertin's Olympic project was also dictated by the society in which Coubertin himself lived. As explained in Chapter 1, in industrialized and civilized nations, a strict gender role structure existed and defined the middle and upper classes' everyday duties and expectations. Men and women were thought to have completely

<sup>97</sup> Boulongne, *Pierre de Coubertin*, 86. Original: "La démocratie athénienne était masculine et pratiquait à l'égard des femmes une discrimination qui, pour n'être pas raciale, n'en était pas moins aussi grave de conséquences psychologiques et sociales que l'ostracisme raciste;" "Elle n'est qu'un 'oikourema' (un objet 'fait pour les soins du ménage'). Naturellement exclue des rituels du culte, elle ne peut assister aux cérémoniaux des Jeux: elle n'est rien;" "Dans le monde antique, la condition de la femme est une plaie aussi grave que celle de l'esclavage."



different natures; consequently, they had different roles in society. Men's roles, as we noted revolved around the public space - economy, politics, and certain socio-cultural activities or places such as sports, taverns, etc. Women's sphere, on the other hand, centered on private space – home, husband, children.

Sport, which was characterized as brutal, animal, masculine, and competitive was especially reserved for men. This was the realm where boys became men and where masculinities were formed and maintained. As a result, women were automatically excluded. Boulongne writes that

Coubertin's position was logical in light of his definition of sport (activity that, demanding excess, can lead to sacrifice) and that accordingly, the weak, according to him women and children, should therefore be excluded from such Olympic activities.<sup>98</sup>

Based on women's role in nineteenth-century industrialized nations and based on this view of sport, Coubertin's exclusion of women at the Olympic Games was reasonable. It fit perfectly with the traditional gender roles and expectations that defined a limited democracy. Coubertin made this clear when, in 1902, he wrote:

Women have probably proved that they are up to par with almost all the exploits to which men are accustomed, but they have not been able to establish that in doing so, they have remained faithful to the necessary conditions of their existence and obedient to the laws of nature.<sup>99</sup>

Tradition was meant to be maintained, regardless of egalitarian ideals:

Let us not fall into the Utopia of complete communism. Equality must stop at the threshold of the family hearth, for men will never give it access

<sup>98</sup> Boulongne, *Pierre de Coubertin*, 79. Original: "Mais a-t-on vu que la position de Coubertin était dans la logique même de sa définition du sport (activité qui, réclamant l'excès, peut mener au sacrifice) et que, de ce fait, les faibles, selon lui les femmes et les enfants, devaient être exclus des joutes olympiques."

<sup>99</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, "L'éducation des Jeunes Enfants et des Jeunes Filles," *La Revue Olympique* (October, 1902): 61, in *The Evolution of Women's Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Mary Henson Leigh (Ph. D. Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1974), 56.

to their homes or allow it to interfere in family affairs. Intimate social relationships are governed by heredity, tradition, and everyday habits.<sup>100</sup>

Based on these social constructs, a female Olympian constituted a body out of place.

Coubertin, unlike many elite men of this time, did recognize that sport could have certain benefits for women. If women were to practice sports, however, it could only be with moderation and as a private endeavor. He also believed that, unlike young men, young women could not acquire a moral sense through sports. When asked why, he explained:

Physical education, athletic physical culture, yes. That is excellent for young girls, for women. But the ruggedness of male exertion, the basis of athletic education when prudently but resolutely applied, is much to be dreaded when it comes to the female. That ruggedness is achieved physically only when nerves are stretched beyond their normal capacity, and morally only when the most precious feminine characteristics are nullified.<sup>101</sup>

Women and strenuous sports were essentially contradictory. Coubertin believed that if women practiced strenuous sports, they would ultimately lose all their female attributes. This was obviously dangerous for women themselves, but also for the nation, which needed women to continue taking proper care of their homes, husbands, and children. Women should therefore accept that they were not built for strenuous sports and competition and not stretch their muscles to the point of becoming mannish.

Coubertin's view of women as athletes was evident in his opposition to women aviators. At the turn of the century, some women had started to participate in aviation meets organized in Paris. In an article he wrote in 1910, Coubertin explained why this

<sup>100</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, "What We Can Now Ask of Sport," *The Olympic Idea* 47, in *The Evolution of Women's Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 59-60.

<sup>101</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, "L'Utilisation Pédagogique de l'Activité Sportive," *Le Sport Suisse* 1074 (November 21, 1928): 1 and *Le Sport Suisse* 1075 (November 28, 1928): 1, in *Pierre de Coubertin Olympism*, Muller, 188.

should absolutely be prohibited.<sup>102</sup> His first argument was that such a show was “against nature” because women’s bodies were not made to sustain the movements, violence, and physical risks involved in such an activity. He made this point clear when comparing aviation to other strenuous sports:

Do we allow women to participate in horse-racing and should women jockeys appear would we calmly watch them break their skulls from the spectator stands? Would we allow women’s teams to compete for polo or football championships? We wouldn’t would we?<sup>103</sup>

In the same article, Coubertin also differentiated private and public spaces. He conceded that women had the right to perform certain activities in private. Nothing in the laws of the country forbade women to risk their lives and practice strenuous physical activities. They should not, however, perform these activities in front of an audience. Placing a woman’s fragile body in front of people’s eyes represented an act of indecency, he felt. Women should therefore not have been allowed to participate in aviation meets:

Respect of individual liberty requires that one should not interfere in private acts and if a woman wants to go up in an airplane no policeman must keep her from doing so [...] but in public competitions, their participation must be absolutely prohibited. It is indecent that the spectators should be exposed to the risk of seeing the body of a woman being smashed before their eyes.<sup>104</sup>

Coubertin had no problem with men flying before an audience. The image of the body of a man “being smashed before their eyes” was not indecent for Coubertin. Again, because men belonged to the public world, working, making economic and political decisions, defending the nation, practicing sports, and taking risks, they were “men of action;” people knew that something like an aviation accident could happen to them. This was part of men’s lives. But women who entered aviation meets and took risks

<sup>102</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, “Chronicle du Mois,” *La Revue Olympique* (July, 1910): 109-110, in *The Evolution of Women’s Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 64-66.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

were out of place, crossing gender lines, and therefore shocking the audience. Women's role, as Coubertin reminded readers, was to accompany their husbands. He wrote: "Let women accompany their husbands every now and then, that is quite enough."<sup>105</sup> In an aviation meet, as elsewhere, women's only role should therefore be that of beloved wives supporting their husbands.

Moreover, Coubertin noted, if women had the time to practice aviation, they were probably not fulfilling their gender and familial duties:

If a woman is still young enough to like going up in a balloon and to follow her penchant, it is because she does not have much to do at home. Women who have children to raise do not expose themselves to useless perils because they know they are needed.<sup>106</sup>

Coubertin, like his contemporaries, apparently believed that the loss of a father was of less consequence to children than the loss of a mother.

After pointing out that the prevalent gender structure required women to abstain from participating in any public athletic competition, Coubertin explained that women were, anyway, not physically built for strenuous activity: "No matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain certain shocks. Her nerves rule her muscles, nature wanted it that way."<sup>107</sup> The operative word in this statement is "nature." Men and women were simply biologically different and women did not possess the natural attributes required to practice strenuous athletic activities.

Coubertin allowed that women could practice certain sports, but only as long as the goal was safe leisure and health, conducted moderately and in private. But another factor influenced his thinking as well. Writing about snow sports, Coubertin criticized women

<sup>105</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, "Chronicle du Mois," *La Revue Olympique* (July, 1910): 109-110, in *The Evolution of Women's Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 64-66.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

on aesthetic grounds for their participation in what he considered “virile sports.”<sup>108</sup> Here he focused on the spectacle presented by a woman athlete. Coubertin took sledding as an example. He argued that “a sled is already in itself an object ugly enough, like a stool of inelegant shape.”<sup>109</sup> He then added that the position it required made it a sport that women should not even contemplate:

Seeing a lady with her skirts lifted sliding in this position, usually scratching up the runway with two small pointed sticks which she holds in her hands and which help her to steer the sleigh, that sight represents a true offence to the eyes. Nothing uglier could be imagined. This ugliness sometimes even becomes indecency.<sup>110</sup>

For Coubertin, “No spectators remains the rule.”<sup>111</sup>

The issue of spectatorship played a key role in Coubertin’s strong opposition to women’s athleticism. While he believed that women were not physically cut out for such activities, he recognized that it was their right to decide whether to participate in sports. As long as women practiced them in private settings, without any spectators, they only risked their own health, which was their problem. In public, though, it became everyone’s business because it was detrimental to the spectators.

In 1934, Coubertin wrote an article in which he discussed the issue of spectatorship in detail. He explained that spectators attend an athletic competition for a specific reason: to watch sports.<sup>112</sup> Those spectators are contributing positively to the event. The minority of spectators who come for other reasons are corrupting the event. Because

<sup>108</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, “Chronicle du Mois,” *La Revue Olympique* (July, 1910): 109-110, in *The Evolution of Women’s Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 60-61.

<sup>109</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, “Les Sports de Neige: I. Luges, Tobogans, Bobsleighs,” *La Revue Olympique* (January, 1908): 9-14, in *The Evolution of Women’s Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 60-61.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, “La Bataille Continue,” *Bulletin N. 5 of the Bureau of Sports Pedagogy*, in *The Evolution of Women’s Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 80-81.

<sup>112</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, *Pédagogie Sportive* (Lausanne, Switzerland: Bureau International de Pédagogie Sportive, New Edition, 1934), 114-115, in *The Evolution of Women’s Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 84.

there are so few of them for men's competitions, they can be ignored; the true nature of the event still shines. The athletes and the majority of the spectators are therefore reaping the social and moral benefits that Olympism provides.

However, there is no reason for spectators to watch women's sports, especially compared with men's sports. The latter offers an athletic spectacle of a much better quality. Why then would people attend women's competitions? According to Coubertin, they did not attend for love of the sport:

Technically the female football players and boxers they have tried to exhibit here and there present no interest whatsoever; they will always be imperfect copies. There is nothing to learn from watching them; so those who assemble for this purpose must have other things in mind.<sup>113</sup>

For Coubertin, "other things" probably involved immoral thoughts. Since the great majority of spectators at women's events are present for improper and probably immoral reasons, the events are corrupted and no longer transmit the social and moral benefits of sport. For him, a co-ed Olympics is wrong because it would bring spectators to the stadiums for inappropriate wrong reasons. The key word to describe women's sport appears, at this point, to have been "spectacle." Since there was always an audience expected for men's competitions, because in that context it was beneficial to athletes and spectators alike, men and women should not compete in the same sport events and sully the high-mindedness of the audience. Coubertin made this point clear: "Add a female element, and the event becomes monstrous."<sup>114</sup>

Coubertin once contemplated the option of having a separate competition for women:

"If feminine sports are carefully kept distinct from the aspect of the spectacle, there will

<sup>113</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, *Pédagogie Sportive* (Lausanne, Switzerland: Bureau International de Pédagogie Sportive, New Edition, 1934), 114-115, in *The Evolution of Women's Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 84.

<sup>114</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, "L'Utilisation Pédagogique de l'Activité Sportive," *Le Sport Suisse* 1074 (November 21, 1928): 1 and *Le Sport Suisse* 1075 (November 28, 1928): 1, in *Pierre de Coubertin - Olympism*, Muller, 189.

be no reason to outlaw them.”<sup>115</sup> In another article, however, Coubertin dismissed this possibility:

In our view, this feminine semi-Olympiad is impractical, uninteresting, ungainly, and, I do not hesitate to add, improper. It is not in keeping with any concept of the Olympic Games, in which I believe that we have tried, and must continue to try, to put the following expression into practice: the solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism, based on internationalism, by means of fairness, in an artistic setting, with the applause of women as a reward.<sup>116</sup>

Coubertin never changed his mind concerning the inappropriateness of women in the Olympics. Throughout his life, he strenuously excluded women, relegating them to a secondary role both in life, as men’s companions, and in the Olympic Games, as spectators and admirers. In 1931, he published a book retracing his Olympic project and experiences.<sup>117</sup> Women were absent from that book. There was no mention of the admission of women to the Games or of their Olympic achievements.<sup>118</sup> The only time he referred to women was to praise a Swedish woman who had six sons who participated in the 1912 Olympic Games.

In 1931, Coubertin again addressed the women’s issue when he put together what he called “The Charter of Sport Reform.” He wrote an article entitled “The Struggle Continues,” with the avowed purpose of responding to “present-day evils.”<sup>119</sup> Among these, he cited “the irritating question of feminine athletics and their public exhibition.”

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<sup>115</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, *Pédagogie Sportive* (Lausanne, Switzerland: Bureau International de Pédagogie Sportive, New Edition, 1934), 114-115, in *The Evolution of Women’s Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 84.

<sup>116</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, “Les Femmes aux Jeux Olympiques,” *Revue Olympique* (July 1912): 109-111, in *Pierre de Coubertin - Olympism*, Muller, 711-713. The full article is reprinted as Appendix III.

<sup>117</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, *Mémoires Olympiques* (Lausanne, Switzerland: Bureau International de Pédagogie Sportive, 1931).

<sup>118</sup> Even though, by that time, some women had in fact participated.

<sup>119</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, “La Bataille Continue,” *Bulletin N. 5 of the Bureau of Sports Pedagogy*, in *The Evolution of Women’s Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 80-81.

Conforming to his beliefs, the Charter Coubertin put together recommended the “suppression of the admission of women to all competitions in which men take part.”<sup>120</sup> He made one important clarification: he was not advocating the total suppression of female competitions, but simply asking for them not to have anything to do with his Olympic Games. He found this approach beneficial for two reasons. First, it would not degrade the Olympics. Since having men and women compete in the same Olympics would be “promiscuous,” it was important “to put an end to the promiscuity because that promiscuity prevents sports pedagogy from exerting profitably its action not only on adolescence, but on adults as well; and we consider that both are dependent on it.”<sup>121</sup>

Second, having separate competitions would allow the public to decide if women should participate in athletic events or not: “Let [women] be organized freely according to the idea of those who take the responsibility for them and so far as they deem it desirable. The experience will bring public opinion to decide between adversaries and supporters.”<sup>122</sup>

As we have seen, Coubertin’s exclusion of women rested on intellectual, theoretical, social, and moral principles. The Olympic project was designed specifically to benefit men and, by extension, society. Women would dilute and detract from the positive effects of the project. Women were inherently unfit for competitive athletics, and belonged at home. And morally, the participation of women could have a corrupting effect on the Olympic spectators.

Finally, Coubertin also saw two practical problems concerning women’s Olympic participation. First, he explained that if women were to enter the Olympics in one sport,

<sup>120</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, “La Bataille Continue,” *Bulletin N. 5 of the Bureau of Sports Pedagogy*, in *The Evolution of Women’s Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 80-81.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.



it would then be difficult to decide in which sports women should compete and in which they should not. He wrote:

A door must be either open or closed. Can we allow women access to *all* Olympic events? No? Then why should some sports be open to them while the rest are not? Above all, what basis can one use to place the barrier between the events that are permitted, and those that are not?<sup>123</sup>

At that time, women had succeeded in participating in two Olympic competitions--tennis and swimming--thanks to some lenient local organizing committees, but Coubertin foresaw that women would soon ask for greater participation: “There are not just women tennis players and swimmers. There are women fencers, women riders, and, in America, women rowers.”<sup>124</sup> So what was the IOC going to do if women now also wanted to compete in fencing, riding, and rowing?

Coubertin was also thinking of the future. Women were then not practicing many sports. But what if, in the future, they began to practice all the sports men practiced? He argued,

In the future, perhaps will there be women runners or even women football players? Would such sports, played by women, constitute a sight to be recommended before the crowds that gather for an Olympiad? I do not think that any such claim can be made.<sup>125</sup>

The door for women to enter the Olympics should remain closed, he believed, or the situation could become unmanageable.

Coubertin saw a second practical problem with admitting women into the Games. He asked: “Would separate events be held for women, or would meets be held all together, without distinction as to sex, regardless of whether the competition is among individuals

<sup>123</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, “Les Femmes aux Jeux Olympiques,” *Revue Olympique* (July 1912): 109-111, in *Pierre de Coubertin - Olympism*, Muller, 711-713. The full article is reprinted as Appendix III.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

or teams?”<sup>126</sup> He then argued that since society was progressively moving toward equality between the sexes, surely it made sense to have men and women compete in the same races. This, however, was in itself problematic because it could only be done through coeducational clubs. As Coubertin noted, though, such clubs only existed in swimming and tennis. He further pointed out that even with the existence of coeducational clubs, such competitions would make no sense because women would never reach the second round: “Even with coed clubs, ninety-five times out of a hundred, elimination rounds favor the men.”<sup>127</sup>

For Coubertin, letting women compete when they had no chance of winning defeated the purpose of the Games. He therefore reminded everyone what the Games stood for: “Let us not forget that the Olympic Games are not parades of physical exercises, but aim to raise, or at least maintain, records. *Citius, altius, fortius*. Faster, higher, stronger. That is the motto of the International Committee, and the fundamental reason for the existence of any form of Olympism.”<sup>128</sup> It is interesting to note that where women were concerned, Coubertin wandered far from his original motto that “the important thing is to participate.” There was apparently no point in having women participate if they were not able to out-perform men, win competitions, and beat records.

Coubertin continued throughout his life to preach the proper role women should play in society, in sport, and especially, in his Olympic Movement. In the address he gave in 1935, summarizing the philosophic foundations of modern Olympism, Coubertin once more made his position on women participants clear: “At the Olympic Games their role

<sup>126</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, “Les Femmes aux Jeux Olympiques,” *Revue Olympique* (July 1912): 109-111, in *Pierre de Coubertin - Olympism*, Muller, 711-713. The full article is reprinted as Appendix III.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

should be above all to crown the victors, as was the case in the ancient tournaments.”<sup>129</sup>

If left to Coubertin, women’s role at the Olympics would still be to applaud male competitors.

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<sup>129</sup> Pierre De Coubertin, “Les Assises Philosophiques de l’Olympisme Modern,” *Le Sport Suisse* 31 (August 7, 1935): 1, in *Pierre de Coubertin - Olympism*, Muller, 583.

### **Chapter 3 – Women’s Entrance into Coubertin’s Olympics-- Obstacles to Public Acceptance of Women Athletes**

Coubertin was unambiguous: female athletes had no place in his Olympic project. Despite his opposition, though, women did officially enter some Olympic events starting in 1900, and increasingly participated in every Olympic edition during Coubertin’s life--three hundred and twenty-eight women took part in the Berlin Games organized in 1936, one year before Coubertin died of a heart attack.<sup>130</sup> Though women represented only a small number of athletes compared to the 3,630 men in the 1936 games, these numbers highlight the improvements made since 1896 concerning women’s participation in sport, and more specifically in the Olympics.<sup>131</sup> This chapter focuses on how women overcame the first two obstacles they encountered--nineteenth century gender roles and Coubertin’s position on female Olympians--and how they entered Coubertin’s male-only games. It then highlights some new obstacles sportswomen faced in the Olympic realm. Finally, it looks at the reasons why, despite these obstacles, female athletes in the 1920s and ‘30s still wanted to be part of Coubertin’s Olympics.

#### **Breaking into a guarded sports institution**

##### **The first women competitors**

Although in the first modern Olympiad, women were not allowed to participate, some women, despite Coubertin’s strong opposition, decided to try to enter the competition. Stamati Revithi, a Greek woman, wanted to run the marathon with men but her

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<sup>130</sup> Number provided by the Olympic Studies Center. Accessed January 12, 2011.  
[http://www.olympic.org/Documents/women\\_participation\\_figures\\_en.pdf](http://www.olympic.org/Documents/women_participation_figures_en.pdf)

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

registration was rejected. In response, she decided to run the marathon by herself the next day. She completed the same course as the men, but had to complete the final lap outside the stadium because she was refused entry. Officials recognized her achievement but could not remember her name, so they called her “Melpomene,” after the Greek muse of tragedy.

In 1900, women made their first official Olympic appearance: nineteen women competed in tennis and golf. They represented 1.6 percent of the participants. According to historians Margaret Costa and Paula Welch, women owed this progress to the IOC’s inability, at the time, to devise a structure that would have actually prevented women from participating: “In the primary stages of its development, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) lacked sufficient organizational skills and cohesive structure to control the program of the Games.”<sup>132</sup> In practice, the 1900 Paris and 1904 St. Louis committees ended up selecting, on their own, the events that would appear on the Olympic programs. Golf and lawn tennis, two socially acceptable events for women, made the cut in 1900, with the addition of archery as an exhibition sport in 1904. According to Costa and Welch, this feminine presence did not challenge contemporary gender roles because these women were from the upper class and were only practicing sports socially acceptable for them. They argue that the seven American women who participated in the 1900 Olympic Games “matched the profile of 19th-century scions of wealth. They belonged to social clubs; studied art, music, literature, and language; and, through their country club affiliations, entered sport from an acceptable realm.”<sup>133</sup> They then add that because the Exposition (world’s fair) took place concurrently with the Olympic Games, “The American women who participated were wealthy socialites who were drawn to Paris by

<sup>132</sup> Margaret D. Costa and Sharon R. Guthrie, eds., *Women and Sport: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 124.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

the Exposition, participating in a little tennis and golf during the Paris ‘season;’ they were not accorded team status, uniforms, fanfare, or recognition by the American Olympic Committee (AOC).”<sup>134</sup> The American women’s golf team was composed of five women who either lived in Europe or were there on extended vacation. According to Costa and Welch, then, the participation of women in the 1900 Olympics was more accidental than planned and did not represent any major advancement for women.

This interpretation was confirmed by the 1904 St. Louis Olympic Games, organized by the American Olympic Committee. James E. Sullivan, a close friend of Coubertin, led the AOC and strongly opposed the participation of women in the Olympic Games. He believed women should simply not be allowed to compete in any athletic event performed in the presence of men. As a result, there was no increase in the number of events offered for women in 1904, and the 1908 London committee agreed to stage only exhibition sports for women, including skating, tennis, archery, and gymnastics.

It was only in 1912, with the Swedish Olympic Committee, that women were admitted in swimming, a sport taken more seriously than lawn tennis or archery. As Costa and Welch point out, the IOC minutes contain only a passing comment on the subject: “The Swedes are opposed to specialization. They are feminists and women already admitted to the trials of lawn tennis and gymnastics will be without a doubt in the swimming championships.”<sup>135</sup> This openness on the part of the Swedish, however, was not necessarily reciprocated by other nations. In the U.S., for instance, Ida Schnall, who was playing baseball for the New York Female Giants, was not allowed to enter the swimming competition. Sullivan was behind this decision. His death in 1914 meant that American women had a greater chance to be allowed to compete in the Games. The fact

<sup>134</sup> Costa and Guthrie, eds., *Women and Sport: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 124.

<sup>135</sup> Minutes of the Annual Session of the IOC (1911): 10, in *Women and Sport: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Margaret D. Costa and Sharon R. Guthrie, eds. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 125.

that the host committees were given considerable leeway concerning the events that would be included in the Games helped women enter some of the competitions.

The increasing participation of female athletes, however, was also due to some sympathetic international federations, such as the Federation Internationale de Natation Amateur (the International Federation of Amateur Swimming). Costa and Welch argue that “the influence of the federations prevented the intervention of Coubertin and led to the official acceptance of women in the Olympic Games of 1924.”<sup>136</sup> The minutes of the annual IOC meetings reflected this new status: “Women are admitted in certain competitions in the Olympic Games. The program will include contests which they can dispute among themselves.”<sup>137</sup>

### **Alice Milliat and her Women’s Olympic Games**

Women also owed their increasing access to Olympic competitions to a bold French woman named Alice Milliat and to more favorable social norms. Milliat (1884-1957) headed several protests and consequent changes concerning women’s access to the Olympic Games. Very little biographical information remains about her, especially about her early life. From what we know, she was a translator who, on the side, practiced rowing. Like Coubertin, Milliat believed that sport could contribute to character building. In a 1927 article in the *Cahiers de la République des Lettres, des Sciences, et des Sports*, she explained that sport “develops personalities, gives confidence and courage, generates a resourceful spirit.”<sup>138</sup> Progressively, Milliat became a sports

<sup>136</sup> Costa and Guthrie, eds., *Women and Sport: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 126.

<sup>137</sup> Minutes of the Annual Session of the IOC (1923), in *Women and Sport: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Margaret D. Costa and Sharon R. Guthrie, eds. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994), 126.

<sup>138</sup> Alice Milliat, “Les Beaux Arts,” *Cahiers de la République des Lettres, des Sciences, et des Sports* 6 (May 1927) in “Alice Milliat and the Women’s Games,” Ghislaine Quintillan, *Olympic Review* (February-March 2000): 27.

administrator, first organizing the Parisian club “Fémina Sport” in 1912. Five years later, she founded, and then presided over, the Fédération des Sociétés Féminines de France (French Federation of Women’s Clubs).

Through that organization, Milliat lobbied the IOC and IAAF, asking them to officially include women in the 1920 track and field Olympic competitions. Women, by that time, had competed in several Olympics and in several sports, including tennis, golf, swimming, and gymnastics, but they had never been able to compete in track and field. There were two problems with women’s participation in track and field, the most popular Olympic sport. First, it involved strength, muscles, power, and speed. In other words, it was considered a very manly sport and definitely not suited for women. Second, track and field was mostly practiced by the lower classes, which automatically classified it as less appropriate than tennis and swimming, two sports requiring sufficient wealth to access courts and clubs. Female track and field athletes have, therefore, from the start met with more opposition than female swimmers and tennis players. The IOC and the IAAF refused to add track and field events for women in the Olympic program. Milliat consequently decided that women should have their own Olympics, where they would be free to compete in as many events as they chose.

The first Women’s Olympiad took place in Monaco in 1921. Five nations sent athletes: Great Britain, Switzerland, Italy, Norway, and France. That year, Milliat also set up the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (Women’s International Sport Federation, known as FSFI). She was able to achieve this because by then, several countries had declared themselves in favor of such an organization, including Great Britain, Italy, Czechoslovakia, the U.S., and France.

In 1922, Milliat organized the second Women’s Olympic Games, this time in Paris. Eleven events were on the program. An estimated 20,000 people came to applaud these



female competitors from Britain, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, America, and France. The event forced the IOC to discuss the issue of women's participation. During a meeting of the Executive Commission held in Lausanne in October 1923, the IOC members addressed the topic. It was listed in fourteenth position on the agenda. Unlike other points on the agenda, for which details of the debates were provided, only one line was written concerning the women's issue: "Feminine question: that they do whatever they want, as long as it is not in public."<sup>139</sup> This issue was again discussed at the IOC's 1924 meeting. The committee decided not to increase women's participation, arguing that the Olympic program was already full enough and that adding more events would make the Games too difficult to organize. Count Clary of France entered the following motion: "Faced with the universally well-known necessity of shortening the Olympic program and without wanting to touch here on the principles even, the IOC has decided concerning the participation of women in the Olympic Games, to simply maintain the status quo."<sup>140</sup>

In 1926, Milliat held another Women's Olympic Games, this time in Gothenburg, Sweden. Women from ten nations competed. For these Games, Milliat organized a spectacular opening ceremony and made sure that the Swedish royal family attended. The Women's Olympics were clearly becoming increasingly prestigious, as Milliat pointed out: "People are interested in the Women's Olympic Games; during the last games in Gothenburg, all foreign diplomats spent a night travelling from Stockholm to watch the athletic events. Is that not proof itself?"<sup>141</sup> The FSFI was becoming a strong and independent organization. This growing popularity challenged the IAAF, which

<sup>139</sup> Procès Verbal de la Commission Exécutive du IOC, Lausanne (October 13-15,1923): 4. Translation: "question feminine: qu'elles fassent ce qu'elles veulent, mais pas en public."

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in *A Travers les Anne aux Olympiques*, Otto Mayer (Geneva, Switzerland: Cailler, 1960), 109.

<sup>141</sup> Alice Milliat, "Les Beaux Arts," *Cahiers de la République des Lettres, des Sciences, et des Sports* 6 (May 1927), in "Alice Milliat and the Women's Games," Quintillan, 28.

wanted to control women's athletics. It also challenged the IOC. Both events used the same name--Olympic Games--which made it easy for people to associate or compare them. This infuriated IOC members, who insisted that only Coubertin's Olympic Games was legitimate. This was discussed during an IOC executive meeting in November 1925: "The Commission expressed concerns about the title 'Olympic' that this organization of this Games appropriated itself and will take measures asking the FSFI's help so that this title, which belongs to the IOC, be exclusively reserved to the Games organized by the IOC every first year of each Olympiad."<sup>142</sup>

Milliat succeeded in forcing the IOC and the IAAF to take women's athletics seriously. After meeting and negotiating, Milliat, the IAAF, and the IOC came to an agreement. Milliat changed the name of the FSFI's event from the Women's Olympics to the Women's World Games. In return, the IOC added ten track and field events for women on the 1928 Olympic program. It is interesting to note that the IAAF, the IOC, and Milliat reached this agreement in 1926, a year after Coubertin, who the strongest voice against female participation in the Olympics, retired from the IOC presidency.

Even with Coubertin removed from the IOC's command, obstacles remained. First, Coubertin's philosophy and influence continued to be the guiding force behind the Games. Second, even if other IOC members and presidents were not as staunchly opposed to women's Olympic participation, it did not mean that they were going to do anything to facilitate or encourage their participation. In fact, the IAAF and IOC did not follow through on their agreement to add ten women's track and field events to the 1928 Olympic Games. Only five events were added: the 100 meters, 800 meters, high jump,

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<sup>142</sup> Procès Verbal de la Commission Exécutive du IOC, Paris (November 3-6, 1925): 7-8 - Original: "La C.E. s'est ensuite occupée des Jeux Féminins qui doivent avoir lieu a Bruxelles en 1926. Elle s'est émue de l'appellation 'Olympique' que s'est appropriée l'organisation de ces Jeux et fera des démarches auprès des FSFI afin d'obtenir leur aide pour que ce titre, qui est la propriété du CIO, soit uniquement réservé aux Jeux organisés par lui la 1<sup>ère</sup> année de chaque Olympiade."

discus, and 4x100 meters. Though disappointed, most of the FSFI athletes took that five-event opportunity. It is interesting to note, in passing, that the British Women's Athletics Association refused to send its female athletes, arguing that fewer than the ten events promised was not acceptable. Their abstention represents the only women's boycott in Olympic history.

### **The 1928 women's 800-meter race**

The 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games played a significant role in the future of women in the Games. Several women showed signs of fatigue at the end of the 800-meter race. Newspaper reports were full of stories about women exhausted or fainting at the end of a race they were not physically fit to run. *The London Times*, for one, questioned whether such a strenuous race should exist for women. It then described the end of that race as proof that it might be too dangerous: "The half dozen prostrate and obviously distressed forms lying in the grass at the side of the track after the race may not warrant a complete condemnation of the girl athletic championships, but it certainly suggests unpleasant possibilities."<sup>143</sup> *The New York Times* article echoed similar concerns. First, it cited the incident, arguing that "even this distance makes too great a call on feminine strength."<sup>144</sup> It then described what happened at the end of that race:

At the finish 6 out of the 9 runners were completely exhausted and fell head long on the ground. Several had to be carried off the track. The little American girl, Miss Florence MacDonald, who made a gallant try but was outclassed, was in a half faint for several minutes, while even the sturdy Miss Hitomi of Japan, who finished second, needed attention before she was able to leave the field.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>143</sup> "The Olympic Games," *The London Times* (August 3, 1928): 6.

<sup>144</sup> "Americans Beaten in 4 Olympic Tests," *The New York Times* (August 3, 1928).

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

It is interesting to note that both articles refer to the female competitors not as “women,” but as “girls.” In articles about the male 800-meter race, though, athletes are not referred to as “boys,” but as “men.” This journalistic manipulation reinforced the inferiority of women’s events to those for men. Portraying women as little girls diminished the seriousness of their events and accomplishments. Another article emphasized the treatment female track and field athletes received:

In expressing the opinion here, that the participation of women in the Games is out of place, no criticism of women participants is intended, for they all behaved admirably. There are situations, however, in which women simply do not fit, aside from the fact that there are events that are definitively disastrous for women.<sup>146</sup>

*The Chicago Herald-Tribune* expressed similar thoughts: “I have in front of me the picture of the half-mile for women in the Olympic Games at Amsterdam and of the eight girls who finished six of them fainted, exhausted--a pitiful spectacle and a reproach to anyone who had anything to do with putting on a race of this kind.”<sup>147</sup>

The gendered treatment female track and field athletes received in 1928 is evident when compared to the treatment two male competitors received after a similar incident in 1904. These two men also seemed exhausted after their 800-meter race. Still, the newspaper articles described the scene in very different terms than when women were concerned. *The St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, for instance, reported:

Thursday afternoon at the finish of the 800 meter run, two men fell to the track completely exhausted. One man was carried to his training quarters helpless. Another was laid out upon the grass and stimulants used to bring him back to life. All that the officials said was that the race was a good one; ‘that Breitkreuz was game;’ that Range ran a good race; yet no one

<sup>146</sup> Carl Schrader, “Nations at Play,” *The Playground* XXII (March 1929): 675.

<sup>147</sup> *The Chicago Herald-Tribune* (July 17, 1930).

condemned the race as being a detriment to the good of mankind, to the welfare of the runners.<sup>148</sup>

Apparently, no one--athletes, officials, spectators, media--saw any problem with some male athletes being exhausted and needing medical help after competing in the 800-meter race. This, apparently, was just part of the sport. More specifically, the coverage stressed that these male competitors admirably gave their best--women athletes experiencing the same thing, however, were portrayed as unfit and competing inappropriately.

Not all observers viewed the women's event as dilatory, however. This is evident from Dr. Fr. M. Messerli's 1952 report on "Women's Participation to the Modern Olympic Games." Dr. Messerli was a member of a commission launched by the IAAF to study the question of women's participation. As such, he attended the race, unlike some journalists or IOC members who commented on the alleged disaster but were actually not present. He then wrote:

22 women representing 14 countries took part in the 800m flat. The majority showed an excellent racing technique, the American, Canadian, German and one Japanese competitor appeared to us as particularly well trained. One amusing little incident occurred at the Finals of the 800m flat, when reaching the winning post, two Canadians and one Japanese competitor collapsed on the lawn, the public and the journalists believed them to be in a state of exhaustion. I was judging this particular event and on the spot at the time, I can therefore certify that there was nothing wrong with them, they burst into tears thus betraying their disappointment at having lost the race, a very feminine trait!<sup>149</sup>

Anne Vrana O'Brien was part of the U.S. track and field team during the 1928 and 1936 Olympic Games. In Amsterdam, she did not participate in the 800-meter race; her

<sup>148</sup> "Olympic Games Officials Condemn Marathon Race," *St Louis Globe-Democrat* (September 4, 1904) – from newspaper clippings: Games of the III Olympiad located in the Olympic House in New York City - reprinted in *The Evolution of Women's Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Mary Henson Leigh (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1974), 333.

<sup>149</sup> Dr. Fr. M. Masserli, "Women's Participation to the Modern Olympic Games" (Lausanne, Switzerland: IOC, 1952): 10-11.

event was the 100 meters. She did, however, attend the 800-meters. In 1987, she talked about what happened and how damaging it was for women's sport:

I understand that they felt that this was too long a race and that some athletes were collapsing. Well, they were tired. They had run 800 meters and it was a long distance, and of course, they were winded. But they certainly weren't collapsing all over the track the way they described it. I was there and I saw it. They needed some rest but they certainly weren't in terrible shape. It's just too bad that that impression has been allowed to grow because it kept women's track from getting into the distances for many, many years. Even the 200 meters wasn't allowed for a long time. It's a shame that this legend was allowed to grow the way it was. I was there and they were winded, I'll guarantee you that, but I have seen men that were winded at the end of a 220 just as badly.<sup>150</sup>

Ada Sackett Taylor, a member of the National Swimming Committee and chaperone of the Olympic swim team in 1928, also attended the women's 800-meter race. She also testified that nothing alarming took place during that race: "Some in authority believed that the young woman collapsed because of nervousness and because the tenseness of her task was relieved, and not because of physical exhaustion. She was herself almost immediately and did not display any ill after-effects."<sup>151</sup>

Another article, this one focusing on the women's track and field events in general, highlighted the good performances of female athletes: "All students of athletics who followed the women's competition could not help but be impressed by the excellent performances. The style employed by the women in all of their events was identical to that used by men."<sup>152</sup> It is interesting to note the words Mr. Shroeder chose. He did not compare male and female athletes in terms of race times. Many journalists, sports educators, and sports organizers relegated women's events to an inferior status because their results were not as good as men's. Shroeder adopted a different perspective: he did

<sup>150</sup> Anne Vrana O'Brien, oral history by George A. Hodak (October 1987): 9.

<sup>151</sup> Taylor, Ada Sackett, "Women in Athletics," *Amateur Athletic Union Bulletin* IV (August, 1929): 6.

<sup>152</sup> Shroeder, Louis, "Amsterdam Olympic Games," *American Physical Education Review* (November, 1928): 609.

not focus on times but on technique, thus pointing out that in terms of technical ability, women were as talented as men. Shroeder, however, represented the minority.

Many IOC members, sports educators, and journalists exaggerated that incident to maintain and reinforce male athletes' superiority. And in a way, they succeeded. First of all, the women's 800-meter race was immediately taken off the Olympic program on the grounds that it was too strenuous an event for women. It was not reinstated until 1960 and even then, several IOC members and journalists still referred to the 1928 incident to oppose putting it back on the program. *The New York Times*, for example, stated: "When this race was tried at Amsterdam in 1928, the gals dropped in swooning heaps as if riddled by machine-gun fire. This year the event was restored. Why?"<sup>153</sup>

Second, two years after the incident, in 1930, Count Henri de Baillet-Latour, who succeeded Coubertin as IOC president, used that same 800-meter race to suggest, during the Berlin Olympic Congress, that women should only be allowed to compete in what he called "aesthetic events"--those highlighting women's more feminine attributes, such as gymnastics, swimming, tennis, and skating. A loud group of sports educators went even further, arguing that, once again, all women's events should be eliminated from the Olympic program. They advocated, for the 1932 Los Angeles Games, a return to Coubertin's male-only Games. After many discussions and arguments, the IOC decided not to eliminate all women's events from the Olympic program. As the minutes of the IOC meeting attest, Count Clary, Marquis of Polignac, Dr. Karl Ritter Von Halt, De Matheu, Count Baillet-Latour, Count de Rosen, S.E. Dr. Lewald, and General Sherill discussed the issue of women's Olympic participation.<sup>154</sup> However, the debate was not recorded. The only information appearing on the official record was the voting results.

<sup>153</sup> *The New York Times* (May 7, 1964): 20, in *The American Woman in Sport*, Gerber, Felshin, and al, 142.

<sup>154</sup> Procès Verbal du IOC (Barcelona: April 25, 1931). My translation.

After discussion, women's participation in 1932 was unanimously accepted in skating, gymnastics, and swimming. Other sports also made it into the Olympic program, but were more contested. Track and field, for instance, obtained sixteen votes for and three votes against, while fencing obtained seventeen votes for and two votes against.

### **Obstacles to public acceptance of female Olympians**

#### **The requirement of feminine appearance**

The debates surrounding the 1928 women's 800-meter race, the issue of women's Olympic participation, and the appropriate events women should enter if allowed to compete in the Games remained omnipresent on the IOC agenda for several more decades. Journalists perpetuated the debate, writing about women's athletic performances, but especially about women's appearance and behavior. Commenting on the 1932 Olympics, for instance, journalist Dick Hyland, a former All-American football player at Stanford University in the 1920s, wrote: "Lots of folks laugh at lady athletes. I have seen seventy thousand people gaze tolerantly at the cinder track down which six girls scrambled during the Olympic Games in Los Angeles--seen them gaze and then break into a laugh at the girls' comical antics." It is interesting to compare this statement referring to women's track and field events with the one Hyland made concerning a women's diving event: "But at these same Games, I watched a packed aquatic stadium marvel at the beauty and grace, courage and ability of a dozen girls who soared through the air in fancy and high-diving contests."<sup>155</sup>

A similar newspaper article, focusing on outstanding track and field athlete Helen Stephens, highlights the distaste for women in track and field. After her shining

<sup>155</sup> Dick Hyland, "Are Women Champions," *Good Housekeeping* XCVIII (May, 1934): 38, in *The Evolution of Women's Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 349.



performance in the 1936 Olympics, the British Olympic Report stated: “Miss Stephens’ style was certainly not attractive, judged from the point of the charm of Jesse Owens. She possessed a phenomenal stride and the power of a quarter-miler. From the aesthetic point of view the palm should be awarded to Miss Dollinger, who finished fourth.”<sup>156</sup> More importantly than being good athletes, in journalistic opinion, women needed to look feminine.

The physical appearance of Stanislava Walaciewicz, a Polish runner who later became an American citizen and took the name of Stella Walsh, was the source of many discussions. Commenting on her performances, Gaston Meyer, French editor of the daily *L’Equipe*, wrote: “This large brunette, of whom it is said that she shaves every day, ran the 100 meters in 11.9 in winning the Olympic Games of 1932 at Los Angeles.”<sup>157</sup> Because Walsh’s appearance was not classically feminine and because she excelled at a “manly” sport, she was not considered a “normal” woman and her sexuality was questioned. This was the fate reserved for many athletes who competed in track and field and many who did not appear feminine enough to male journalists or IOC members. Women’s Olympic events, as a result, were threatened with elimination on several occasions.

Consequently, even after more women’s events were finally added in 1928, Alice Milliat continued to work and lobby for women’s athletic rights. Believing that the five events added in 1928 were not enough, and to pressure the IAAF and the IOC to add even more events, Milliat decided to continue organizing what was now called the Women’s World Games. Two more World Games took place. One, which included sixteen

<sup>156</sup> The British Olympic Report, Berlin (1936): 92. - in *The Evolution of Women’s Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson, Leigh, 397-398.

<sup>157</sup> Gaston Meyer, *Athletisme* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1966), 226, in *The Evolution of Women’s Participation in the Summer Olympic Games 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 418.

nations, was organized in Prague in 1930. The next was held in London in 1934. In 1935, Milliat asked the IOC to provide a full women's Olympic program and equal representation for women in the IOC. She argued that if the IOC refused, the FSFI would again organize a separate Olympic Games for women. By that time, however, her leverage was decreasing. The world-wide economic depression and the rise of fascism in Europe had already begun to weaken the women's sports movement. This led to the IAAF taking control of women's athletics. As a result, Milliat was unable to obtain what she asked for. The IOC did vaguely agree to add several events for women, but not to allow full equality. Without control of women's athletics and without much bargaining power with the IAAF and the IOC, the FSFI disintegrated and finally closed down in 1938, one year after Coubertin's death.

Despite this setback, it is clear that by then, women had already achieved some significant progress. As explained previously, this evolution was, in part, due to some sympathetic Olympic organizing committees and international federations, and to certain individuals, such as "Melpomene" and Alice Milliat, who challenged the accepted gender structure, believing that women should have access to sport competitions. This evolution was also partly the result of changes in the way society viewed women, their physical abilities, and their roles in life. In the United States, for instance, women had been excluded from the sport arena throughout most of the nineteenth century and men had no problem using medical claims to justify this exclusion. But starting in the 1890s, social reformers began to challenge women's "sick creature" stereotype. At the same time, women progressively reentered the medical profession, enabling them to voice their own medical conclusions about the female body. Even though the image of women started to be redefined by the turn of the century, it was only in the 1920s, following the social reform movement, progressivism, World War I, the 1920 constitutional amendment

giving women the right to vote, and a rejection of Victorian values and culture by young people, that the “new” American woman fully came into being. The “flapper” embraced short skirts, cigarettes, automobiles, dancing, speakeasies, and the belief in fun and freedom.

Sport mirrors society; the 1920s exemplify this perfectly. For women, the flapper era represented a decade of social, cultural, and sexual liberation; for sportswomen, it also represented a golden age, since an increasing number of women entered the sporting world, though not without debates and resistance. The flapper era and changes in medical discourse made this progress possible. By that time, doctors were advocating exercises for women to improve their health. As Patricia Vertinski stresses, however, doctors’ key word was “moderation.” “While vigorous activity was frowned upon and periods of rest strongly encouraged, regulated healthy exercise was definitely indicated. Caution was the watchword, however, since muscular exercise was assumed to expend energy required for developing complete womanhood.”<sup>158</sup> Talking about her Olympic experience more than seventy years later, Aileen Riggan remembered how hard it was for her to convince the U.S. Olympic Committee to let her compete in the diving event during the 1920 Antwerp Olympics. She explained that the committee was opposed to women participating in the Games and that once this was resolved, the fact that she was fourteen years old became an issue:

Finally, the committee said they would accept a few women swimmers. Of course, they were thinking of somebody about thirty years old, I guess. They finally said, “We agreed to take women, which was against our principles. We just didn’t think women should be competing in such a strenuous sport, but we are not going to be responsible for taking two children to Europe.”<sup>159</sup>

<sup>158</sup> Vertinski, *The Eternally Wounded Woman*, 53.

<sup>159</sup> Aileen Riggan, oral history by Dr. Margaret Costa (November 11, 1994): 18.

It was only because her manager protested against this decision and offered to be personally responsible for her that the committee finally agreed to take her to the Olympics. In the end, this fourteen-year-old traveled on a ship transporting an overwhelmingly male crowd for more than a week, competed in the Olympic Games, and won the gold medal in the springboard event. This was the kind of obstacle women who wanted compete in the Olympics faced under Coubertin's leadership.

Women of this period were supposed to practice sports to the extent that they improved their physical appearance. As historian Donald Mrozek explains, "restraint in the pursuit of their sport was taken as a way of ensuring the social benefits of femininity."<sup>160</sup> The assumed impact of sport on females' bodies, then, is what distinguished acceptable sports from non-acceptable sports. In a 1936 *Vogue* article, "Women in Sports Should Look Beautiful," Paul Gallico opined that out of the twenty-five sports in which women publicly took part, he thought only eight of them were acceptable for women. His main criterion was physical appearance: "Definitely interdicted, and never again to be performed before my eyes, is any sport in which women stick out places when they play, wear funny clothes, get out of breath, or perspire. It's a lady's business to look beautiful, and there are hardly any sports in which she seems able to do it."<sup>161</sup> Gallico reiterated his point: "Ladies have no business playing squash, or any of its derivatives. They can't take it, or rather, they can't take it gracefully."<sup>162</sup> He then detailed women's physiological characteristics and why, because

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<sup>160</sup> Donald Mrozek, *Sport and American Mentality, 1880-1910* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 142. Chapter 5, "From 'Swooning Damsel' to Sportswoman – The Role of Women as a Constituency in Sport," portrays efficiently the way sportswomen were perceived late in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. It especially covers issues of femininity, biological functions, and regeneration of the nation.

<sup>161</sup> Paul Gallico, "Women in Sports Should Look Beautiful," *Vogue* (June 15, 1936).

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

of them, certain sports were simply not appropriate. Concerning track and field, for example, Gallico explained:

The upper part of their legs go in at the wrong places; they carry too much weight from the waist up unless they are built like boys (in which case it doesn't count because then they are not ladies); and finally they ought to get a look at their faces as they break the tape at the finish of the 100-yard dash, twisted and contorted and pitted with the gray lines of exhaustion.<sup>163</sup>

It is interesting to note that he thought any hint of a masculine look disqualified a woman from being a lady. Gallico's definition of a "lady" was very narrow. He did not take into account the fact that a track and field athlete could be "lady-like" off the track or define herself as a lady. For him, as for others of his generation, physical appearance was the defining factor. Not surprisingly, Gallico advocated swimming for women: "It is graceful and full of rhythm, and the girls swim, face up, their features wreathed and softened by the white foam they churn up in the green waters."<sup>164</sup> He also encouraged women to practice speed and figure skating,

especially the latter, which is the female figure in the dance, but freed by the steel blades from the ordinary pull of gravity and lethargy of friction. An entire arena is her dance floor, and there is no costume lovelier or more graceful than the figure-skating dress with its short flared skirt, and the jaunty caps to match.<sup>165</sup>

Gallico concluded that figure skating was simply "what little girls were made for."<sup>166</sup>

The social beliefs of the times concerning women and athleticism, reflected in Gallico's article, represented a major obstacle for female athletes, depriving them of the freedom to choose which sports they wanted to engage in.

Sports magazines of the time highlight this gendered approach. In 1925, *Physical Culture* magazine offered the following covers:

<sup>163</sup> Paul Gallico, "Women in Sports Should Look Beautiful," *Vogue* (June 15, 1936).

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

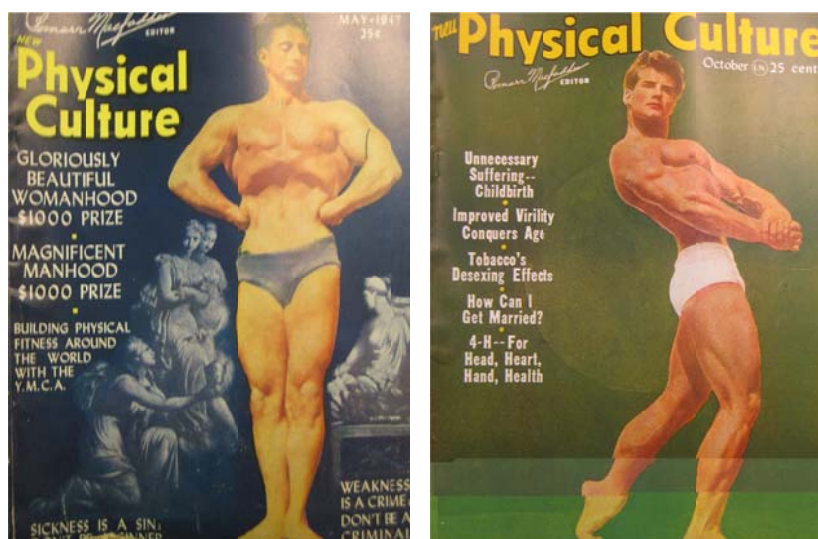


*Physical Culture* magazine covers from February to July 1925

The sort of sports deemed appropriate for women is clear in these covers. There is no illustration, for example, of women playing team or contact sports. In an article focusing on femininity and sport, Harris mentioned the risk female athletes took when entering the sports world: “When a female chooses to participate in vigorous competitive activity, she may be risking a great deal. She is laying on the line everything she may represent as a female in much the same way as the girl who first appeared in public wearing pants.”<sup>167</sup> This explains why all the covers depict a woman gracefully practicing an individual

<sup>167</sup> Harris, “Femininity of the Line,” *Psychology Today* (August, 1979): 30.

sport. The clothing also reflects the requirement for women athletes to look feminine.<sup>168</sup> In contrast, as the following covers highlight, for men, muscle and strength were assets.<sup>169</sup>



*Physical Culture* magazine covers from May and October 1947

It is interesting to note what is stated at the bottom of one of these covers: “Weakness is a crime. Don’t be a criminal.” It is clear that both men and women could practice sport, but not the same sports, not at the same intensity, and definitely not for the same reasons.<sup>170</sup>

The focus on “soft” exercises for women, as opposed to vigorous training for men, resulted in gendered athletic activities. Ideas put forth by reformers such as Catharine Esther Beecher reflect this gender-based approach. Even though she was especially vocal during the nineteenth century and actually died in 1878, her educational vision and

<sup>168</sup> *Physical Culture* (February 1925, March 1925, April 1925, May 1925, June 1925, July 1925).

<sup>169</sup> *Physical Culture* (May 1947, October 1947). John F. Kasson, in *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*, offers a very interesting interpretation of Houdini’s career. He argues that his magical acts have been studied in depth. What has been overlooked, however, is the importance of the naked masculine body he displayed at a time when physical fitness had become crucial for men.

<sup>170</sup> Mrozek, *Sport and American Mentality*, Chapter 7, “Toward a New Image of the Body – Champions of Movement and Action,” relates well the importance for men of looking physically fit late in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

especially the role of physical education in that vision is enriching because it highlights efficiently the important role gender was playing when developing new social recommendations and programs. Beecher's ideas represent an enriching example not only for the nineteenth century but all the way up to the 1920s.

Beecher feared Americans' physical and moral deterioration, advocated physical activities as a remedy, and respected the firmly entrenched sex segregation. Beecher, for instance, conducted a survey to check females' physical fitness. "Out of 450 women whom Catharine Beecher surveyed personally, she was only able to classify 24% as being strong, while labeling 42% delicate or diseased and 34% habitual invalids."<sup>171</sup> To help women become physically healthier, Beecher promoted a concept of womanhood centered on the "cult of domesticity" and the "cult of true womanhood."

Historian Linda Borish explains that "a 'true' woman, according to Beecher, one possessing the virtues of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness, needed robust health. To perform her roles of mother, wife, moral guardian, healthkeeper and housekeeper, a true woman required physical and moral energy."<sup>172</sup> Borish then highlights how important it was for women to maintain that physical fitness:

Preserving the physical fitness of the mother also went hand in hand with the social health of America. Future mothers, as well as fathers, depended on mothers for acquiring physical energy and moral character [....] In sum, lack of stamina contributed to personal, familial and national breakdown in Beecher's domestic ideology.<sup>173</sup>

Beecher advocated household tasks--sweeping, dusting, doing laundry--as respectable and healthy physical activities for women. In addition to house chores, Beecher also

<sup>171</sup> Patricia Vertinsky, "Sexual Equality and the Legacy of Catharine Beecher," *Journal of Sport History* 6 (Spring, 1979): 39-40.

<sup>172</sup> Borish, "The Robust Woman and the Muscular Christian," 142.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.



encouraged the practice of calisthenics and gymnastics: “These included ‘Exercises for the Chest and Lungs,’ ‘Exercises to Perfect the Muscles of the Arms and Hands,’ ‘Exercises for the Muscles of the Trunk,’ ‘Exercises for the Calisthenics Hall.’ ‘Walking, Skipping, Exercises with Weights.’”<sup>174</sup> Beecher’s calisthenics program was definitely gender-based. It excluded strenuous activities suited only for the “stronger” sex. In her program, Beecher “chose to reassert female influence in North America on the basis of their difference from men rather than on the grounds of their human equality with men.”<sup>175</sup>

Beecher was not the only one advocating such activities for women. Dr. M.A. Ribble, for example, who contributed several pieces to *Physical Culture* magazine, wrote in 1915: “Did it ever occur to you that you could use your monotonous routine of household duties as a means of physical culture, or that by becoming acquainted with the important groups of muscles in your own body you could use them to strengthen and beautify yourself?”<sup>176</sup> Beecher and Ribble contended that exercising while accomplishing household chores fulfilled three female duties: taking care of the home, looking ladylike and attractive for one’s husband, and maintaining one’s health. Several social reformers and doctors also advocated exercises for women as long as they fit, or because they fit, their social roles.

Many newspaper articles of the time reflected this view of gender roles. In an article entitled “Are Sports Harmful to Girls?” women are said to have specific roles in society,

<sup>174</sup> Catharine Esther Beecher, *Calisthenic Exercises, for School, Families, and Health Establishments* (New York, NY: 1856) VII, in “The Robust Woman and the Muscular Christian,” Borish, 144.

<sup>175</sup> Vertinsky, “Sexual Equality and the Legacy of Catharine Beecher,” 43.

<sup>176</sup> M.A. Ribble, “Get Acquainted With Your Muscles - How Women Can Avoid Fatigue,” *Physical Culture* (June 1925): 64.

and their sporting practices need to be based on these roles. Talking about how much women should participate in athletics, the writer explains:

We are interested not in the few athletic girls who may make a veritable career of their sports, but, instead, in the great hosts of girls who are to become home makers and the mothers of the next generation. Our problem, specifically is to determine whether unrestricted participation in any and all sports is good for the present and future welfare and health of these future builders of our country.<sup>177</sup>

Women's role was to manage their homes and raise good citizens. Men, on the other hand, were encouraged to practice sport strenuously because it would help them become strong citizens.

This gendered approach to sport prevailed in collegiate programs as well. Once more, "physiological differences between males and females have been constructed as 'natural' by sports institution--schools, families, and the mass media--and used to sanction sex-specific activities, such as ice hockey for males and figure skating for females."<sup>178</sup>

Schools therefore advocated competitive sports, such as football and basketball, for male students, while only promoting exercises for female students. The key words were "competition" for men and "participation" for women. In "The New Sportswoman," Elizabeth Halsey emphasized this:

A good player gives every ounce of available power to her team. She develops pluck, a joy in overcoming obstacles, strength, self-control, and staying power in match games. These are all desirable qualities. But to ask these qualities of the average high school girl in the midst of the frenzied mob scenes that usually attend interscholastic basketball games is to ask the impossible. She gets, instead, an hysterical fighting spirit, runs herself ragged, and too often comes out at the end of the season with a damaged heart and other disabilities.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>177</sup> "Are Sports Harmful to Girls," no source (no date but in the 1930s) Box 293, Clipping U.S., Women in Athletics, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois.

<sup>178</sup> Gina Daddario, *Women's Sport and Spectacle: Gendered Television Coverage and the Olympic Games* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 3.

<sup>179</sup> Elizabeth Halsey, "The New Sportswoman," *Hygeia* 5 (1927).

Gymnastics or calisthenics were therefore the first collegiate sports developed for women. Despite Halsey's objections, basketball was also popular among female students. To make it respectable for them, however, several rules reducing the competitive aspect of the game were implemented. The court was divided into three sections, with players restricted to one section, thus ensuring that they would not sprint up and down the whole court. Other adjustments to the game included allowing only one dribble after receiving the ball, prohibiting any physical contact or effort to hinder the shooter, having six players instead of five, and closing the nets so that after each basket, the game was stopped so the players could take a break.<sup>180</sup>

Before the 1890s, men had claimed that athleticism endangered women's reproductive capacities. Using a supposedly medical justification, male critics adopted a more sexualized argument: if women practiced competitive sports, they would become physically and morally mannish. Many women believed them. During an interview conducted twelve years after ending her successful swimming career to get married, Mrs. H.E. Schoenhut, formerly Olga Dormer, reached the same conclusion. When asked if sport was for girls, she answered:

I believe in sports and plenty of participation in them for all girls, but I do believe there is a limit on the kind of sports in which girls and women should indulge. Swimming, of course, cannot be excelled, and most other lines of athletics are all right, but it is my belief that strenuous competition in purely masculine sports, particularly track and field events, is not good for members of my sex.<sup>181</sup>

Like many people of the time, she based her judgment on the impact of sports on women's appearance:

<sup>180</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 87.

<sup>181</sup> "Are Sports Harmful to Girls," no source (no date but in the 1930s) Box 293, Clipping U.S., Women in Athletics, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois.

Running in particular, either sprinting or distance, quickly destroys the feminine musculature and develops a condition of the muscles similar to that of a male runner of like experience. Again, particularly if one thinks of the future, the strain of such physical exertion writes its story on the face of the athlete, and that is the only face one has, you know, to carry through the rest of life.<sup>182</sup>

It is evident that the problem rested mostly with sports involving competition and strength. In *Out of Bounds*, Lenskyj explains that women's participation in sports defined as "masculine" blurred the boundary between femininity and masculinity. The implicit threat to male athletic domination became more explicit in the mid-1920s, when two female athletes performed better than men in their respective sports. In 1924, a twenty-year-old Chicago woman broke the world record--the men's record--in the backstroke. Then, in 1926, New Yorker Gertrude Ederle became the sixth person to swim the English Channel, doing so two hours faster than the five men who preceded her. Women's athletic involvement threatened to equalize sex roles and definitions. Consequently, sportswomen who did not conform to the medical, heterosexual, and social conventions were characterized as unfeminine tomboys or lesbians. This was one of the major obstacles women faced.

### **Mildred Didrikson's career**

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<sup>182</sup> "Are Sports Harmful to Girls," no source (no date but in the 1930s) Box 293, Clipping U.S., Women in Athletics, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois.

As historian Linda Borish states, the career of Mildred Ella “Babe” Didrikson “presents a compelling image for cultural and historical studies.”<sup>183</sup> Among others, it illustrates effectively how Americans perceived female athletes during the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties. The issue of social perception is significant because it impacted drastically the way sportswomen felt about their athletic experiences and achievements. In fact, it even at times impacted how they behaved. Born in 1911, Didrikson was of Norwegian origin. There, her mother had excelled at skiing and skating before moving to Beaumont, Texas. While growing up, times were often difficult for the large Didrikson family--so difficult that Mildred often held part-time jobs to help her family. Her father was a strong believer in the need for physical fitness. His seven children were therefore encouraged to practice sports early on. Growing up with several brothers, Didrikson, then nicknamed “Baby,” quickly developed a strong attraction to sport, competition, and what were seen as boys’ games. She began competing in baseball. In one game, she hit five home runs. After that, people started calling her “Babe,” referring to the baseball star Babe Ruth. That nickname stuck with her the rest of her life. By fifteen, she was playing on the basketball team of her high school. Her level of play quickly attracted attention. Melvin J. McCombs, coach of the Golden Cyclones, one of the best women’s teams in the nation, recruited her. She quickly became the star player of that team, which went on to win three national championships.

After basketball, Didrikson turned to track and field. In 1931, she competed in seventeen events at the National Women’s Amateur Athletic Union’s meet (NWA AU). She won first place in eight events and second place in nine. In 1932, she competed again in this national meet and performed even better. She presented herself as a one-

<sup>183</sup> Borish, “Women at the Modern Olympic Games: An Interdisciplinary Look at American Culture,” 48.

woman team and captured the national championship, accumulating far more points individually than any other team. The Illinois Women's Athletic Club, which entered a team of twenty-two women, finished second with twenty-two points.

That same year, Didrikson also competed in the Los Angeles Olympic Games. At the time, women's participation was limited; they could only enter three events. Didrikson excelled in all three. She won gold medals and broke the women's world record in javelin and in the 80-meter hurdles. In the high jump competition, she tied for first place with American Jean Shiley. The judges objected to Didrikson's jumping style, diving head and shoulders first over the bar. They consequently decided to award the gold medal to Shiley and the silver to Didrikson. Nonetheless, with such successes, it was no surprise that the Associated Press named Didrikson 1932's Woman Athlete of the Year.



Babe Didrikson Zaharias with a javelin at the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles<sup>184</sup>

Following her Olympic participation, Didrikson turned to golf. Once more, she excelled. In 1935, she won the Texas Women's Amateur Championship. Other female players, probably threatened by Didrikson's talent, petitioned the United States Golf Association to have Didrikson banned from amateur competitions. She therefore became

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<sup>184</sup> Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

a professional golfer. Because there was only one professional ladies' golf tournament at the time, Didrikson conducted promotional tours and exhibition matches with some of the best male golfers in the world. In 1938, she met and shortly thereafter married wrestler George Zaharias. The latter decided to retire from wrestling and manage his wife's career. In 1940, they asked the USGA to reinstate Didrikson Zaharias's amateur golf status. It said it could only do so if an athlete did not make any money from athletic competitions/exhibitions for three years. Didrikson Zaharias did not make any paid appearances in the next three years and by 1943, she re-entered amateur golf competitions. She rapidly took control of that sport, winning seventeen tournaments in a row. Her successes once more caught the attention of the press, which named her the Associated Press's Woman Athlete of the Year in 1945, 1946, and 1947.

While at the top of her game, Didrikson was fully aware that women were short-changed compared to male golfers. In 1949, she therefore co-founded the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), which attracted sponsors and consequently provided female golfers with more and better-paid opportunities. Didrikson became the star of the LPGA and was financially more successful than any other female golfer of the time. Her popularity played a major part in the development and success of the LPGA. Recognizing her importance in the world of sport, the Associated Press, in 1950, named her Outstanding Woman Athlete of the Half Century.

In 1952, her career was put on hold when she was diagnosed with colon cancer. She underwent surgery and rejoined the LPGA tour a few months later. By 1954, she had added five trophies to her collection and was once more named the Associated Press's Woman Athlete of the Year. She officially retired from the LPGA tour in mid-1955, after doctors revealed to her that the cancer had spread. She died in 1956, at the age of forty-five. An all-around athlete, Didrikson impacted women's sport and sports in

general like few did or ever will. Paul Gallico, despite his strong opposition to female athleticism, wrote:

It may be another 50 or 75 years before such a performer as Mildred Didrikson Zaharias again enters the lists. For even if some yet unborn games queen matches her talent, versatility, skill, patience and will to practice, along with her flaming competitive spirit, there still remains the little matter of courage and character, and in these departments the Babe must be listed with the champions of all times.<sup>185</sup>

Didrikson made headlines and was a common topic of discussion because of her immense athletic talent. That talent, however, as well as her somewhat masculine appearance and personality also made her very controversial. Sport columnist Grantland Rice was probably Didrikson's number one fan. Following the 1932 Olympics, he described her as follows: "She is an incredible human being. She is beyond all belief until you see her perform. Then you finally understand that you are looking at the most flawless section of muscle harmony, of complete mental and physical coordination the world of sport has ever known. This may seem to be a wild statement, yet it happens to be 100 per cent true."<sup>186</sup> Rice, however, was an exception. Many argued that sports destroyed her femininity. For these people, Didrikson was the proof that women should refrain from athletic activities. Joe Williams, a sports columnist for the *New York World-Telegram*, for instance once commented:

Babe simply refuses to accept any concessions to femininity [...] When you get down to the elementals, she didn't do very much. All the records she made were ordinary. The same year she became the greatest woman athlete in history, a comparative chart shows that she had not equaled one record made by a masculine high school champion of the same period. I recall doing a column on the young lady at the time and suggesting that instead of furthering admiration for her sex she had lowered it. By her championship accomplishments she had merely demonstrated that in

<sup>185</sup> Quoted in, *Great Women in Sports*, Anne Janette Johnson (Detroit, MI: Visible Ink Press, 1996), 129-130.

<sup>186</sup> Quoted in *Whatta-Gal: The Babe Didrikson Story*, William Oscar Johnson and Nancy P. Williamson (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1975, 1977), 111. No specific date but most likely 1932-33.



athletics women didn't belong, and it would be much better if she and her ilk stayed at home, got themselves prettied up and waited for the phone to ring.<sup>187</sup>

Others argued that she naturally looked, behaved, and performed like a male. For them, she had to be a lesbian or even a man. Susan Cayleff, author of a biography of Didrikson, tells that Gallico even referred to Didrikson as a "Muscle Moll in print."<sup>188</sup> In this piece, "he openly speculated whether she was a lesbian or even a member of a 'third sex' that is neither male nor female." He then said that he "was as curious about her as he was about 'the bearded lady and the albino girl at the circus sideshow.'" For him, Didrikson could not even be interested in classic feminine activities like "the very ancient and honored sport of man trapping."<sup>189</sup> Cayleff stresses that Gallico's columns were not the only ones questioning Didrikson's sexual nature or orientation: "Other columns such as 'Mr., Miss, Mrs. or It?'" openly discussed Babe as odd and debated which bathroom she should use, men's or women's, after an athletic competition."<sup>190</sup> Even Didrikson once commented on this. In a 1936 *American Magazine* article, she declared, "People are always asking me, 'Are you going to get married, Babe?'" and it gets to my goat. They seem to think I'm a strange, unnatural being summed up in the words Muscle Moll, and the idea seems to be that Muscle Molls are not people."<sup>191</sup>

American society simply could not accept such a successful and unfeminine female athlete. That is why, according to Cahn, certain journalists tried to reconcile these conflicting pieces by finding out and highlighting some feminine traits in Didrikson. For instance "because of her youth and her stated lack of interest in men, reporters in the 1930s focused on her persona as a tomboy, looking for some 'female' interests that might

<sup>187</sup> Quoted in *Whatta-Gal: The Babe Didrikson Story*, Johnson and Williamson, 123.

<sup>188</sup> Susan Cayleff, *Babe Didrikson* (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 1995), 80.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-82.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>191</sup> Mildred Didrikson, "I Blow My Own Worn," *American Magazine* CXX (June 1936): 104, in *The Evolution of Women's Participation in the Summer Olympic Games, 1900-1948*, Henson Leigh, 341.

reinstate her as a woman.”<sup>192</sup> That, however, only happened when she became a golfer. Because golf was considered an appropriate sport for women, Didrikson was finally more in line with what was expected of women. Cahn argues that Didrikson’s “golfing achievements earned scant praise next to her more celebrated achievement--becoming ‘a real woman’ at last.”<sup>193</sup>

Her marriage in 1938 also contributed to her popularity as a female athlete, reassuring American society that her athletic involvement and achievements did not come at the expense of her womanhood. Getting married, then, whether she did so for love or convenience, was of tremendous importance because it shut down the rumors of lesbianism. The fact that George Zaharias was a wrestler, the perfect masculine man of the time, also helped Didrikson to be seen as a woman, at last. Gallico, immediately applauded that Didrikson had finally found her place in society: “Until the Babe met and married George Zaharias, she was a pathetic and solitary figure, neither one thing nor another in the average, normal world of ordinary men or women or even, for that matter, of athletes.”<sup>194</sup> Cayleff says Didrikson’s “relationship with George, which was splashed across the newspapers nationwide, earned her complete acceptance as a ‘real’ woman.”<sup>195</sup> Cahn reaches the same conclusion, explaining that “because she had married, gained weight, and taken up a more ‘feminine’ sport, journalists could now plug her into the tomboy-becomes-real-woman narrative.”<sup>196</sup>

To illustrate this argument, Cahn gives the example of a *Life* magazine article published shortly after Didrikson’s wedding. The headline stated: “Babe Is a Lady Now: The World’s Most Amazing Athlete Has Learned to Wear Nylons and Cook for Her

<sup>192</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 215.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Quoted in *Babe Didrikson*, Cayleff, 113.

<sup>195</sup> Cayleff, *Babe Didrikson*, 113.

<sup>196</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 216.

Huge Husband.”<sup>197</sup> There are several heterosexual, middle-class markers in this title. Didrikson could now be considered a lady because her behavior and activities, including wearing feminine clothes, cooking, and taking care of her husband, were on par with what women ought to be and be doing. Again, Gallico commented on such changes: “I hardly knew Babe Didrikson when I saw her. Hair frizzed and she had a neat little wave in it, parted and prettily combed, a touch of rouge on her cheeks and red on her lips. The tomboy had suddenly grown up.”<sup>198</sup> A 1947 article in the *Saturday Evening Post* also commented to Babe’s transformation. It first stated that Didrikson had finally taken off “her mask” of masculinity and then went into details: “Perfume, lipstick and fingernail polish lie on her dressing table. Style and class hang in her closets.... Such frills and fripperies are a far cry from the cotton union suits she once wore and the makeup she defiantly didn’t wear.”<sup>199</sup> Athleticism and femininity had finally been reconciled. Her career highlights the importance of looking feminine in American society and the obstacle this represented for female athletes in general, and especially for those excelling in what were considered manly sports.

### **Commercialization and exploitation**

This strong focus on femininity impacted female athleticism significantly, placing it at the center of a debate between women physical educators on one side and male physical educators and sports promoters on the other. Female physical educators wanted to promote universal participation in moderate sporting activities to develop a white, middle-class, refined athlete. Men, however, wanted to commercialize female

<sup>197</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 216.

<sup>198</sup> Quoted in *Babe Didrikson*, Cayleff, 107.

<sup>199</sup> Quoted in *Idols of the Game: A Sporting History of the American Century*, Robert Lipsyte and Peter Levine (Atlanta, GA: Turner Publishing, Inc., 1995), 132.

athleticism, even though it meant reducing female athletes to beauty objects. This debate was so intense that many articles on the subject were published throughout the 1920-1930s. In “The New Sportswoman,” Elizabeth Halsey explained that sport for women could be positive but also dangerous:

Yes, I think there is a possible danger, which the sportswomen of the past generation did not have to meet. In their day nice girls did not play games in public, but the modern girl is sometimes exploited through her very freedom. Bathing beauties and traveling basketball teams are often promoted by a misguided chamber of commerce as a profitable advertisement for an otherwise undistinguished community.<sup>200</sup>

The *Journal of Health and Physical Education* published an article emphasizing the same issues. In it, Helen N. Smith, Director of Physical Education for Women at the University of Cincinnati, supported sports activities for girls and women, but only if conducted in a very specific, and non-dangerous, way. She begins her article, “Evils of Sports for Women,” by explaining that “despite many of the benefits that women have reaped from outdoor exercise, there are signs, unfortunately, that some of the excesses which have come to characterize men’s athletics are beginning to spread to athletics for women.”<sup>201</sup>

For Smith, this stemmed from the fact that the people in charge of women’s athletics outside of collegiate institutions did not have the girls’ health and well-being in mind. Each person/organization had its own agenda: male coaches wanted to break records to keep their jobs and improve their reputations; Chambers of Commerce wanted winning teams to attract people’s attention to their communities; sporting goods companies wanted to increase their sales and by extension their profits; and organizations such as the U.S. Olympic Committee wanted to find potential contenders for Olympic competition.

<sup>200</sup> Halsey, “The New Sportswoman.”

<sup>201</sup> Helen N. Smith, “Evils of Sports for Women,” *The Journal of Health and Physical Education* (undated but before 1932): 8-9 and 50-51. Box 293, Clippings “Women’s Athletics,” Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois.

As a result, women's athletics began to suffer from one of the main characteristics that had come to define men's athletics--commercialization. Smith argued that

commercialization has overwhelmed the world of sport. Competition is stressed over play and enjoyment. Great national organizations have developed whose members are, for the most part, men who are dependent upon sports for a livelihood, and who need record breakers, winning teams and star performers to boost their trade.<sup>202</sup>

Female educators at collegiate institutions were trying to stay away from that approach to athletics, but people organizing athletics for industrial workers or city districts were embracing commercialization. She adds that

certain organizations, purely for their own benefit, are seeking to place women's athletics in the same position as men's athletics. For instance, in a small town the Chamber of Commerce wishes to boost the town. It needs advertising. What is better than to have a winning basketball team?<sup>203</sup>

Being on that team, according to Smith, was inevitably negative for women. First, a man who did not know what was best for women would coach that team. Second, what the team members needed would never be taken into account because the goal was to win.

Smith emphasizes these issues:

A man coach invariably takes charge of the girls' team. His main job is coaching the boys' team, and as such, he has little interest in the girls' team, and no knowledge or only a limited knowledge of rules in girls' basketball, or of the capacities of girls in athletics. He must produce a winning team or lose his job.<sup>204</sup>

Winning was the sole end for both male coaches and booster organizations. Women, in that context, were just a means to an end.

Smith mentions the example of basketball tournaments, organized for publicity at the expense of the girls' well-being:

<sup>202</sup> Helen N. Smith, "Evils of Sports for Women," 8-9.

<sup>203</sup> Helen N. Smith, "Evils of Sports for Women," 8-9 and 50-51.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

Basketball tournaments have been another vicious development; county tournaments, where one team will play three and four games in a day, where girls are removed from the floor in a hysterical condition, where feeling is so tense that the elements of sportsmanship and clean play are, in most cases, forgotten. Yet the Chamber of Commerce decides to hold a bigger and better tournament the next year.<sup>205</sup>

Some of these tournaments crowned the winning team but also the most beautiful player. The May 1937 issue of the *Amateur Athlete*, for example, includes the following picture, taken during a basketball tournament.



“Dr. James R. Naismith with the Tournament Beauty Winners, Mary Guess on the left, First, and Bonnie Gammill, the Runner-up.”<sup>206</sup>

Being beautiful was landing these players more recognition than being a good player. Such beauty pageants were, of course, non-existent during male basketball tournaments.

In addition to Chambers of Commerce, Smith points out that certain companies also used women’s athletics to increase their profits. She describes how one sporting goods company organized a basketball tournament and that “no physical examinations of the

<sup>205</sup> Helen N. Smith, “Evils of Sports for Women,” 8-9 and 50-51.

<sup>206</sup> Picture found in *The Amateur Athlete* (May 1937): 16. Box: Amateur Athlete 1936-1940, The Sports Special and Rare Books Collection, University of Notre Dame.

girls who participated” were conducted. Also, “any type of rules were to be played, boys or girls or mixed.” Finally, “there were no regulation costumes, and one team was to appear in a sort of peach colored bathing suit.” Some people protested to the sporting goods company, which replied that

this company has been organizing and running all kinds of leagues for the past fifty years in order to sell their merchandise, and if they have to discontinue this practice, they will have to quit business. They have sold equipment to all the girls’ teams in their league and they are trying to procure games for these teams.<sup>207</sup>

Smith then explains that even the Olympic Committee had its own agenda. For her, IOC members “are not interested in seeing that every girl has a chance to take part in the Olympic Games, but they will take one or two ‘star’ performers, train them intensively, and boost them and America to their best ability.”<sup>208</sup>

Smith believed other women could best care for girls’ well-being in the sports world. She saw the conduct of athletics as a gender-specific task. Men, in her view, could not take the girls’ needs into account and could not design athletic programs for as many girls as possible, because they wanted to win and/or attract more publicity and profit: “It is time for all women of the country, grandmothers, mothers, sisters and daughters to demand a sane program in sports - a program conducted by trained women who are interested in girls and not in gate receipts and self or firm advertisement.”<sup>209</sup> As far as Smith was concerned, only these trained women could develop the athletic programs girls needed. And for her, it had to involve “play days”:

A Play Day is the coming together of two or more schools or groups for athletic activity where competition is based upon some arbitrarily chosen division and not on the school against school system. The participants are divided by lot into teams that take part in the various games. Teams adopt the names of colors and are known throughout the day as the ‘reds,’

<sup>207</sup> Helen N. Smith, “Evils of Sports for Women,” 8-9 and 50-51.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Helen N. Smith, “Evils of Sports for Women,” 8-9 and 50-51.

‘yellows,’ ‘blues,’ etc. In this way there is an equal number from each school on every team. Emphasis is placed on ‘Play for play’s sake.’ There is spontaneous fun which is unspoiled by the tension of an overexcited audience and an overstimulated team. As soon as the activities get under way, teams develop a natural group loyalty. This loyalty provides the incentive for team spirit, making success desirable and the giving of one’s best to the team essential. It is a wholesome competition with a friendly, genuine spirit in back of it.<sup>210</sup>

The issues Smith raised reflect the nature of the debate surrounding women’s athletic participation in the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties. This debate sheds light on several important points. First, it shows that male and female educators, promoters, and journalists assumed that girls/women athletes had no agency--that they did not play any part in shaping the athletic programs/competitions they participated in.

Second, it highlights the existing blindness towards race and class issues. As Cahn underlines, “the moderate, wholesome athlete idealized by physical educators fused appropriate female athleticism with a middle class concept of womanhood characterized by refinement, dignity, and self-control.”<sup>211</sup> Educators believed that female college students could only practice sports in a moderate fashion because over-exercising would damage their reproductive abilities and their feminine characteristics, thus endangering the future of the nation. This argument, however, fails to take into account the fact that at the time, many women, including poor whites, immigrants, and African Americans, held physically demanding jobs and were nevertheless good wives and mothers.

Educators were not the only ones oblivious to the class and race issue. In an article entitled “Are Sports Harmful to Girls?,” the writer says “we have not yet settled in any considerable degree the argument as to how much, and what kind of, exercise our women

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 57.



folk should take.”<sup>212</sup> By “women” the writer means “the average Miss, who is an athlete for a few years, possibly, and who then must give up her sports to a considerable extent, if not completely, to take over the management of her home when she marries.” The women discussed here are white, middle-class women. Most African Americans and poor women were not simply managing their homes; they also had to work to make money for the family. The debate about female athleticism rested on white, middle-class standards and perceptions of what was proper for white, middle-class women. This class and racial bias certainly represented an obstacle for female athletes. As a result, women who insisted on competing in the Games did not benefit from much public or financial support.

### **The financial cost of being an Olympian**

The cost to participate in the Games was a major obstacle for female athletes of the time. Most of them were coming out of high school or were in their college years and had no income. Aspiring male athletes were in the same educational position but they received more financial support from the different athletic bodies than women because men were expected to practice sport at such level, therefore a financial structure had been set up to provide for that. No such structure existed for women. Making it to national competitions or the Olympic tryouts was therefore difficult financially for them. Evelyne Hall Adams, who won a silver medal in the 80-meter hurdles competition at the 1932 Olympics, explained that her family was so poor that when she developed scoliosis at eleven years old, her parents could not afford to take her to a clinic and get the body cast

<sup>212</sup> “Are Sports Harmful to Girls,” no source (no date but in the 1930s). Box 293, Clipping U.S., Women in Athletics, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois.

she was supposed to wear for a year. Years later, when she competed in track and field, her family's financial state had not improved much. She could not practice as needed because she did not have money to pay for transportation to and from practices: "Most of my teammates in the IWAC [Illinois Women's Athletic Club] lived on the north side of Chicago and I lived on the far south. We could only practice twice a week because we didn't have enough money for gas."<sup>213</sup> She competed in the 1928, 1929, and 1930 indoor and outdoor national championships, but financially, it was difficult for her to cover the expenses involved: "Most of the track and field for women was concentrated on the East Coast and I was about the first girl that traveled east to compete in these meets. My husband and I had to scrape money to get gas for our little old car." Hall Adams won both the indoor and outdoor national championships in 1930. Despite these promising results, she did not benefit from any funding to attend the 1931 championship and defend her title: "We tried every way we could to save money so that we could drive again to the East Coast for the 1931 championships, but because I lacked 15 dollars, I had to stay home and forfeit my championship. What a disappointment!"<sup>214</sup>

Anne Vrana O'Brien was a bit luckier, finding the money necessary to pay her way to the 1936 Olympic tryouts. She explained how this happened:

Fortunately, I lived in a lovely place called Huntington Beach at the time. When I showed up Sunday morning everybody said, 'What are you doing here? You're supposed to be on your way east for the trials.' I said, 'They didn't have enough money to get us our tickets.' And they said, 'Don't unpack your bags!' So there were three gentlemen who went from door to door, to the police department, to the fire department, down to the stores in Huntington Beach, until they had gathered enough money to buy my ticket to go back to the track meet.<sup>215</sup>

<sup>213</sup> Evelyne Hall Adams, oral history by George A. Hodak (October 1987): 5.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Anne Vrana O'Brien, oral history by George A. Hodak (October 1987): 12.

Vrana O'Brien made it to the tryouts and qualified to go to the 1936 Berlin Games, but the fact that a potential Olympian almost missed the tryouts because she could not afford traveling to them says a lot about the economic situation female athletes faced at the time.

Female athletes wanting to compete in the Games struggled financially because, like male athletes, they had to remain amateurs to be eligible to participate. They struggled more than men, however, because they lacked financial support from the athletic ruling bodies. Some female athletes for instance had to pay their way to the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. Iris Cummings Critchell, who competed in the 200-meter breaststroke during the 1936 Olympics, explained that she attended the tryouts and qualified to be on the U.S. team, but was not sure she could go to the Games because the Olympic Committee did not have enough money to cover the costs for all the athletes. She stated:

We were told right after the completion of the tryouts that yes, you've made the team. We got a letter that said yes, you've qualified for the team and yet we do not have the funds to send the whole team. We were told by officials, it was made very very clear, 'if you want to go, get out and try to raise some money.' And we were sent out, all of us, to try to raise money. They normally took three for each event and two alternates for relays. Well, they dropped the two alternates off right away; they didn't include them in this. And the third placers in a lot of these events were put on questionable standby as to whether they were going to make it. And you were told to try to find funding.<sup>216</sup>

O'Brien, a 1928 and 1936 track and field Olympian, also mentioned that certain female athletes had to pay their way to the 1936 Games:

I don't think people are even aware of this, but on the 1936 Olympic girls track team there were four of us that had our ways paid but the others had to come up with their own money to get to Berlin, Germany. They were on the team, they had already made the team, but there wasn't enough

<sup>216</sup> Iris Cummings Critchell, oral history by George A. Hodak (May 1988): 11-12.

money to send the whole team. So these girls had to either get the money themselves or have their townships get the money together.<sup>217</sup>

These were the conditions female athletes faced when venturing in the world of sport with competitive goals in mind. Since they were not supposed to be there, the financial support they received was minimal.

### **The benefits of Olympic participation disregarded**

Despite the significant obstacles women faced under Coubertin's leadership of the Olympics, including the strong opposition of Coubertin and most of his IOC peers, the social norms restricting women to "feminine" events, the threat of commercialization and exploitation, racial and social class bias, and the financial sacrifices involved in preparing for and attending the Games, many American women still wanted to compete in the Olympics and did everything they could for make it happen because it offered them opportunities to travel, meet people, and live unforgettable moments--hard things to come by for women in the nineteen-twenties nineteen-thirties.<sup>218</sup>

### **Human and intercultural exchange**

When asked about how their Olympic participation impacted them, several early American female Olympians mentioned the human and cultural opportunities going to the Games represented. Regarding the former, some talked about meeting U.S. athletes,

<sup>217</sup> Anne Vrana O'Brien, oral history by George A. Hodak (October 1987): 25.

<sup>218</sup> In *Coming on Strong*, Cahn emphasizes this point in Chapter 9: "The tensions athletes felt were mitigated by the personal satisfaction and social possibilities they found in sport. Travel, public recognition, and a sense of belonging made athletics a worthwhile endeavor" (231).

some about meeting foreign athletes--both seen as great opportunities to make friends and learn about different people and different cultures. Sometimes, these interactions even started on the way to the Olympic site. Clarita Hunsberger Neher, a diver in the 1924 and 1928 Olympics, said:

I think one of the wonderful things about it was the days that we had to get acquainted. If you make the team today, you know only the people who are in your field; as a swimmer or diver I would know that group. But here, we got acquainted with everybody: the boxers, the wrestlers, the gymnasts, you name them.<sup>219</sup>

O'Brien also liked being associated with other athletes on the ship. For her, it was an eye-opener:

We learned about other people's activities and about other things they did, other types of athletics that there were. I became very interested in fencing, for instance. Up to that time, I hadn't even thought of fencing as an athletic endeavor. All of these things I would never have been able to do if it hadn't been for the Olympics. I will always be very grateful for being an Olympian because it opened so many beautiful doors to me.<sup>220</sup>

In addition to discovering more about America and Americans, several female Olympians remembered with great fondness meeting athletes from different countries. Evelyne Hall Adams, for instance, competed and won a silver medal in the 1932 Los Angeles Games. She explained: "I had never been in contact with girls from foreign countries and that was quite a revelation to me."<sup>221</sup> She then described a specific encounter with the Japanese women's team:

I remember one afternoon I had a string of glass colored bracelets on my wrist and was surrounded by the Japanese girls. I took one off and gave it to one of the girls. Then they all wanted one so I gave them all a bracelet. I guess I had about a dozen on my wrist. Then they tried to give them back to me, it was all I could do to make them understand that I wanted them to keep them. I said, 'present, present.' I would push my hands toward them

<sup>219</sup> Clarita Hunsberger Neher, oral history by Anita L. DeFrantz (May 1987): 8.

<sup>220</sup> Anne Vrana O'Brien, oral history by George A. Hodak (October 1987): 25.

<sup>221</sup> Evelyne Hall Adams, oral history by George A. Hodak (October 1987): 13.

and finally they understood that I meant them as a gift. The very next day they all crowded around me and whisked me off to their rooms [...] They dressed me in all their beautiful kimonos and robes, the shoes, the fans, the whole works. Then, when I tried to give these things back to them, they protested. I told them I couldn't accept these very expensive gifts, but while I was protesting, the manager, who spoke English, said to me, 'Please, Evelyne, keep these. They have elected you Japan's adopted daughter. They want you to accept their humble gifts. So that was a thrill--to be Japan's adopted daughter.'<sup>222</sup>

The introduction of the Olympic village for the 1932 Los Angeles Games stimulated this kind of experience. For Jean Shiley Newhouse, this was one of the reasons why she preferred the 1932 Games to the 1928 Games. During the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, each nation's Olympic committee housed its athletes wherever it deemed appropriate. The U.S. Olympic team remained on the ship that carried the athletes from New York to Amsterdam. Though they did interact fully with other U.S. team members, the athletes' interactions with foreign athletes were much more limited than in 1932 when, for the first time, an Olympic village was set up.<sup>223</sup> Shiley Newhouse liked this arrangement because it allowed more interactions between athletes from different countries: "All the women athletes, from all over the world, stayed at Chapman Park. So we visited back and forth all the time, traded costumes, learned a few words of this and that--Spanish, Japanese, German, Polish. It was very, very interesting. I liked that part of it very much."<sup>224</sup>

Talking about that experience thirty-five years later, Shiley Newhouse expressed concerns that this aspect of the Olympic Games, which for her was essential to her experience, had disappeared, lost in the show business atmosphere that now defines the Olympics. When summarizing the Olympics she knew and embraced, she said:

The way I view my time slot is that the Olympics were a microcosm of the world. The many faces of mankind were so different and interesting and such a vital part of our interaction. It changed my whole life forever. I was interested in the history of various nations I had never heard of before. I

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>223</sup> Men and women were, however, housed in different locations.

<sup>224</sup> Jean Shiley Newhouse, oral history by George A. Hodak (September 1987): 18.

was interested in their cultures, their religion, their music, their mores. The whole world was open to me. I was a little country girl. I was very confined in a very small area with people that were all alike. It just intrigued me and enriched my life so.<sup>225</sup>

Iris Cummings Critchell attended the 1936 Olympics. During her oral history, she also commented several times on the human aspect of the Games:

I enjoyed very much being housed with other women athletes of the world in the Friesenhaus. Not only was the U.S. women's team there, but there were women's teams there from the other countries--France, Holland, Romania, and so forth. And I made particular friends with a number of girls from the Dutch team.<sup>226</sup>

Among them, she especially befriended a swimmer called Ali De Vries. They exchanged addresses and kept in touch after the Games. In fact, members of Cummings Critchell's family visited De Vries in Amsterdam twice in the 1950s. Then, in 1984, De Vries joined Cummings Critchell to attend the Los Angeles Games, for which the latter volunteered. Like Shiley Newhouse, Cummings Critchell doubted that such friendships could result from today's Olympics, which are too driven by money and politics. The fact that when asked about their Olympic experiences, so many athletes remembered and mentioned the human interactions that happened more than forty years before, shows that for them, the Olympics was about much more than athletics and medals. It is obvious that the human and intercultural opportunities the Olympics provided them were an essential part of their Olympic experiences and memories.

### **Traveling opportunities**

<sup>225</sup> Jean Shiley Newhouse, oral history by George A. Hodak (September 1987): 36.

<sup>226</sup> Iris Cummings Critchell, oral history by George A. Hodak (May 1988): 28.

The opportunity to travel was also a crucial element for earlier Olympians. This included traveling through the U.S. to attend the Olympic tryouts, traveling to the Olympic cities, and for most, going to several European countries as part of the post-Olympic exhibition tours sponsored by the USOC. As Cahn states, for most of these young girls, all of that was absolutely new: “Growing up on farms, in small towns, or in insular urban neighborhoods, most women athletes had traveled little prior to their involvement in competitive sports.”<sup>227</sup> For Cummings Critchell, leaving New York harbor was already an incredible and unforgettable experience. She recalled,

This is a great opportunity and we were thrilled with it. And I can remember being very excited with the send-off--the streamers and balloons and lots of well-wishers! Then we sailed out past the Statue of Liberty and to me, seeing it for the first time.... This was America and we were sailing across the Atlantic. That was thrilling, that was new for most of us.<sup>228</sup>

Doris O’Mara Murphy was born in 1908, in Yonkers, New York. As she began swimming more seriously, she joined the Women’s Swimming Association. Its manager, Charlotte Epstein, was in charge of organizing meets for the team. The girls were thus able to travel quite a bit for that time, competing in New York, Florida, and Connecticut, among other places. O’Mara Murphy had, however, never been abroad. So when she traveled to the 1924 Paris Olympics, at sixteen, it was her first time aboard a ship. She said of it, “it really was just an outstanding experience--going over on an ocean liner, which I had never done, and visiting these different countries that I never would have had the chance to visit. It was just outstanding.”<sup>229</sup>

<sup>227</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 232.

<sup>228</sup> Iris Cummings Critchell, oral history by George A. Hodak (May 1988): 16.

<sup>229</sup> Doris O’Mara Murphy, oral history by George A. Hodak (July 1987): 13-14.



O'Brien traveled out of the country for the first time in 1928, to go to the Berlin Olympics. That trip was a major event in her life. Talking about the trip, she said:

The travel was great. We were on a big ship, the SS President Roosevelt. It was an eye-opener. Of course, I was a very young girl at the time. I had my sixteenth birthday on board ship during the Games. I was very interested in everything and with big eyes looked at everything. I really enjoyed the different life that came to me immediately.<sup>230</sup>

Shiley Newhouse went to Amsterdam in 1928. More than fifty years later, she still remembered an afternoon that impacted her whole life. That day, one of the boxers was feeling seasick from staying on the ship used as a hotel for the U.S. athletes during the Games. Shiley Newhouse offered to go with him to visit the city of Amsterdam. They took a cab. The driver, after realizing that they were foreign Olympians, offered to tour them around and take them to a museum. She described that visit as follows:

So he took us in the museum and he showed us this big picture that had to be 15 feet by 15 feet, a very large picture, burnt on corner. I looked at it and said, 'Oh my goodness, we have that on the wall in our living room.' No one in our family knew what it was. I didn't know what it was. It was a picture we had inherited from an aunt of ours, my mother's sister. It was the *Night Watch* by Rembrandt.<sup>231</sup>

She explained why this was an important moment for her: "That was my first indication that there is a lot to see in this world, a lot to know that I didn't know. From then on I was very anxious to see and hear and do everything I possibly could. I was just so curious about everything."<sup>232</sup> Shiley Newhouse consequently credited her Olympic adventure with changing her and the way she looked at the world. She explained: "When I went to Europe there were so many beautiful things that I came to know. The music and the architecture, the beautiful churches, the various cultures, and the many faces of

<sup>230</sup> Anne Vrana O'Brien, oral history by George A. Hodak (October 1987): 6.

<sup>231</sup> Jean Shiley Newhouse, oral history by George A. Hodak (September 1987): 8.

<sup>232</sup> Jean Shiley Newhouse, oral history by George A. Hodak (September 1987): 8.

mankind were so beautiful in their variety. I learned so much in that short period that the whole rest of my life was changed forever.”<sup>233</sup>

Several early female Olympians also mentioned post-Olympic tours as part of their Olympic experiences. O’Brien explained that right after the Amsterdam Olympics, she went to Belgium, where the track and field team competed in a meet. After that, the team went to Paris. “We didn’t have any track meet in Paris, it was just a visit. These were the kind of pluses that were given to us--little trips and so on. It gave us a chance to see some of the European countries that, of course, could not have been available to me because I never would have been able to do it on my own.”<sup>234</sup> As these early female Olympians testified, the Olympic Games represented a lot more than a sporting competition. It offered them opportunities that women that age and at that time in history would not have had, including traveling the world and meeting other American and foreign Olympians. From that perspective, one can agree with Cahn statement that these women’s sport experience represented “an education.”<sup>235</sup>

### **Memorable human and athletic experiences**

Participating in the Olympics also allowed these early female Olympians to live unforgettable experiences. Most athletes mentioned certain moments that they carried with them forever, moments that sometimes changed the rest of their lives. When asked

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>234</sup> Anne Vrana O’Brien, oral history by George A. Hodak (October 1987): 8.

<sup>235</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 232.

for specific moments, most talked about the opening ceremonies, the medal ceremonies, and the honor it was to represent the U.S. at the Olympics. These testimonies are critical to understand what the Olympics represented for these women. Most of them reflect pleasures that, according to society, were reserved for men. It seems, then, that part of Olympics was not experienced as a gendered venture. While the Games were clearly developed and based on discriminatory principles, women were, for certain aspects, able to enjoy the same benefits as men.

Clarita Hunsberger Neher, who attended her first Olympics in 1924, remembered how she felt: “I think I’ve always thought that had I won a medal that that would be the most important day of my life there. But, as it turned out that wasn’t to be, and it was that Opening Day Ceremony that wiped me out. It was something else.”<sup>236</sup> She then described that special evening:

We came out of that darkness, that tunnel, into the light of day. Well, the whole place, I couldn’t believe it, it just came alive. I couldn’t have anticipated what it was going to be. Coming out into the bright lights and having everybody stand up, and people were standing and cheering and shouting and waving flags, and the tears rolled down our faces. I turned and looked behind me, and men had tears too.<sup>237</sup>

Evelyn Hall Adams attended the Games in 1932. Her rendition of the opening ceremony was fairly similar:

The Opening Ceremony was a very moving and a very stirring ceremony. It really filled everyone up to the brim with the Olympic spirit. We were so excited when they gave the Olympic oath and when they released thousands of pigeons. And this large chorus sang the Olympic hymn. It was really something to swell inside of you. It was something that people never forget. In fact, it was really electrifying.<sup>238</sup>

<sup>236</sup> Clarita Hunsberger Neher, oral history by Anita L. DeFrantz (May 1987): 13.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>238</sup> Evelyn Hall Adams, oral history by George A. Hodak (October 1987): 15.

For the talented and lucky ones who finished in the top three in their competitions, the medal ceremony was also a very special and unforgettable moment. Shiley Newhouse first competed in the high jump at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics and finished fourth. Four years later, she again qualified to represent the U.S. for that event. Both she and Babe Didrickson tied at a world record height of 1.65 meter but, as noted above, the judges decided to award the gold medal to Shiley Newhouse because of Didrickson's unorthodox technique. Up to the 1928 Olympics, the IOC gave winners their medals during the closing ceremonies. They would simply call their names one by one and hand them a box containing their medal. Starting in 1932, a medal ceremony was organized immediately after the end of each competition. During these ceremonies, the national anthem was played and the flags were raised. This new format made a great impact on the athletes. Questioned about the medal ceremony fifty-five years after she won the gold medal, Shiley Newhouse said:

I have talked to other athletes about receiving the Olympic medal. There is something about it that goes so deeply, something unexplainable is stirred up inside. When they played 'The Star-Spangled Banner' I just cried. I've seen a lot of people do it since then. No one is able to explain it. It's a feeling that surges up and even though you try to control it and retain your dignity, you just can't do it.<sup>239</sup>

Adams ran the 80-meter hurdles and won the silver medal in 1932. When asked about how she felt when receiving that medal, she was very passionate:

Believe me, all Olympians will tell you that their greatest thrill was standing on the victory stand. We did not have a complicated or impressive awards ceremony as they do now--putting ribbons around your neck with the medals. They just handed them to us. All Olympians will tell you that the greatest thrill of all was when they stood on that victory stand. I can still close my eyes and remember that thrill--the pride and the excitement I experienced when I stood on that stand. Really it was a thrill of a lifetime. When I looked in the stands and saw the thousands of

<sup>239</sup> Jean Shiley Newhouse, oral history by George A. Hodak (September 1987): 25.

spectators, it was like a sea of white, with the men all in straw hats. They were all waving American flags and cheering and clapping loudly. Then suddenly it became very quiet. We turned and faced the peristyle and saw the flags from all the nations blowing in the breeze and the flaming torch, then slowly two American flags and one South African flag were raised to the top. Everyone sang the American national anthem with gusto. I was so proud to be an American and to win medal for my country that tears filled my eyes and I tingled all over. A thousand words could not describe my thoughts.<sup>240</sup>

It is clear from all these testimonies that female athletes who competed in the 1920-30s Games experienced and remembered much more than just the actual sport competitions. As Cahn explains, “public affirmation--not to be taken for granted in the lives of most working-class girls and women--combined with the physical and emotional pleasure of competition to place sport at the center of young athletes’ lives.”<sup>241</sup> No matter which Olympics they attended, what sport they were involved in, or the competition’s results, they all lived moments that they cherished for the rest of their lives. In their memories, as we saw, the travelling opportunities, the chance to meet other athletes, and the opening ceremonies played a significant role in their overall Olympic experiences. In similar fashion to male athletes, women’s interpersonal and athletic experiences remained engraved in their memories.

Educators, promoters, social reformers, journalists, and IOC members, however, had a gendered view of the rewards of Olympic participation; they ignored the benefits it offered women, including the human and intercultural component, the travel opportunities, and the memorable experiences. They also ignored the fact that even though they did not want women to practice sports strenuously, many Americans

<sup>240</sup> Evelyne Hall Adams, oral history by George A. Hodak (October 1987): 19.

<sup>241</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 234.

applauded and admired female athletes who represented the United States in such important competitions as the Olympic Games.

This support started before the Games. Carlita Hunsberger Neher remembered a touching moment on her way to the 1924 Paris Olympics. Talking about her first trip aboard a ship, she said: “On each side of that ship in tremendous letters it said American Olympic Team. As we sailed out of New York Harbor all the little boats from all over gathered around and were tooting their horns and the fireboats were out shooting water high into the air. It was a tremendous exit that we had.”<sup>242</sup>

Shiley Newhouse remembered a similar moment on her way to Amsterdam in 1928: “As we came into the canal at Rotterdam one of the American warships was coming in the opposite direction. They had the band out on the foredeck and they were playing ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ as we passed by and they gave us a big salute. That was a real touching moment. I cried.”<sup>243</sup>

No ship was involved in the 1932 Games, since the competition took place in Los Angeles. Instead, athletes took the train to go from their tryout locations to Los Angeles. On the way, they once more received a lot of public recognition. Adams described the exciting trip as follows: “Our team had a special sleeper car on the Santa Fe. On the side of the Santa Fe coach were big signs saying: ‘Women’s United States Track and Field Team.’ I mean, we were in seventh heaven.” She then talked about their meals: “We didn’t eat in the diner, we’d stop at these Fred Harvey places along the Santa Fe. When we would stop, people would hold up flags and banners and welcome us and wave

<sup>242</sup> Clarita Hunsberger Neher, oral history by Anita L. DeFrantz (May 1987): 7.

<sup>243</sup> Jean Shiley Newhouse, oral history by George A. Hodak (September 1987): 7.

American flags. To jump into that limelight was quite a change for young, inexperienced girls.”<sup>244</sup>

Based on these testimonies, it seems that there was no gender differentiation concerning the public recognition female and male athletes received on their way to the Olympic Games during the 1920-30s. Male athletes may have received more recognition, but this did not surface in any of the interviews. Female athletes may also have been recognized for different reasons. In “Icons of Liberty or Objects of Desire? American Women Olympians and the Politics of Consumption,” Mark Dyreson argues that during the 1920s, the media began to use female athletes as sexual commodities and as a way to stimulate public consumption.<sup>245</sup> Cahn, in *Coming on Strong*, also highlights the popularity of female athletes in the 1920s. According to her only movie stars ranked ahead of women athletes in public esteem.<sup>246</sup> Even though physical attraction may have, as Dyreson stipulates, played a role in society’s embrace of female athletes, none of the Olympians interviewed mentioned this factor. It seems then that female athletes did not experience the Games as a gendered venture. The little story Clarita Hunsberger Neher told Anita DeFrantz about her 1924 trip to France emphasizes that the US Olympic Committee treated female athletes as part of the U.S. team. She explained that General Douglas MacArthur, already famous for his World War I achievements, presided over the USOC. He was on the ship and once addressed the athletes in a way that left a great impression. Hunsberger Neher said: “It was our last evening on the ship and he said ‘I want to tell you something before you leave. You know, it’s true you’re all Olympians

<sup>244</sup> Evelyne Hall Adams, oral history by George A. Hodak (October 1987): 11.

<sup>245</sup> Mark Dyreson, “Icons of Liberty or Objects of Desire? American Women Olympians and the Politics of Consumption,” 435-460.

<sup>246</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 46.

but I want you to remember something: that first and foremost you're Americans."<sup>247</sup>

Once they were members of the U.S. Olympic team, American female athletes did not apparently feel or remember any gender discrimination. They were Olympians, they were members of the U.S. Olympic team, and they received significant public recognition for that on their way to the Olympic cities.

The same appears to hold true concerning female athletes' experiences during the Olympic Games. Female athletes indeed received a lot of public recognition as representatives of the U.S. Olympic team and as Olympians in general. During an oral history, Evelyne Hall Adams, a 1932 Olympian, described some of the bonuses coming with the Olympian status:

One of the beauty shops on Western Avenue--I think it was called Bobby's--offered free haircuts, makeup and I think I even had my eyebrows tweezed there. Everyone was so friendly to us. They would greet us on the streets and of course we rode on streetcars free--all we had to do was wear our uniform. But this was the first time I had ever been in a beauty shop and had my hair cut and my eyebrows tweezed, so it was quite an experience for me.<sup>248</sup>

Shiley Newhouse expressed similar feelings about the 1932 Games: "Practice was usually at USC or UCLA and buses would come and take us to and from the hotel. But the people of the city were most solicitous. They invited us out to their homes. They would have big affairs for us. Clubs would invite us, like the Breakfast Club, which was very popular then on the radio."<sup>249</sup>

Manifestations of public recognition continued after the Games. The first instance occurred when the U.S. Olympic team came back to the U.S. The publicity of the time, channeled through local and national newspapers, stimulated a warm welcome home. All

<sup>247</sup> Clarita Hunsberger Neher, oral history by Anita L. DeFrantz (May 1987): 9.

<sup>248</sup> Evelyne Hall Adams, oral history by George A. Hodak (October 1987): 13.

<sup>249</sup> Jean Shiley Newhouse, oral history by George A. Hodak (September 1987): 17.



the athletes coming off the ship were congratulated by the New York population and officials. Talking about that very special day, Aileen Riggin recollected a little incident that made her realize how much of an achievement her Olympic participation represented for American people. She explained that during the parade, her hat blew off and that she had to temporarily leave her spot in the parade to run after it:

It went cartwheeling down the street ahead of me, down 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and I was running after it like crazy. Then I leaned over to pick it up and all the change fell out of my breast pocket. I had my subway fare home. So, a lot of women grabbed me and they started hugging me and kissing me while I was trying to pick up my coins from the pavement. I had to run to catch up my group in the parade. It was a crazy experience for me. It was the thing I remember out of it all. They were hugging me and kissing me and making a big to do.<sup>250</sup>

The enthusiasm that people showed Riggin after her Olympic participation was new and surprising for this young woman. Doris O'Mara Murphy, a 1924 swimming Olympian, felt similarly: "We all returned on the ship and then we were greeted in New York City. We paraded up Fifth Avenue and we each were greeted by the mayor and presented with a medal. It was quite a parade and reception. Every time I see a parade in New York City I think of that."<sup>251</sup>

After the 1928 Amsterdam Games, athletes were welcomed back similarly. Shiley Newhouse described that day: "We had a big parade in New York. Jimmy Walker was the very colorful mayor of New York. He gave us all a medal and a ticker tape parade, and then we went home."<sup>252</sup> It seems from these testimonies that there was no differentiation between male and female athletes--they were all welcomed and congratulated because they all represented the U.S. in a major athletic competition.

<sup>250</sup> Aileen Riggin, oral history by Dr. Margaret Costa (November 11, 1994): 31.

<sup>251</sup> Doris O'Mara Murphy, oral history by George A. Hodak (July 1987): 13.

<sup>252</sup> Jean Shiley Newhouse, oral history by George A. Hodak (September 1987): 28.

After this general welcome in New York, athletes returned to their respective communities, where they were also greeted and congratulated. Shiley Newhouse explained that after her 1928 Olympic participation, and even though she did not win any medal, her local town welcomed her like a hero: “My little, small community of Brookline was very excited about what I had done. They had a night at the movies for me at our one little movie theater. And they had a parade and I rode in a Cadillac to the movie house. They gave me a free pass for the next two years to go to the movies whenever I wanted to. That was the size of it after 1928.”<sup>253</sup>

Participating in the Olympics during 1920-30s turned these athletes into local and, sometimes, national celebrities. Riggin, who at fourteen years old won the first American diving gold medal during the 1920 Antwerp Games, remembered that after this achievement, people in her community suddenly knew who she was: “I was awfully well-known around New York. This isn’t conceit, it’s just a fact. We had so much publicity. I was recognizable on the street. And I made appearances at lots of things.”<sup>254</sup>

When reading these testimonies, it is evident that American society embraced and celebrated the U.S. Olympic team, including its female members. We do not know from these oral histories if, at that time, men received more recognition or if women only received recognition because they were part of the U.S. Olympic team, but they did receive considerable public recognition, saw it, appreciated it, and still remembered it many years later.

The Olympics Games, then, seems to have been a double-sided event. On one hand, it discriminated heavily against female athletes, refusing them access to competitions, and

<sup>253</sup> Jean Shiley Newhouse, oral history by George A. Hodak (September 1987): 11.

<sup>254</sup> Aileen Riggin, oral history by Dr. Margaret Costa (November 11, 1994): 33.

then, placing several significant obstacles on the way. As the 1928 debacle at the 800 meter race highlights, for instance, the physical abilities of female athletes were constantly challenged, especially in sports considered inappropriate for the weaker sex. Also, as the career of Mildred Didrikson exemplified, female athletes who did not conform to traditional norms of femininity saw their sexuality and athletic performances questioned. In addition, their bodies were then used as an example to justify why athleticism and femininity conflicted and were simply not to be. Women's bodies, in short, were central to their experience in the sport world. This was not the case for men. Male athletes showcasing impressive muscularity may have been praised and admired slightly more than less physically built athletes. Yet, this was not central to their Olympic experiences, to the financial support they benefitted from, and to the future of men in sport.

On the other hand, the testimonies of female Olympians point out that despite the gender discrimination and the negative focus on women's bodies that defined the Olympics, certain female athletes did reap some of the same benefits male athletes enjoyed. Under Coubertin, then, women evolved in a limited and gendered space; one that offered them opportunities unique for American women at the time, but also one denying them full gender parity and equality.

Since Coubertin resurrected the Olympics, designed it as a male-only athletic competition, and opposed women's participation in the Games so vehemently, one might assume that his death would make it easier for women to finally be welcome and treated on an equal par with male Olympians. This was not the case. Coubertin's disappearance from the Olympic leadership, in 1937, did not result in the massive entrance and

acceptance of women into Olympic competitions. The fact that Coubertin never changed his mind about women's Olympic aspirations was not the only obstacle women faced. More important was the fact that Coubertin was not alone in loudly rejecting female Olympism and, in general, female athleticism. Many IOC members, all men and all reflecting the rigid gender structure of the time, strongly opposed the addition of women's events to the Olympic program. One IOC member, Avery Brundage (1887-1975), was especially vocal concerning women's participation in the Olympics. The next chapter focuses on Brundage's position, arguments, and impact on female Olympism and athleticism.

## Chapter 4 – A New Obstacle: Female Olympism under Avery Brundage’s Presidency

Avery Brundage played a crucial role in shaping the post-Coubertin debate about women’s Olympic participation.<sup>255</sup> The timing of his entrance onto the Olympic scene was critical. He reached leadership positions within the sports institution, and especially within the IOC, at a time when the women’s question was highly controversial and several measures intending to restrict, diminish, or eliminate women’s Olympic presence were introduced and discussed. Because he had such a significant influence on the history of women in the Olympic Games and more broadly, on women in sport, Brundage, his philosophy, and life achievements are essential to this study. This chapter consequently focuses on this new obstacle women faced to enter the Olympics or as Olympians.

### **The making of a leader**

Born in Detroit, Brundage studied at the University of Illinois, from which he graduated in 1909 with a bachelor’s in civil engineering. Brundage was an all-around athlete who competed for the University of Illinois for four years, winning the conference discus championship during his senior year. After graduating, he joined the Chicago Athletic Association and specialized in the ten-event competition that was a precursor to the modern decathlon. Brundage qualified for the 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games. He took part in the pentathlon, finishing sixth, and in the decathlon, finishing sixteenth.

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<sup>255</sup> In *The Olympic Crisis: Sport, Politics and the Moral Order*, John J. Hoberman argues that Coubertin was the first great pillar of the Olympic movement, while Brundage was the second. He also explains that Brundage consistently tried to maintain the Games as close as possible to the ones Coubertin renovated (New Rochelle, NY: Aristade D. Caratzas, 1986).

Thereafter, and even after founding his own construction company, Brundage continued to compete, winning three national championships in the all-around event in 1914, 1916, and 1918. He then turned to handball and was a popular player in the Chicago area. By then, his construction company was financially sound, leaving him time to get involved in athletic organizations.

From 1925 to 1927, he served as chairman of the National Handball Committee of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), becoming president in 1928. In 1929, he became president of the American Olympic Association (AOA--which became the United States Olympic Committee or USOC in 1961) and held that position until 1952. In 1930, he became vice-president of the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF). After the 1936 Berlin Games, he became a member of the IOC. In 1945, after the death of then IOC president Count Henri de Baillet-Latour, Brundage became vice-president and in 1952, when IOC president Sigfrid Edstrom retired, Brundage was appointed as his successor, a position he held until after the 1972 Munich Olympic Games.

### **Brundage and female athleticism**

During his years in the IOC, as member, vice-president, and president, Brundage tried to keep the Olympic Games as close to Coubertin's original vision as possible. Brundage was indeed probably the greatest follower of Coubertin's principles. This could be because Brundage was a man of his time and social class, as well as that like Coubertin, Brundage was an idealist.

Throughout his years in the IOC, Brundage fought several battles that made him a very controversial figure, both liked and disliked. One of these battles concerned

amateurism. Like Coubertin, but at a time when professionalism had clearly become inevitable, Brundage strongly opposed any rule that would have allowed professional athletes to compete in the Olympics. Brundage lost that battle; professional athletes did progressively enter the Games. Today, they are actually the norm.

Another important battle Brundage led throughout his IOC years concerned women. Despite the fact that the participation of women in the Olympics, and in sports in general, occurred in many instances when Brundage was in leadership positions in sports, there is not much existing evidence of discussions on this subject. In both the IOC's official records and the Avery Brundage Collection, the number of entries concerning women and sports is small or completely absent. In 1930, for example, Brundage was elected to the IAAF's "Committee on Women's Sports." This appointment appeared in the minutes of the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the IAAF and in the AAU Minutes of 1930. Yet, there is no trace of his work on that committee in the extensive Avery Brundage Collection. Indeed, "there is no indication of his having attended any meetings, nor is there any correspondence [sic]."<sup>256</sup> The few extant entries on women and sports are not very specific and detailed. Most of these documents only state that the question of women's participation was introduced and the proposition to remove women from the Games was rejected or approved.

Under these circumstances, one has to significantly infer in order to decipher Brundage's attitude toward the issue. This explains why not much has been written about Brundage, his approach to female athleticism, and his impact on women's sports. This is also one reason why Mary H. Leigh's article is entitled "The Enigma of Avery Brundage and the Women Athletes."<sup>257</sup> The other reason is, according to her, that the evidence left

<sup>256</sup> Mary Henson Leigh, "The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes," *Arena Review* 4 (May 1980): 13.

<sup>257</sup> Henson Leigh, "The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes," 21.

about Brundage's position on women and sport is conflicted--sometimes implying that he somewhat supported women's participation, sometimes leaning towards strong opposition. In this article, Leigh paints a different picture of Brundage than the traditional one which portrays him as anti-women, just as much as he was anti-ethnic groups, unless he saw a certain added value to their presence in the Games.

Paula Rogers Lupcho, who presented a paper on Brundage and "his impact on international competition for women" at the annual convention of the North American Society for Sport History, agreed with Leigh, seeing a progression in Brundage's position on female athleticism. She argued that Brundage's impact on women and sports totally changed at a very specific time--1948. She concluded that "prior to 1948, evidence suggests that Brundage had a positive effect on increasing opportunities available for national and world class women athletes. In the post-1948 period, evidence suggests a negative influence on the part of Brundage in increasing opportunities for female athleticism on the international level."<sup>258</sup> However, Lupcho did not explain clearly why 1948 was the turning point. Without providing such a precise timeframe, Leigh does support Lupcho's conclusion that Brundage's position on female athleticism, and therefore his impact on competitions for women, evolved over time. In her study, she insisted that between 1928, when Brundage appeared on the national and international sport administration stage, and 1953, when he proposed the elimination of women's events from the Olympics, Brundage's public stance on women's athletic participation changed significantly. According to Leigh, when Brundage became president of the AAU, in 1928, he did not strongly oppose competitive sports for women. On the contrary, she explained that "his stated belief, and the position of the AAU, was that

<sup>258</sup> Paula Rogers Lupcho, "Avery Brundage: His Impact on International Competition for Women," in *Proceedings, Annual Convention 4<sup>th</sup>*, North American Society for Sport History, Eugene, Oregon (June 15-19, 1976): 16.



women were going to compete [sic] anyway and that the AAU should provide direction and safeguards for women's competitions."<sup>259</sup> To support her point, Leigh inserted a quotation from "The AAU and Women's Athletics:"

Times have changed, women demand the same privileges and opportunities as men and the world has found out in these as in other fields that what women want--they get. Apparently women want competitive athletics ... inasmuch as the girls were going to compete anyway, it was as much its [AAU's] duty to lead and direct this brand of sport along safe and sane line.<sup>260</sup>

Leigh also noted that Brundage referred to the advances women had made in society to justify supporting their participation in athletic competitions. He is quoted as saying that it was "not so long since the business woman was looked upon with the same questioning glance that is directed now at the girl in a track suit."<sup>261</sup> It is interesting to point out that Brundage, here, did not refer to a sport traditionally considered feminine, such as gymnastics, swimming, or tennis; he supported women's participation in track and field, the most controversial sport for women because of its physical demands. Brundage either thought that track and field was acceptable for female athletes or that women were going to do it anyway, so the AAU had better allow it and regulate it to ensure that women would remain safe and feminine. The fact that Brundage did mention the importance of safeguarding women's "precious heritage of gentleness and feminine charm" points toward the latter explanation.<sup>262</sup> Brundage tolerated athleticism for women and was ready to support it officially as long as it did not deter from women's accepted role in society.

<sup>259</sup> Henson Leigh, "The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes," 11.

<sup>260</sup> Avery Brundage, "The AAU and Women's Athletics" (not dated but prior to 1830). Speech found in the Sports Collection, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois, quoted in "The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes," Mary Henson Leigh, *Arena Review* 4 (May 1980): 11-12.

<sup>261</sup> Quoted in "The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes," Henson Leigh, 12.

<sup>262</sup> Henson Leigh, "The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes," 12.

Leigh also saw evidence in the reports of the IAAF that Brundage, in these early years, favored female athleticism. Leigh never stated why and what enlightened this conservative man to, at that point in time, support the participation of women in the Olympics. She argued, however, that his influence during a meeting in 1930 clearly impacted female Olympians favorably. She explained that previous IOC President Baillet Latour had proposed the admission of women in the gymnastics, swimming, tennis, and skating Olympic events, but not in the track and field ones. At the 1930 meeting of the IAAF Council, however, Gustavus Kirby, the U.S. representative on that council, introduced a motion that threatened the elimination of all men's track and field events if Baillet Latour's motion, rejecting the introduction of track and field events for women, was accepted.<sup>263</sup> According to Leigh, "it is very clear that Brundage lent support to and perhaps even instructed Kirby to offer the resolution in the IAAF Congress in 1930."<sup>264</sup>

Other evidence supports Leigh's conclusion. During the 1930 Olympic Congress organized in Berlin, female athletes, who knew their fate would be decided during the next Olympic meeting in Barcelona, made sure to make a good showing. Kirby, in a letter to Howard S. Braucher, commented:

I personally saw a group of young girls in the scantiest kind of clothing, trotting around the fields or running tracks, engaging in 100 metre runs, taking part in the broad jump, and hopping about in all kind of athletic and gymnastic movements; and to my direct statement as to whether or not such character of exercise was not bad for them, the answer invariably was that on the contrary, it was good for them.<sup>265</sup>

<sup>263</sup> Minutes of the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the IAAF (1930): Section 3, quoted in "The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes," Henson Leigh, 13.

<sup>264</sup> Henson Leigh, "The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes," 13.

<sup>265</sup> Gustavus Kirby to Howard S. Braucher, June 9, 1930 (Box 75: Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois), reprinted in *The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement*, Allen Guttmann (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1984), 59.

When renowned Norte Dame football coach Knute Rockne ridiculed Kirby for his statement, Brundage supported Kirby:

Anyone who observed the exhibitions put on by girl athletes in connection with the Olympic Congress in Berlin would be a strong advocate for sports of all kinds for girls under proper supervision. They are really doing some wonderful things in the athletic line in Germany today. We could well take a few pointers from them.<sup>266</sup>

At that point, then, Brundage clearly supported female athleticism.

Brundage's approach to the 1931 IOC meeting organized in Barcelona again showed that by the early 1930s, he was ready to accept women's participation in the Olympics, including in track and field events. Even though no document was found explaining why Brundage stood by women at the specific moment in time, one can speculate that Brundage, a practical man, thought their presence was somewhat valuable to the Games. Leigh explained that Brundage was well aware that the issue of women in track and field events was going to be raised during that IOC meeting. She argued that Brundage tried to convince certain influential sports administrators, prior to the meeting, that women's track and field events should be maintained in the Olympic program. In a letter Brundage sent to Murray Albert, he says: "I explained the IAAF attitude on women's athletics to Garland at length and although I do not believe that he, personally, is very enthusiastic on the subject, at the same time he promised to fight for the retention of women's track and field events at the meeting in Barcelona."<sup>267</sup> Based on these few entries, Leigh concluded that "if his attitudes toward women's participation were less positive, Brundage did not

<sup>266</sup> Avery Brundage to Knute Rockne, July 17, 1930 (Box 8: Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois), reprinted in *The Games Must Go On*, Guttman, 59.

<sup>267</sup> Avery Brundage was referring to Colonel William May Garland, who was an IOC member from the U.S. Letter written on April 13, 1931. Quoted in "The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes," Henson Leigh, 14.

publicly express them, as far as the author is able to ascertain, until after the Los Angeles Games of 1932.”<sup>268</sup>

During these Games, an automobile company endorsed Babe Didrikson, but the AAU suspended her for breaking the amateur rule. Commenting on this, Brundage told the press: “You know the ancient Greeks kept women out of their athletic games . . . . They would not even let them on the sidelines. I’m not sure but what they were right.”<sup>269</sup> It seems, then, that by 1932, Brundage’s take on women in athletics had changed somewhat. Leigh suggested that this growing opposition may have been because several large companies had begun to finance some women track and field teams and Brundage, a fervent supporter of pure amateurism, rejected professionalism more than he did female track and field athletes. This theory, however, remains speculative.

The fact that a significant number of people, including sport administrators and journalists, increasingly questioned whether powerful and successful female track and field athletes were indeed women may have more to do with Brundage’s reluctant attitude than the issue of amateurism. It was Brundage, for instance, who raised the question of gender verification in a June 1936 letter addressed to Count Baillet Latour and distributed to all the IOC members. This letter, which will also be used in the next chapter, is critical because it highlights some of the issues pertaining to female athletes’ participation in the Olympics. Brundage began the letter by reprinting the message he received from a sport follower. It read:

As an interested sport fan and one who upholds the participation of feminine athletes in athletics I feel has been [sic] allowed to take part in a field where she (?) doesn’t belong. I saw and spoke to her when she took part in an exhibition meet here. Her deep bass voice, her height and 10<sup>1/2</sup> inch shoes surely proclaim her a border-line case if ever there was one. I

<sup>268</sup> Henson Leigh, “The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes,” 14.

<sup>269</sup> Avery Brundage, “Greeks Were Right, Brundage Believes,” *New York Times* (December 25, 1932): Section 3, 1, quoted in “The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes,” Henson Leigh, 14.

feel she has never put forth her best efforts in the events because if she did, the entire public would take a great deal more notice. Judging from her past performances, she will, without a doubt, be a member of the United States Olympic team and if this is permitted the normal American girl will certainly be misrepresented. Something should be done to prevent this and rules should be made to keep the competitive games for normal feminine girls and not monstrosities.

This note highlights several typical issues of the time concerning female athletes.

First, this sport fan is clearly questioning the gender of one of the American sportswomen about to participate in the Olympics. Second, he/she is doing so because of the masculine physical appearance of the female athlete in question and because her athletic performances are impressive. Third, the sport fan is therefore concluding that this athlete is deviant and that her participation makes the competition unfair for “normal” athletes. He/she then expects the USOC and IOC to intervene to ensure that only “real” women are allowed in the women’s events at the Olympics.

Brundage’s comments to Latour are also revealing of the increasing questioning of women’s gender and growing need to develop a system to address this issue:

I don’t know if hermaphrodites are as common today as they evidently were two thousand years ago judging from the many statues which appear in museums of classical art, but I do know that the question of the eligibility of various female (?) athletes in several sports has been raised because of apparent characteristics of the opposite sex. Recently considerable publicity was given in the American press to the case of an English athlete who after several years of competition as a girl announced herself (?) as a boy. Perhaps some action has already been taken on this subject; if not, it might be well to insist on a medical examination before participation in the Olympic Games.<sup>270</sup>

<sup>270</sup> Avery Brundage to Count Henri Baillet Latour, no source (1936) printed in “The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes,” Henson Leight, 13.

By the mid-1930s then, Brundage, like most IOC members, was increasingly concerned about female track and field athletes and the impact of that sport on feminine appearance and public perception. In 1936, he stated: “I am fed up to the ears with women as track and field competitors. Her charms sink to something less than zero. As swimmers and divers, girls are [as] beautiful and adroit as they are ineffective and unpleasing on the track.”<sup>271</sup> In a 1949 letter to E.J.F. Holt, president of the IAAF, Brundage again insisted: “I think it is well-known that I am lukewarm on most of the events for women, for a number of reasons which I will not bother to expound because I probably will be outvoted anyway. I think women’s events should be confined to those appropriate for women; swimming, tennis, figure skating, and fencing, but certainly not shot-putting.”<sup>272</sup> Brundage’s perspective, then, was consistent with white middle-class men’s conservative gender views. Practicing “soft” sports showcasing feminine attributes was tolerable, but a woman competing in power-, muscular-, and strength-oriented sports, such as track and field, was an aberration--a body out of space. When Brundage became president of the IOC in 1952, he immediately proposed revisiting the women’s issue, this time even suggesting the elimination of all women’s events.

During the 48<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOC, held in Mexico City in April 1953, the issue of women’s Olympic participation was addressed. The forty-fourth entry on the agenda says: “Proposition to eliminate the women’s events.”<sup>273</sup> After much debate, the IOC decided not to eliminate women’s events. It did not, however, endorse all sports for women or encourage equality between men and women at the Games. It only stated, “It has been unanimously decided not to exclude women from the Games. Mr. Brundage,

<sup>271</sup> Andrew Postman and Larry Stone, *The Ultimate Book of Sports Lists* (Bantam Books, 1990).

<sup>272</sup> Avery Brundage to E.J.F. Holt (November 14, 1949) (Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois).

<sup>273</sup> 48<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOC, Mexico-City (April 17-21, 1953): 2 - Original: “Proposition d’éliminer les épreuves pour femmes.”

however, added that women should only be allowed in sports that are appropriate for them. Accepted.”<sup>274</sup>

Dr. Fr. M. Messerli, a professor of medicine and later the historiographer of the IOC, summarized the common view of IOC members concerning women’s prime duties in life. In a report on “Women’s Participation to the Modern Olympic Games,” edited by the IOC and published in 1952, he stated that “women’s Sport is making steady progress, the number of women competitors is always increasing notwithstanding the fact that despite the repeated request of feminist milieu, a relatively limited number of competitions are accessible to women.”<sup>275</sup> He then explained where IOC members stood on the gender issue:

We are of the opinion, that these restrictions are all for the good, seeing that woman has a noble task in life namely to give birth to healthy children and to bring them up in the best of conditions. We must do everything in our power to improve her conditions of living, but on the other hand, we must avoid everything which can be injurious to her health and harm her as potential mother.<sup>276</sup>

Competing in tough sports, such as track and field, was not acceptable for women, who might suffer an injury that would interfere with their maternal role. Messerli continued,

As a doctor, I personally disapprove most strongly of women’s boxing or wrestling contests. I happened to be present in Paris, when the women’s wrestling Championships were being contested; I can safely say that I never saw anything more grotesque or less womanly. According to her constitution and as a future mother, a woman can only go in for exercises intending to develop her physique and making her more supple, avoiding as a rule, competitive events.<sup>277</sup>

According to him:

<sup>274</sup> 48<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOC, Mexico-City (April 17-21, 1953): 14 - Original: “Il est décidé à l’unanimité de ne pas exclure les femmes des Jeux. Mr. Brundage toutefois ajouté que les femmes ne devraient être acceptées que dans les sports qui leur sont appropriés. Accepté.”

<sup>275</sup> Dr. Fr. M. Messerli, “Women’s Participation to the Modern Olympic Game” (Lausanne, Switzerland: IOC, 1952): 16.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

The International Federations and organizing committees of the Olympic Games have done right to limit the number of these competitions, though they are not opposed to woman practicing sport, on the contrary, they realize that it is for her good. It is wise therefore to curb her natural impulse which often leads her to overdo sports especially strenuous ones, thus restricting her accessibility to competitive performances. Any excess in the field of sport may be injurious to herself and her descendents.

We aim at woman developing a taste for a rational system of physical education involving the practice of recreative and practical exercises as well as games and sports which will satisfy her physical and psychological needs. Later on, when she becomes a mother, while looking after her home and children, we advise her to continue the practice of physical exercises in order to ward off the effects of the years passing by, thus keeping her for ever a young mother fit to play with her children. Recreation and play are the first phase of children's education.<sup>278</sup>

Under Brundage, the issue of what was appropriate for women, in terms of biology and physical appearance, was brought up over and over again. In September 1953, for instance, Brundage's circular letter, sent to all national Olympic committees and international federations said, "Please give your opinion about the following: Are you in favour of limiting the number of participants?" It then listed a number of propositions such as eliminating all team sports, limiting the number of athletes, and so on. Finally, in ninth position, it said: "by excluding women altogether from the Games," and in tenth position: "by exclusion of some items for women. Which?"<sup>279</sup> Again, the members voted not to exclude women, but to limit their participation to "feminine" sports. When asked, for an *Amateur Athlete* article, to comment on this decision, Brundage declared: "The argument was that there were no events for women in the original Olympic Games and therefore women should be eliminated. They could stage their own games if they

<sup>278</sup> Dr. Fr. M. Messerli, "Women's Participation to the Modern Olympic Game," 16.

<sup>279</sup> Circular-Letter to All National Olympic Committees and International Federations, Lausanne (September 1, 1953).



wished. Many were in favor, but more were against this suggestion, so it was voted down.”<sup>280</sup>

Because he included a proposition to eliminate all female events from the Olympic Games and because of a few statements criticizing certain female athletes or events, many people, including journalists, sports administrators, historians, and so on, concluded that by 1953, Brundage had become a staunch anti-female-athlete advocate.

Historian Allen Guttman disagreed with this interpretation. Guttman positioned Brundage’s approach to female athletes within the larger Olympic picture, arguing that by the 1950s, one of the main issues facing the IOC was the increasing number of events--and therefore athletes--in the Games. Adding a women’s event for each of the many male events meant doubling the participation. Guttman opined that “because Brundage listed the exclusion of women as a logically possible means to reduce the program, he was often misunderstood.”<sup>281</sup> He continued, “many sportswriters, like Arthur Daley of the *New York Times*, misread Brundage, praised what they took to be his anti-feminist views, and trotted out their own Victorian hobbyhorses.”<sup>282</sup> In other words, some journalists used Brundage’s statements on the issue of female athleticism to support their point of views that women should not play any role in the Olympic movement. For Guttman, then, Brundage’s opposition to female athleticism has been exaggerated. “The truth is that he too cherished certain prejudices common to the Victorian era which he had been born. He was, however, not among the conservatives on this issue. He was biased against females in some events, like shot putting, but his general inclination was to approve of women athletes.”<sup>283</sup>

<sup>280</sup> “Brundage Urges Strengthening of the Olympic movement,” *Amateur Athlete* (January 1954), in “The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes,” Henson Leigh, 17.

<sup>281</sup> Guttman, *The Games Must Go On*, 194.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

Brundage's take on the women's question did not evolve much after that. In the 1960s, when the historical context changed and actually helped women enter the Olympic Games in increasing numbers and in more events, Brundage remained loyal to his belief that women should participate, but only in events appropriate for them. In a *San Francisco Examiner* article entitled "The Low Down--Brundage Says Olympics Should Be for Men Only," he reasserted that women should not compete in track and field: "If I had my way there'd be no women shotputters or their like in the competition. To my way of thinking, they just don't belong in it. I have so stated my position many times, but always I have been outvoted." When asked to explain why he so strongly opposed women's participation in track and field--and when the journalist suggested that it might be because he was a woman hater--Brundage replied:

Far from it. It is rather because of my abiding affection for women that I am opposed to seeing them attempt anything to which they are not physically suited. Track and field is not their sphere. The shotput does nothing for them. The runs are too strenuous. They should stick to such sports as fencing, swimming and gymnastics. These things they do well.<sup>284</sup>

Prescott Sullivan, the journalist who wrote that article, ended his piece writing: "At the risk of amazonian attack, we must say we agree with Brundage in principle."<sup>285</sup>

Following these statements, Roxanne Andersen used the press to answer Brundage. Born Roxanne Atkins, this track and field athlete ran for Canada in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. She then married an American, moved to California following World War II, and became a U.S. citizen. There, she worked on developing track and field activities for women--activities that were later used as models for national programs for years. By the 1950s, she was involved in U.S. track and field governance, serving on the women's

<sup>284</sup> Prescott Sullivan, "The Low Down--Brundage Says Olympics Should Be for Men Only," *San Francisco Examiner* (May 9, 1960).

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

track and field national committee and becoming its co-chair in 1958. In addition, she also was a staff member for the U.S. contingent attending the Pan American Games in 1971 and 1983. She wrote several books and articles on athletic competitions for girls and women, and she received the President's Award for years of meritorious service to athletes in 1982. When Andersen, described by journalist Sullivan as "an attractive brunette," read Brundage's comments, she fired back: "Just let me catch up with that old buzzard and I'll tell him a few things." She added:

[Brundage's] objection is typical of any one who is as far behind the times as Brundage. The man should get off his archaic high horse and wake up to the fact that women have earned their rights in a changing world. Women of today vote. They work at their jobs with no favors asked of men. And, whether Brundage likes it or not, they're in the Olympics to stay. Brundage, and others like him, got their noses out of joint when the girls stole the spotlight from the men at the Melbourne Games four years ago. Women athletes were responsible for some of the most thrilling moments of the entire program. Betty Cuthbert and Shirley Strickland were Australia's star performers, and no one captivated the crowd more than did Mildred McDaniel, an American girl, when she broke the high jump record.<sup>286</sup>

In another *San Francisco Examiner* article, this time written by Mildred Schroeder, Andersen further criticized Brundage for his comments:

Let Mr. Brundage or anyone else who thinks sports make girls mannish and muscular look at them! I'm already 50 and I still snap over the hurdles, throw the discus and sprint in my demonstration clinics and classes. My non-athletic contemporaries can't. And I wonder if Mr. Brundage can still take a hurdle? American women, as well as the women from all parts of the world, are pressure groups for more sports participation. We don't get the coaching and the attention men athletes get in this country or women get in such countries as Russia, Australia, but we want our place in the sun. Men need to be educated to realize that sports belong to the human race. Women's sports are one classification and we are capable in our own way--and just as interested.<sup>287</sup>

<sup>286</sup> Prescott Sullivan, "The Low Down--Avery Brundage Must Answer to Roxanne," *San Francisco Examiner* (May 11, 1960).

<sup>287</sup> Mildred Schroeder, "An Answer to Avery--Hurdlers, Sprinters Dare Inspection," *San Francisco Examiner* (May 11, 1960).

Note not only Andersen's comments, but also the journalist's take on the matter.

Andersen rejected the idea that women who competed in track and field were necessarily muscular and mannish. The thrust of her argument, however, was that women had the right to participate, and should therefore receive the same training and competing opportunities as men. Thus, she addressed the issue of physical appearance but went further, defining the dilemma a women's rights issue. The journalist, on the contrary, got stuck on the physical appearance argument. Schroeder began by referring to Andersen as a "svelte sports authority," before mentioning "[h]er blue eyes blazing in her attractive tanned face [....]." Later in the article, she explained that anybody looking at the track and field athletes during the next competition would see that Brundage was incorrect, listing several athletes whose physical appearance would prove Brundage wrong. She started with "Irene Obera of Berkeley, diminutive dimpled sprinter, beautifully proportioned, voted 'Miss Western U.S. Games' in 1959, and rated a good Olympian material." Also mentioned were "hurdlers Cherrie Parish and Lucille Brown, good-looking trim Negro girls who are Chico State students," and "Pat Daniels of San Mateo, a tall striking blonde 16 year old who runs the 800 meters."<sup>288</sup> Women athletes were expected, even in track and field, to look feminine. If they could also be good at what they were doing, so much the better; if not, well, it was normal that women were not that good at a male activity.

### **The All-American Girls Baseball League**

The physical appearance of female athletes, and especially of females involved in traditionally male sports, remained a controversial topic throughout the years Brundage

<sup>288</sup> Mildred Schroeder, "An Answer to Avery--Hurdlers, Sprinters Dare Inspection," *San Francisco Examiner* (May 11, 1960).

was involved as a sport administrator. The only way for women's presence in a male-defined domain to be somewhat acceptable was to diminish or, better, erase the tension between athleticism and femininity. The brief lifetime of the All-American Girls Baseball League (AAGBL) highlights many issues pertaining to women and sport, including the importance of feminine appearance, the commercialization of the female body, and perceived gender roles in the world of sport and in mid-twentieth century American society. Even though baseball was not an Olympic sport at the time, for men or women, the existence and demise of this female baseball league is relevant to the study of the Olympics because it sheds light on the conflicting relationship between athleticism and femininity and how it impacted all American sportswomen, including Olympians.

The AAGBL, the first women's professional baseball league, represented a unique moment in women's sport history. The creation of this league, which, in the end attracted more than six hundred American, Canadian, and Cuban female players, was a response to conditions created by World War II. By the start of the 1943 professional baseball season, more than three thousand minor leaguers had joined the service or taken war-related jobs. Only nine of the nation's twenty-six minor league teams had enough players. Major league teams suffered as well, losing most of their star players to the war effort. In addition, gasoline rationing limited people's ability to travel and put a premium on local entertainment.

Philip K. Wrigley, the chewing-gum mogul owning the Chicago Cubs franchise, decided to create and manage a women's league to keep people interested in baseball. In 1943, he recruited the best softball players and formed four teams located in medium-sized industrial cities around Chicago. Each team had fifteen players, usually in their late teens and early twenties. In addition, each team also included a coach, a business

manager, and a woman chaperone to make sure that players behaved in ladylike fashion off the field. Stepping into a male domain represented a threat to the established gender code and could therefore only be embraced if the players did not appear too masculine. This explains why players wore a feminine rather than practical uniform, why they always had to wear lipstick and have long hair, why slacks and trousers were forbidden, and why the spring training schedule included charm school classes. In *Coming on Strong*, Cahn mentions these specific rules and concludes that “league officials sought to capitalize on the general support for women stepping into male roles, at the same time reassuring spectators that women playing a ‘man’s game’ remained ‘normal’ in every other respect.”<sup>289</sup> The league thus developed the “femininity principle,” which reinstated its commitment to keeping its athletes feminine-looking. Cahn explains that this meant recruiting athletes based not only on their baseball abilities but also on their physical appearance. “In a section titled ‘Femininity with Skill,’ the league handbook reasoned that it was ‘more dramatic to see a feminine-type girl throw, run and bat than to see a man or boy or masculine-type girl do the same things. *The more feminine the appearance of the performer, the more dramatic the performance.*’”<sup>290</sup> Appearing feminine was so important to the league’s success that even the teams’ names were feminized--Daisies, Lassies, Peaches, Chicks, Sallies, and Belles.

Because it represented a unique athletic and financial opportunity for girls, many were interested in joining, and the League rapidly expanded from four to ten teams. Rules were also modified over time, from a mixture of softball and baseball to baseball rules only, highlighting the players’ ability to master a male sport. In 1948, up to 910,000 fans

<sup>289</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 149.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 150. Taken from the AAGBL Handbook, italics in the original text.

paid to attend games. Wrigley succeeded in selling his League because it maintained the players' femininity while showcasing their baseball skills. Wrigley also packaged the league as a patriotic venture, organizing exhibition games at Army camps, for instance. The entrance of these women into a male arena was acceptable because it was temporary, until men came back from the war, and because it did not challenge current gender roles.

The league did not foment a gender revolution in the sports arena or in society. The popularity of women's baseball was temporary, and as the United States recovered from the war, attendance declined. After the 1954 season, the league disappeared. Several factors explain this. First, the war was over so men were home, stimulating the renewal of major league baseball. Second, the league decentralized in 1951. Since each host city was left to assume full control of its team, there was no more national recruiting system and publicity campaign for the League. Third, the development of television provided alternative entertainment. Fourth, the end of gasoline rationing gave people more freedom to travel to games. Finally, many Americans wanted a return to normalcy in all aspects of life, including gender roles. As Cahn explains, "the presence of women, even 'feminine beauties' in 'masculine athletics' clashed with the conservative culture of the 1950s."<sup>291</sup> The women's baseball league was an anomaly. From 1954 to the late 1970s, the existence of the league was largely forgotten. With the popularity of the film *A League of Their Own*, released in 1992, interest revived. Although fictionalized, this movie does focus on the founding and organization of the AAGBL.

The league, which represented a sort of parenthesis in the history of women and sport, shows that many issues obstructing women's entrance into the sports arena at the end of the nineteenth century remained in place by the mid-twentieth century. Even newspaper

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<sup>291</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 161.

articles of the time covered similar topics as articles from the 1920 to 1930s. A piece written in 1949 by Doctor S.E. Bilik, “Rugged Sports Rob Women of Appeal Declared Doctor” started by diminishing women’s sport abilities, arguing that they “lack the strength, endurance, skill, suppleness, agility and resistance to injuries that are essential requisites in competitive athletics.”<sup>292</sup> This doctor then focused on female athletes’ appearance, insisting on the negative consequences of sports:

The incidental exhaustive training tends to toughen a woman’s body, rob her of her natural grace and ultimately make her not only unattractive but actually ugly. Watch girl athletes in action or study newspaper photos. Athletes in ‘fighting trim’ are all muscle and bone and angles, and hollows and nervous tension. Get a woman in the same physical condition and you begin to wonder whether she has TB or a mean husband.<sup>293</sup>

Bilik’s next argument against women’s participation in competitive sport relied on women’s role in society. According to him, women were on earth for a specific reason and it was not sport: “A woman is built physically different from man for a purpose, namely childbearing.”<sup>294</sup> This was the popular attitude women still faced at the time of Brundage’s leadership. Despite these obstacles and despite Brundage’s position on women’s participation in the Olympics, women made more progress in the 1960s than they had during the previous three decades. The historical context is essential to understanding this evolution.

<sup>292</sup> S.E. Bilik, “Rugged Sports Rob Women of Appeal, Declares Doctor,” *Chicago Daily News* (February 1, 1949) (Box 111: Subject File Women Athletics, International Olympic Committee, Lausanne).

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.



### **The impact of the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement**

The end of World War II marked the beginning of the Cold War--a time of conflict, tension, and competition between the United States and Stalin's Soviet Union and their respective allies. This historical period critically impacted the way athletic governing bodies dealt with female athletes. Brundage, for instance, found himself in a position where he had, whether he liked it or not, to promote female Olympism.

Throughout the Cold War, from the mid-1940s to the early 1990s, an intense rivalry between these two blocs unfolded in multiple arenas, including sports. The political issues at stake were complicated but their implications in the world of sport were simple: athletes became representatives of their countries and of their respective political systems. From then on, an athletic victory was a lot more than an athletic performance; it reflected the superiority of the athlete's political system and nation. As Mechikoff states, "both the Soviet Union and the United States have made the Olympic Games integral to their foreign policy."<sup>295</sup>

The Cold War Olympics began in 1952 in Helsinki--the first time the Soviet Union entered a team and the year Avery Brundage became president of the IOC. American decathlon winner Bob Mathias's post-victory declarations summarizes the atmosphere and the intertwining of sport and politics: "There were many more pressures on the American athletes [in 1952] because of the Russians than in 1948. They were in a sense the real enemies. You just loved to beat 'em. You just had to beat 'em. It wasn't like

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<sup>295</sup> Robert A. Mechikoff, "The Olympic Games--Sport as International Politics," *Journal Of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* (March 1984): 23.

beating some friendly country like Australia.”<sup>296</sup> American and Russian athletes had become mini warriors in the American-Soviet war for international prestige, recognition, and influence. No matter what Coubertin or Brundage said about the Olympics being a non-political event, politics was more than ever an integral part of the Games.

The increasing importance of the ranking system highlights the politization of the Games. Coubertin said many times that there should be no rankings among nations because the Olympics was a competition for individuals. Still, ranking always took place, mostly dictated by the media and governments. During the Cold War, these rankings became even more important. It did not matter which athletes won or what event athletes won; what mattered was which country had the most medals at the end of the Games. In fact, from 1952 to 1988--the last Games in which the Soviet Union competed as such--the U.S. and the Soviet Union won the most medals in all the Games except in 1988, when East Germany--a Soviet client--took second place and the U.S. was third. Otherwise, the Soviet Union won the most medals six times (1956, 1960, 1964, 1972, 1976, and 1988), while the U.S. finished first twice (1952 and 1968).<sup>297</sup>

In theory, the Soviet government was more advanced than the U.S. government concerning gender relations: in 1913, Lenin proclaimed March 8 as the International Women’s Day; in 1914, the first issue of *The Woman Worker*, a paper dedicated to working women, was published; and in 1917, following the Russian Revolution, women were given the right to vote and the right to enter the political arena. In practice,

<sup>296</sup> Quoted in *Politics of the Olympic Games*, Richard Epsy (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 38.

<sup>297</sup> These totals do not take into account the 1980 and 1984 Olympic Games since the U.S. and the Soviet Union respectively boycotted each other’s Games. A table of the medal count between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War (1952-1988) can be found in the Appendix section - Appendix IV.

however, “women in Russia did not achieve the equality claimed by the Soviet state, and may even have been in a worse position than many of their counterparts in the West.”<sup>298</sup>

Even though women may not have been treated as equal in Soviet society, the way the Soviet government approached sport benefited women. The government, which understood amazing well the symbolic potential of male and female athletic performances, used the institution of sport effectively. It scrutinized its youth and selected individuals who showed a predisposition for certain sports. It then trained these individuals intensively in order to bring them to an elite level. It did this not only with men but also with women. For the Soviets, the gender of the winner did not matter; whoever won highlighted the superiority of the Soviet Union. Victory was therefore to be pursued at all costs, including intense training and the distribution of performance-enhancing drugs. In that context, Soviet women had more opportunities to practice sport, to compete in the sport arena, and to be praised for their athletic participation and achievements than American women. Because women came to play such a prominent role in Russian sports, the U.S and its Western allies had to respond by raising women’s status in sports and in society. The U.S realized that to compete against the Soviet Union in the athletic arena, it needed to invest more money, time, and attention on women. So far, the U.S. had relied on a participatory approach to sport for women. The goal was not to develop a few elite athletes but to encourage young women to engage in fitness exercises for health benefits only. No system had therefore been developed and no financial support had been set up to recruit the best female athletes, train them, and prepare them for such an international athletic competition as the Olympic Games. If the

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<sup>298</sup> Jeni Harden, “Beyond the Dual Burden: Theorising Gender Inequality in Soviet Russia,” in *Critique: Journal of Social Theory* 30, Issue 1 (2002): 43-68.

U.S. wanted its female athletes to defeat their Russian counterparts in the Olympics, this approach needed to change. In a letter to Avery Brundage in 1955, New York lawyer George Gray Zabriskie advised the following:

What the A.A.U. and similar bodies in other Western Countries ought to do is to have their local committees go out and beat the bushes for husky, athletic girls with competitive spirit in schools, colleges, farms and factories. There must be plenty of potential Babe Didriksens and Stella Walshes in this country, whose population is almost as large as Russia's and much better nourished, if they are sought out and encouraged. Inculcate in them the ideas of sport and sportsmanship for its own sake, of free trips to meets where they can see different parts of this and other countries, and of the thrill and glory of standing on a pedestal in a foreign stadium--as 16 year old Karen Anderson did in Mexico after outclassing the field in the javelin event--with thousands cheering them, while the National Anthem is played and their country's flag slowly raised in their honor.<sup>299</sup>

This led to more opportunities for American female athletes to compete in the Olympics and more pressure on them to win medals. Nancy Lethcoe, a 1956 swimming Olympian, commented: "Our chaperone, coach, and newspaper reporters certainly very strongly encouraged us to see ourselves as competing for the U.S. and showing that the U.S. system of government produced better athletes and hence was superior to the Russians and communism."<sup>300</sup> Even though Lethcoe perceived this as a "perversion of the Olympic ideal," it did have the benefit of placing women in the spotlight. Lesley Bush, an Olympic gold medalist in the platform event in 1964 immediately became a hero. When asked about this, she replied: "I was still in high school. It was instant popularity, instant boyfriend, instant everything. I was on TV, my picture was in *Life Magazine*, in *Sports Illustrated*, etc. So I had more than my 15 minutes of fame. It lasted

<sup>299</sup> Letter from George Gray Zabriskie to Avery Brundage (April 5, 1955): 2 (Box 115: Subject File, IOC, Women Athletics, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois).

<sup>300</sup> Nancy Lethcoe (Ramey), email interview (February 2007): 6.

several months. There was a parade in Princeton. They even closed the schools and the streets for half a day.”<sup>301</sup>

African American women also benefited from the Cold War need-to-win spirit. The U.S. recognized that it could not criticize the communist regime while practicing racial discrimination and segregation at home. This translated into increased opportunities for African American athletes to train and be selected for the U.S. Olympic team. Because African Americans were socially and economically limited in their access to certain sports, such as swimming or gymnastics, they became predominant in track and field, a sport that did not require expensive equipment or practice fees. One school, Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University, had a great track and field program for African Americans. The following photograph appeared in the February 1960 edition of *The Amateur Athlete*. It features, from left to right, Isabel Daniels, Lucinda Williams, Barbara Jones, and Margaret Matthews, all Tennessee State athletes who competed in the 1956 or 1960 Olympics.<sup>302</sup>



<sup>301</sup> Lesley Bush, phone interview (February 7, 2007): 6.

<sup>302</sup> From left to right: Isabel Daniels, Lucinda Williams, Barbara Jones, and Margaret Matthews, in *The Amateur Athlete* (February 1960): 13 (Box: *The Amateur Athlete* 1958-1960, Sports Special and Rare Books Collection, University of Notre Dame).

Between 1948 and 1964, American women won twenty-nine medals in Olympic track and field competitions. The Tigerbelles, the name given to African American female track and field athletes from Tennessee State, won nineteen of those, including ten gold, five silver, and four bronze medals. The Cold War era not only opened more doors for African American women to compete, it also ensured them some recognition and praise for their performances in the Olympic Games. Wilma Rudolph, an African American who received a full scholarship to attend and train at Tennessee State, became an instant hero when she won three gold medals at the 1960 Rome Olympics (100-meter dash, 200-meter dash, and the 400-meter relay team)--a first in American sports history.<sup>303</sup>



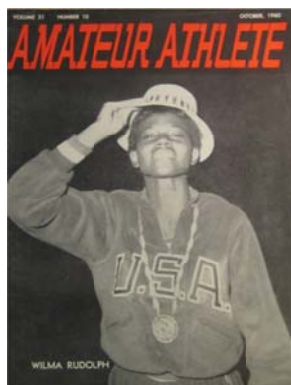
That victory made her “the fastest woman in the world” and an instant national and international hero. In *Black American Women in Olympic Track and Field*, Michael D. Davis highlighted the way people reacted to Rudolph’s Olympic victories:

The Clarksville *Leaf Chronicle* called Wilma ‘an inspiration to the whole world.’ And indeed she was. Fifteen countries invited her to appear at post-Olympic meets, and American Olympic officials, anxious to capitalize on the Olympic glory Wilma had brought to the United States,

<sup>303</sup> Wilma Rudolph winning the 100-meter race at the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome, Mark Kauffman, Time Life Pictures/Getty Images.

quickly arranged a tour. Wilma, her three teammates on the winning relay team, and Earlene Brown, who had won a bronze medal in the shot put, were members of the touring group. They went to Frankfurt, Germany, where Wilma was given ‘the world’s fastest bicycle for the world’s fastest woman.’ In Athens she competed in the stadium where the modern Olympic Games began. In London, a life-size statue of her was placed in Madame Tussaud’s famous wax works, sharing popularity with one of Jack the Ripper. Meanwhile, back in Nashville, Tennessee’s governor Buford Ellington, who had campaigned for election as ‘an old-fashioned segregationist,’ got ready to head the state’s Welcome Home Committee. Clarksville did no less. It breached the walls of racial prejudice. The Mayor, William Barksdale, proclaimed October 4 Wilma Rudolph Day, and his proclamation, engraved on a silver tray, was presented to her.<sup>304</sup>

The following magazine cover, from *The Amateur Athlete*, highlights how popular Rudolph became after winning her three golds. That this sports magazine picked an African American woman, thus resisting racial and gender taboos, also shows that at that point, race and gender were not, even for conservatives like Brundage, as much a priority as defeating the Soviet Union.<sup>305</sup>



Rudolph became one of the U.S.’ most decorated athletes, receiving the United Press Athlete of the Year Awards in 1960, the Associated Press Woman Athlete of the Year Award in 1960, the European Sportswriters’ Sportman of the Year Award in 1960, the Christopher Columbus Award for Most Outstanding International Sports Personality in

<sup>304</sup> Michael D. Davis, *Black American Women in Olympic Track and Field* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1992), 118-119.

<sup>305</sup> Wilma Rudolph, pictured in *The Amateur Athlete* (August 1960): 9 (Box: *The Amateur Athlete* 1958-1960, Sports Special and Rare Books Collection, University of Notre Dame).

1960, the James E. Sullivan Award for Good Sportmanship in 1961, and the Babe Zaharias Award in 1962.

Madeline Manning Mims also trained at Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University. She competed in her first Olympic Games in 1968 and won a gold medal in the 800-meter race. It was the first time an American athlete had won that event. Because of that achievement, Manning Mims also received a lot of public recognition. During an interview, she said, “People had no idea who I was and suddenly, everybody knew my name. Or when they would find out who I was, their respect changed dramatically--more than I thought it would.”<sup>306</sup> Manning Mims went on to qualify and be selected as captain of the U.S. women’s track and field team for the 1972, 1976, and 1980 Olympics.

The fact that Russian women excelled in several Olympic sports made it impossible for the IOC to eliminate these sports from the Olympic program. Doing so would have appeared as a tactic by the western nations to shut down the medal counts of the Soviet Union and its allies. This might partly explain why Brundage, who suggested eliminating all women’s events from the Olympic program during a 1953 IOC meeting, never officially proposed such a measure again. Zabriskie’s 1955 letter notes the negative publicity that would result from eliminating certain women’s events:

If women’s shotput--or gymnastics, discus, or javelin for that matter - is now dropped from the Olympic schedule it will look like the worst possible sportsmanship on the part of the free countries and equivalent to saying: ‘The Russians--or Mrs. Zatopek, or the Hungarians (who cleaned up in gymnastics at Helsinki)--can beat our girls so we won’t play.’ How the Communists would rub that in and say, ‘Why don’t the Americans have the women’s 100-metre dash and high jump dropped too, after their girls placed 1-2 in those events at Mexico City?’<sup>307</sup>

<sup>306</sup> Madeline Manning Mims, phone interview (January 26 and 28, 2007): 4.

<sup>307</sup> Letter from George Gray Zabriskie to Avery Brundage (April 5, 1955): 2 (Box 115: Subject File: IOC, Women Athletics, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois).



For their part, the Soviet Union's representatives tried to increase the number of competitions for women, giving their country and their communist allies more chances to win medals and highlight their superiority. Starting in 1955, the Soviet Union proposed adding basketball, volleyball, rowing, and speed skating to the women's Olympic program. Three years later, Konstantin Andrianov, IOC representative for the Soviet Union, began a campaign for women to participate in any sport holding official women's world championships. The vote on that proposition was pushed to after the 1960 Olympics. In 1961, Andrianov again proposed changing the wording of Rule 29 to read, "Women are allowed to compete in all the sports recognized by the IOC. in which it is provided by the rules of the International Federation concerned [sic]."<sup>308</sup> This would have included athletics, archery, basketball, canoeing, cycling, equestrian sports, fencing, gymnastics, handball, rowing, shooting, swimming and diving, volleyball, figure and speed skating, skiing, yachting, and the Fine Arts Program. Andrianov's proposition was defeated by a 26 to 2 vote. Still, Andrianov continued, over the years, to lobby for more Olympic events for women. In March 1971, he argued the following before the IOC Executive Commission:

It is necessary that women should have equal rights for participation in the Olympic Games. At the same time the International Olympic Committee must observe that all sports are equally represented in the Olympic program and no preference should be given to one or another sport at the Olympic Game. Taking into account the social importance of participation of women in sports generally and the great influence of their participation in the Olympic Games on the development of women's sport all over the world it is high time that women should be given equal rights to participate in the Olympics. Therefore I suggest that women should participate in those events at the Olympic Games, in which they compete at the official international championships. According to the present program such events are basketball, cycling, shooting, handball, and rowing.<sup>309</sup>

<sup>308</sup> 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOC, Athens (1961): Annex 4, Propositions.

<sup>309</sup> Procès Verbal de la Commission Exécutive du IOC, Lausanne (March 1971): Annex 21, 71-72.

Even though the Brundage and the IOC were not prepared, in the 1960s and early 1970s, to accept Andrianov's proposition and to open the door to women in such a significant way, it did agree that improvement concerning women's participation needed to take place. In 1968, the IOC set up a special group, Commission No. IV, to analyze and make recommendations concerning women's participation in the Olympics. The commission's report emphasized that "the disproportion between the participation of women and men in the Olympic Games is unjustifiable as it is."<sup>310</sup> It then argued that the IOC should encourage the participation of women in sports as a whole and in the Olympics particularly. To achieve that, the commission proposed "that no severer rules should limit the admission of sports for women and that any plan for reducing the size and volume of the present program should not be initiated by further limiting women's sports and events."<sup>311</sup>

Brundage did not want more women to compete in the Games; yet, Brundage was ready to do whatever it took for the games to retain their global and superior status. He therefore authorized the addition of certain events to the existing women's program, including volleyball (1964) and archery (1972).<sup>312</sup> The fate of women athletes was also discussed more often during IOC meetings, with debate often centered on how to increase women's participation without burdening too much the already heavy Olympic schedule. It was becoming clear that women's events were now an integral part of the Olympic Games and that the IOC should adapt and increase women's opportunities. It was too late for Brundage to stop this machine. This trend is evident in the IOC's official documents. In 1970, the report from the IOC/NOC Joint Commission IV stated:

<sup>310</sup> Procès Verbal de la Commission Exécutive du IOC, Commission of the Olympic Program (1968): Proposition 8, 6-7.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Basketball (1976), rowing (1976), team handball (1976), and shooting (1984) were also later on added.

“Commission IV is of the opinion that the participation of women in the Olympic Games is a matter which deserves most serious consideration. The moment is more than ripe to pass from a theoretical acknowledgement of the necessity to encourage the participation of women in sports and in the Olympic Games in particular--to the realization of this urgent problem.”<sup>313</sup>

This improvement was a direct result of the Cold War and its impact on gender relations and the function of sport in society. The growing Civil Rights Movement, however, also played an essential role. While this African American movement focused primarily on racial equality, it had important repercussions for female athletes, black and white. Historian Amy Bass used the 1968 Mexico City Games as a case study to highlight what she refers to as “the making of the black athlete.” In her work, she contends that the campaign to boycott the Games, named the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR), was a patriarchal enterprise that tried to overcome racial barriers while accepting or even reinforcing gender discrimination. She writes:

While the racism that the black community battles against makes political homogeneity appear inherently legitimate and concrete, the OPHR could not exist outside its own historical moment, in which social prescriptions of nation--as well as the nationalist strategies that attempted to reconstruct them--operated in gendered terms, ones that most often privileged men.<sup>314</sup>

Bass explains that when discrimination against several groups of people is in effect and when a grassroots political movement fights against such discriminatory practices, a “hierarchy of social priority” emerges.<sup>315</sup> Unfortunately for women, the OPHR’s priority was race and especially “placing the black male on equal footing with his white counterpart before dealing with the inequities faced by women--white and black.”<sup>316</sup> As

<sup>313</sup> Procès Verbal de la Commission Exécutive du IOC, Lausanne (February 1970) Report from the IOC/NOC Joint Commission IV, Annex 9, 66.

<sup>314</sup> Bass, *Not the Triumph but the Struggle*, 189.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

a result, even though African American women were increasingly present in the U.S. Olympic delegation, they were invisible in the OPHR. Wyomia Tyus, Barbara Ferrell, Madeline Manning, Doris Brown, Margaret Bailes, Jarvis Scott, and Mildrette Netter were all in Mexico City; yet none of them played a role or were asked to play a role in the movement to boycott the Games and fight racial discrimination.

While Bass is correct that the OPHR did not fight against gender discrimination and actually reinforced it by using the discriminatory gender prescriptions of the time within its own organization, civil rights agitation did indirectly help women. The African American Civil Rights movement led the way to the development of a growing movement for civil rights for minority groups, including women, gays and lesbians, and Native Americans. The 1960s also saw the birth of what is referred to as the counterculture movement, which social anthropologist Jentri Anders describes as a period when young Americans endorsed “freedom to explore one’s potential, freedom to create one’s self, freedom of personal expression, freedom from scheduling, freedom from rigidly defined roles and hierarchical statuses.”<sup>317</sup> The civil rights and the counterculture movements enabled or at least facilitated the emergence of a loud feminist voice demanding economic, political, and social rights. During this period when few American institutions or traditional norms were left unchallenged, several feminist studies were published and a few women’s groups were formed.<sup>318</sup> Through these publications and groups, feminists questioned the fundamental assumptions regarding gender roles in American society, including traditional views about women’s biological rights and

<sup>317</sup> Jentri Anders, *Beyond Counterculture: The Community of Mateel* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1990), 17.

<sup>318</sup> Feminist publications included Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*. Militant women’s groups included the Women’s Liberation Movement, the National Organization for Women, the National Women’s Political Caucus, the Equal Rights Amendment Ratification Council, and the Coalition of Labor Union Women.

sexuality. Feminists also demanded equal access to several critical American institutions previously dominated by men, including educational, political, economic, and socio-cultural institutions.

As Cahn explains, this specific historical context benefitted sportswomen: “Currents of political reform, women’s activism, and cultural innovation fostered a renewed excitement about women’s sport and an awareness of its feminist implications.”<sup>319</sup> Sportswomen could now make a political pitch to demand gender parity in the sport arena. They could also use the feminist rhetoric of the time to justify making their own decisions concerning their bodies, the athletic activities they wanted to engage in, and the level of competition they were physically fit for. Finally, the more advances women made in society, the harder it became for Brundage and the IOC to justify gender discrimination in the Olympic Movement. As social consciousness progressively evolved and the gender gap consequently shrank, Brundage had to adapt. Again, then, the historical circumstances forced Brundage to modify his stand about the minimal role women should play in the Olympics and instead, to be more tolerant of women’s growing presence in this major athletic event.

### **The passage of Title IX**

The civil rights, counterculture, and feminist movements that took over American society during the 1960s contributed significantly to political decisions favoring gender equality, including the passage of an Educational Act in 1972. Such decisions, which improved women’s opportunities and roles in society, had a profound impact on women’s

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<sup>319</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 249.

experiences and successes in the athletic world, including in the Olympic Games. Title IX of the Educational Act states: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance.”<sup>320</sup> This act improved the athletic opportunities, the quality of sport facilities, and the financial benefits for young girls and women. The statistics are impressive. A year before the passage of Title IX, about 295,000 girls participated in high school athletics, representing only 7 percent of the total number of athletes. At the collegiate level, fewer than 30,000 women competed, and women’s sports only received 2 percent of total athletic budgets. In contrast, by 2001 almost 2.8 million girls participated in high school athletics, representing 41.5 percent of all varsity athletes. At the collegiate level, more than 150,000 women competed, representing 43 percent of all athletes.<sup>321</sup> Title IX only concerns educational institutions receiving federal funding. Its impact, however, extended beyond that limited scope, reaching women in general. Title IX’s support of gender equality in federally funded institutions legitimized women’s athletic participation in a broader societal setting. As historian Susan Ware states, “over the years, the two words ‘Title IX’ have become practically synonymous with women’s athletics.”<sup>322</sup>

The following examples highlight the difference Title IX made in female athletes’ athletic careers. Donna De Varona, who competed in swimming prior to Title IX did not have many options because there were no athletic scholarships for women at the time:

In the winter of 1965, shortly after representing the United States in an international meet in Bremen, Germany, I decided to leave the sport I loved while I was still on top. I realized that without a collegiate program

<sup>320</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 250.

<sup>321</sup> Susan Ware, *Title IX- A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007), 1.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

to nurture my talent, I could not maintain a winning edge. My biggest concern as a 'washed up' Olympian was how to pay for my college education. There simply weren't sport scholarships for women--no matter how many gold medals they won.<sup>323</sup>

Anne Donovan and Nancy Hogshead-Makar, who were both older than De Varona, had a totally different experience.

Donovan, an Olympic basketball player in 1980, 1984, and 1988 and Olympic coach in 2008, explained the impact of Title IX on her life: "I'm a Title IX baby. I have four older sisters. One is two years older than me. She graduated in 1977 and I graduated in 1979. We were both equally good and tall. She had two scholarships to go to college; I had well over 200. So I saw first-hand the benefit of Title IX. My two older sisters did not benefit at all."<sup>324</sup> Hogshead-Makar, a swimming gold medalist at the 1984 Los Angeles Games, also recognized the importance of Title IX in shaping the future of women and sport in America. She explained that one day, after hearing De Varona speak about Title IX, she "realized that girls two years older than me did not have any scholarship to go to college. Two years later, I could go to any college I wanted to and this was because of Title IX."<sup>325</sup>

The impact of Title IX on these two female Olympians is indisputable. Without the opportunity to obtain a scholarship allowing them to continue their education while training in their respective sports, they may never have gone to the Olympics. During an interview, Hogshead-Makar stated this clearly: "I think Title IX is a phenomenal piece of legislation. I owe my medals to this piece of legislation. Without it, I would not have got

<sup>323</sup> In *More than a Game: One Woman's Fight for Gender Equity in Sport*, Cynthia Lee Pemberton (Boston, MA: Northeastern University, 2002). Foreword by Donna De Varona, XIV.

<sup>324</sup> Anne Donovan, phone interview (February 14, 2007): 6.

<sup>325</sup> Nancy Hogshead-Makar, phone interview (February 23, 2007): 5.

any scholarship and that is what kept me in the sport after high school.”<sup>326</sup> Without Title IX, female athletes making it to the Games may also not have been such successful Olympians. The access to athletic facilities and equipment, to experienced coaches developing programs specifically for them, and to competitions on a regular basis indeed helped American sportswomen improve their performances, thus allowing them to be more competitive in international competitions, including the Olympic Games.

The passage of Title IX and the impact of this piece of legislation on female athletes show that by the 1970s, when Avery Brundage stepped out of the IOC leadership, the situation for American women who wanted to play sports competitively had significantly evolved from the beginning of his presidency. Even though he consistently claimed that women should not participate in the Games, should have their own Games, or should only be allowed in the events appropriate for them, and even though he did propose several times curtailing women’s access to the Olympics, women nevertheless made progress. From today’s standpoint, it is clear that the historical circumstances, including the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the feminist movement benefited sportswomen in many ways. Despite Brundage’s opinion on female athleticism, during his tenure, women began to enter the Olympics in increasing numbers. This improvement led to the appearance of a new obstacle. As women’s Olympic competitions slowly came to play a more important role in the Olympic Games, the omnipresent debate about females’ athletic abilities and physical appearances took on even greater proportions and special regulations concerning women’s events started to be discussed and implemented. The most controversial one was the “Femininity Test.”

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<sup>326</sup> Nancy Hogshead-Makar, phone interview (February 23, 2007): 7.



## Chapter 5 – A New Obstacle: The Femininity Test

Femininity tests were conducted, in different ways, from 1968 to 1996. This aspect of Olympic history has still not been well researched. This chapter intends to fill that gap, highlighting the reasons behind these tests, the way they were conducted, and the impact they had on female athletes.

### **Questioning female athletes' gender**

As emphasized previously, during the twentieth-century, female athletes were expected to look and act feminine at all times. The sexuality of athletes who were not particularly feminine, or who behaved in ways considered masculine--by excelling in masculine sports, for example--was often questioned, as in the case of Babe Didrikson during the 1930-40s. In the popular mind, gender was, and to an extent still is, an “either/or” concept. Canadian historian Sarah Teetzel explains that “individuals utilize binary thinking when they classify people or entities into two jointly exhaustive and/or mutually exclusive groups, and then fail to recognize that the resulting bifurcation oversimplifies reality and ignores the spectrum of positions that fall between the resulting polar alternatives.”<sup>327</sup> She adds that forcing athletes to choose between male or female competitions “fails to recognize and take into consideration the spectrum of individuals who fall somewhere between male and female, including the 0.1-1% of the global

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<sup>327</sup> Sarah Teetzel, “Equality, Equity, and Inclusion: Issues in Women and Transgendered Athletes’ Participation at the Olympics,” in *Cultural Imperialism in Action: Critiques in the Global Olympic Trust--The Proceedings of the Eighth International Symposium for Olympic Research*, Nigel B. Crowther, Robert K. Barney, and Michael K. Heine, eds. (Ontario, Canada: Centre for Olympic Studies, University of Western Ontario, 2006): 331.

population born with ambiguous genitalia, those who have changed or transcended their sex assigned at birth, and those who identify with a sex other than female or male.”<sup>328</sup>

Society, then, defines people as male or female and expects each of them to conform to certain prescribed norms. Female athletes who deviate from these norms are considered “abnormal.” Even though the first gender verification tests were implemented in the late 1960s, the questioning of female athletes’ gender began in the 1930s. As Teetzel notes, “No less than ten athletes competing in the women’s category were publicly accused of being men and masquerading as women in media outlets between 1932 and the introduction of standardized sex testing in the 1968 Olympic Games.”<sup>329</sup> The timeframe is not accidental. Rumors and accusations began during the 1930s because it is when women began to seriously challenge the homosocial nature of the Olympic Games. Even though women had competed in some Olympic events since 1900, they first only did so in sports considered feminine. The number of women competitors was also insignificant at the time. During the late 1920s, the situation changed. Women officially entered track and field events, the ultimate masculine sport at the time, during the 1928 Amsterdam Games. In addition, more women now competed and more women lobbied for greater access to Olympic events for women. The increased visibility of strong, physically powerful and active female athletes in a male domain posed a threat to the definition of masculinity that, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, depended on difference from and superiority over women. Women’s presence, then, had to be contained or marginalized. Making sure women only competed in sports specifically labeled as feminine was an easy way to contain them; questioning their

<sup>328</sup> Teetzel, “Equality, Equity, and Inclusion: Issues in Women and Transgendered Athletes’ Participation at the Olympics,” in *Cultural Imperialism in Action*, Crowther, Barney, and Heine, eds., 332.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

gender when excelling in masculine sports was an efficient way to marginalize these athletes.

The first major case occurred during the 1936 Berlin Olympics, when Polish journalists questioned the femininity of gold-medal American sprinter Helen Stevens, who had beaten Polish-American Stella Walsh. Those implications were based primarily on her physical appearance--she was six feet tall and seemed to run like a man. In response, the German officials issued a statement announcing that Stevens passed a “sex check.”

Following those Games, rumors began to circulate about men masquerading as women. But in fact, there has only been one documented case of a man pretending to be a woman at the Olympics. In 1957, Herman, a.k.a. “Dora,” Ratjen revealed publicly that in the 1930s, he had posed as a German woman for three years. He explained that he was asked to do this by officials of the Nazi Youth Movement who associated athletic victories, in men and women competitions, with social and political superiority. Ratjen qualified for the final of the high jump during the Berlin Games--finishing fourth to three women--and set a world record in that event during a smaller meet in 1938. Even though this case, confirming that such a masquerade could indeed happen, only became public knowledge in the mid-1950s, it shows that during the 1930s, the tensions surrounding women’s Olympic events increased and that questioning female athletes’ gender had then become part of the Games.

Avery Brundage addressed this issue in a letter sent to IOC President Count Baillet-Latour and distributed to all the IOC members. This letter, written in 1936, is critical because it demonstrates that women’s gender had, by the 1930s, become a source of debate. Brundage began the letter by reprinting the message he received from a sport follower. It read:

As an interested sport fan and one who upholds the participation of feminine athletes in athletics I feel has been [sic] allowed to take part in a field where she (?) doesn't belong. I saw and spoke to her when she took part in an exhibition meet here. Her deep bass voice, her height and 10<sup>1/2</sup> inch shoes surely proclaim her a border-line case if ever there was one. I feel she has never put forth her best efforts in the events because if she did, the entire public would take a great deal more notice. Judging from her past performances, she will, without a doubt, be a member of the United States Olympic team and if this is permitted the normal American girl will certainly be misrepresented. Something should be done to prevent this and rules should be made to keep the competitive games for normal feminine girls and not monstrosities.

This note highlights several typical issues of the time concerning female athletes.

First, this sport fan is clearly questioning the gender of one of the American sportswomen about to participate in the Olympics. Second, he/she is doing so because of the masculine physical appearance of the female athlete in question and because her athletic performances are impressive. Third, the sport fan is therefore concluding that this athlete is deviant and that her participation makes the competition unfair for "normal" athletes. He/she then expects the USOC and IOC to intervene to ensure that only "real" women are allowed in the women's events at the Olympics.

Brundage's comments to Latour are also revealing of the increasing questioning of women's gender and growing need to develop a system to address this issue:

I don't know if hermaphrodites are as common today as they evidently were two thousand years ago judging from the many statues which appear in museums of classical art, but I do know that the question of the eligibility of various female (?) athletes in several sports has been raised because of apparent characteristics of the opposite sex. Recently considerable publicity was given in the American press to the case of an English athlete who after several years of competition as a girl announced herself (?) as a boy. Perhaps some action has already been taken on this

subject; if not, it might be well to insist on a medical examination before participation in the Olympic Games.<sup>330</sup>

The link between femininity and gender is clearly established in this letter, where Brundage implied that women who looked masculine may actually have been men. Gender, then, was not at this point perceived as something defined by chromosome numbers, as it came to be in the 1970s. During the 1930s, the defining gender factor was physical appearance. If an athlete looked and behaved in ways considered feminine, then that athlete's gender was not questioned; she had to be a woman. If an athlete showcased some masculine characteristics, including muscle and athletic abilities, then that athlete could not possibly be a woman; she had to be sexually deviant or be cheating. To prevent this situation, Brundage suggested that women go through a medical examination before being allowed to compete in the Olympics.

During the 1940s and 1950s, more debates and more suspicions followed. The historical context played a significant role in perpetrating and accentuating these rumors and accusations. The onset of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War transformed an athletic performance into a sign that the successful athlete's political system and nation were superior to others. This gave more incentive for cheating. The athlete winning a competition was an instant hero and his/her nation shined. Some athletes and nations then did not hesitate to use drugs to enhance their performances. Because the level of competition for women's events was lower than for men, the possibility of seeing men masquerade as women to ensure success was not a paranoiac idea. In that context, female athletes, and especially those not confirming to the cultural norms about femininity, came under intense scrutiny. Dominant eastern bloc women athletes who displayed strength and a masculine appearance particularly became the

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<sup>330</sup> Avery Brundage to Count Henri Baillet Latour, no source (1936) printed in "The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletes," Henson Leigh, 13.

focus of attention. This continued into the 1960s. Tamara and Irina Press, two outstanding Soviet track and field athletes, were for instance often said to be male imposters. Between 1959 and 1965, they won five gold medals and set twenty-six world records. These achievements, plus their masculine appearance, virtually ensured that their gender would be questioned.

Some female athletes, too, wondered about the gender of certain competitors in the women's events. Madeline Manning Mims tells this story:

I was warming up and I saw a male participant and I came back and told the guys on the U.S. team that they had better check the 200 meter because a guy was warming up for it. They told me that they were not running until hours later. One guy went to check and came back laughing, saying "that guy you saw is a girl." She was getting ready for her 200 meter race. I was five meters away and I could not see the difference. She was so muscular, looked like a male in her chest, had a light moustache, her hair was cut short. I looked at her in the face and could not tell. She broke the world record in 800 meter [sic] and then she got out really quick.<sup>331</sup>

In another instance, Lesley Bush, had doubts about some female competitors: "My parents taught me that everybody is as good as anybody else. But sometimes, I realize that certain things are not all right. In 1968, some female athletes--especially in the shotput competition--were very muscular. One day, I sat behind them. They were not just muscular women, they were unusually large and had very low voices."<sup>332</sup> The increasing questioning forced the IOC to take action. It decided to adopt the femininity test that the IAAF, for similar reasons, had recently implemented.

<sup>331</sup> Madeline Manning Mims, phone interview (January 26 and 28, 2007): 14.

<sup>332</sup> Lesley Bush, phone interview (February 7, 2007): 7.

### **The IAAF's implementation of femininity tests**

The IAAF conducted the first femininity test during the 1966 European Track and Field Championship in Budapest. The IAAF was the first sport organization to implement such gender verification procedures because track and field was the most controversial sport for women, showcasing several characteristics defined as masculine, including strength and power. The IAAF, then, argued that a test was necessary to ensure that competitors in female track and field events were indeed females. Before competing, then, female athletes had to walk naked in front of three gynecologists. Cheryl Cole commented on that test:

Although the literature offers no easy way to understand precisely “what” the gynecologists were assessing, their method implied that “true sex” was there to be seen. The judges could “see” what they were looking for. Perhaps they were looking for familiar and easily recognized bodily differences that mark off female bodies from male bodies. Perhaps they were searching for bodily anomalies--signs that betrayed the female body, erasing basic and fundamental distinctions between the sexes.<sup>333</sup>

The fact that this gender verification test only relied on a visual examination implies that IAAF officials believed that an athlete's gender could be determined by the way that athlete looked. Another explanation, though not stated, is that the IAAF wanted, via gender testing, to send a clear message to female athletes about acceptable standards of femininity. In other words, women were already competing in this masculine sport and it was too late for the IAAF to eradicate that; it could, however, control to some extent the kind of women competing, thus safeguarding prevalent cultural norms about femininity and masculinity.

<sup>333</sup> Cheryl L. Cole, “One Chromosome Too Many?” in *The Olympics at the Millennium: Powers, Politics and the Games*, Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 128.

Two hundred and forty-three athletes went through this visual check. All of them were found to be females. Certain athletes, though, withdrew from the competition, which led some people to assume that they did so to avoid the test. Declining to be tested was thus interpreted as a confession of guilt. Interestingly enough, Tamara and Irina Press, the two Soviet sisters, were part of a group of eastern bloc athletes who, without any explanations, failed to appear for the test. *The Chicago Daily News* commented: “Sports-page readers will remember the Soviet Union’s Tamara Press, world discus and shot-put record holder, who is built on the lines of a locomotive, and Romanian high jumper Yolanda Balas, who looks like a muscular giraffe. Neither has competed since the sex test requirement was announced by the IAAF--and neither has offered to take the test.”<sup>334</sup>

For the 1966 Commonwealth Games held in Jamaica, the IAAF implemented a more thorough test. This time, the gynecologists not only looked at the naked female athletes walking in front of them; they also performed pelvic examinations, adding a tactile internal exam to the visual, external one. Mary Peters, English pentathlon gold medalist at the 1972 Munich Olympics, described this test as “the most crude and degrading experience of my life.” In her autobiography, she explained: “I was ordered to lie on the couch and pull my knees up. The doctors then proceeded to undertake an examination which, in modern parlance, amounted to a grope. Presumably they were searching for hidden testes. They found none and I left.”<sup>335</sup>

<sup>334</sup> “The Great Olympics Genes Count--When a Gal’s not a Gal?” *Chicago Daily News* (May 3, 1967) – Box 99 - IOC Commissions and Committees - Medical Commission 1966-1969, 1970-1973, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois.

<sup>335</sup> Quoted in “Last Olympics for the Sex Test?” Gail Vines, *New Scientist* (July 4, 1992).



### **The case of Ewa Klobuskoska**

During the 1967 European Cup track and field events, the IAAF adopted a newly developed technology--sex chromosome screening. Though no record could be located stating clearly why the IAAF decided to switch its testing method from visual and tactile to chromosomal, it seems that issues of credibility concerning test results may have played a role. With the Cold War in the background, the IAAF certainly did not want the Soviet Unions and its allies to claim that the gender verification tests were used as a tool to keep talented eastern female athletes out of the competitions. Visual and tactile examinations were not the best to refute such potential accusations, relying heavily on the interpretations and objectivity of the medial team performing the tests. Science, on the other hand, is not often questioned because scientific language has been given more authority in society than almost all types of languages. Being able to scientifically confirm the real gender of an athlete therefore seemed a more appropriate and less objectionable way to approach the gender issue.

Ewa Klobukowska, a Polish athlete, was the first to fail this test: her gene type was XXY rather than the usual female XX. In the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, she had won the gold medal in the women's 4x100 meter relay and the bronze in the 100 meter sprint. In 1965, she set a world record in the 100 meters and the next year, at the European Athletics Championships in Budapest, she won two golds in the 100 and the 4x100 relay, and the silver in the 200 meter sprint. Because she failed the femininity test, she had to withdraw from the European Cup and the IAAF barred her from all future competitions. In addition, the IAAF also decided that "her name will be stricken from the record book and ultimately mean she will have to give back the two medals--a gold and a bronze--she

won in the 1964 Olympics.”<sup>336</sup> When commenting on all of this, Klobuskovska, who later got married and delivered a healthy son, declared: “It’s a dirty and stupid thing to do to me. I know what I am and how I feel. I’ve been very aware of all the unhealthy sensationalism in the press, but I wasn’t expecting this.”<sup>337</sup> The IOC, shortly after, decided to revoke her Olympic medals. In the world of sport, then, Klobuskovska was no longer a champion; she became the first girl who failed the sex test.

Several people boldly denounced these decisions. It is interesting to note that the criticisms were not similar: some were upset at the humiliation and social insensitivity involved with the sex testing while others claimed that the method used to check female athletes’ femininity was not accurate or effective. In other words, some people denounced the actual idea of verifying the gender of female athletes while others approved of the test but not the specific chromosomal approach. This clearly indicates that the popular discourse about gender verification was not unanimous and that the opinions on the topic were quite varied and at times opposite. The *Chicago Daily News*, for example, stated: “Ewa’s Polish teammates are frank. They say she’s a girl with ‘some hormone trouble’ who should have been given treatments instead of being exposed to public competition by point-hungry sports officials.”<sup>338</sup> Another article in the *Chicago Daily News* quoted a sportsman saying that “Ewa was a cruel victim of the greed of our track and field officials. It is the fault of their bloody chase after points which they pursue, disregarding us as human beings.”<sup>339</sup> A letter sent to the U.S.

<sup>336</sup> “Records of Polish Girl Sprinter Who Flunked Sex Test Barred,” unknown newspaper (1969) - Box 99 – IOC Commissions and Committees, Medical Commissions, 1966-1969, 1970-1973, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> “The Great Olympics Genes Count--When a Gal’s not a Gal?” *Chicago Daily News* (May 3, 1967) – Box 99 - IOC Commissions and Committees - Medical Commission 1966-1969, 1970-1973, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois.

<sup>339</sup> *Chicago Daily News* (September 19, 196 - the exact year and title of the article could not be read) - Box 99 - IOC Commissions and Committees - Medical Commission 1966-1969, 1970-1973, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois.

Olympic Committee, also reflects the reactions of many on learning about the sex test and Klobukowska's story. The writer asked for his/her letter to be transmitted to the IOC and then discussed what happened with Klobukowska. After stating that no matter what gender Klobukowska is in the end, he/she criticized the way the IOC handled the case: "This seems absolutely outrageous, disgraceful, disgusting, revolting. To relegate an honest, sincere, conscientious woman athlete to some sort of nameless half-way in between limbo, neither man nor woman. To drag her name through the mud, the muck, and the mire."<sup>340</sup> The writer then blamed the system used to check women's gender, arguing that we should not rely on such inadequate medical test as chromosome counting to determine one's gender. Instead, that writer advocated for a "simple visual examination, done in a discrete way by female observers. That's all that's needed."<sup>341</sup> It is interesting to note that the writer did not object to gender verification for female athletes; he/she just complained about the way the IOC performed these tests. His reasoning about gender was also extremely binary; one had to be either a female or a male and there was no need to count chromosomes to know in which category a person belonged to: "There are varying degrees of masculinity and femininity, emotionally and in spirit, but it's still one or the other, physically. All they have to do is LOOK."<sup>342</sup> The writer then stated that if his/her daughter was an aspiring Olympian, he/she would object to such degrading chromosome testing. He/she then concluded that if this was what the IOC stood for and how it was going to treat athletes, then the United States should stop participating in this competition: "If THIS is what the OLYMPICS comes down to, then

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<sup>340</sup> Letter to the U.S. Olympic Committee (February 27, 1969) - no name is indicated. Box 99 - IOC Commissions and Committees - Medical Commissions 1966-1969, 1970-73, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

let's just forget the whole thing. Give it up.<sup>343</sup> Despite such criticism, the IOC followed the example of the IAAF and decided to also implement some gender verification tests.

### **The IOC's implementation of femininity tests**

In 1967, the IOC established a medical commission composed of eight experts and professors. During their first meeting, these specialists agreed that an elite competition such as the Olympics should adopt sex testing to ensure that only women would participate in the women's events. When questioned about the motives behind the implementation of sex testing in the 1960s, Prince Alexandre de Merode, Chairman of the IOC Medical Commission in the 1980s, responded: "It is not our aim to issue decisions "ex cathedra" concerning the masculinity or femininity of persons participating in the Olympic Games. We simply wished to put a stop to the development of a particularly immoral form of cheating which had been spreading insidiously within high-level competition sport."<sup>344</sup> Since there are no official reports confirming such "immoral form of cheating," one can question the validity of this explanation. It seems that rumors and accusations of cheating were more probable than actual cheating. Merode in fact confirmed this, stating: "incessant denunciations having their origin in the Olympic Village, accompanied by persistent rumours widely echoed by the media, were besmirching sport and the reputation of the persons concerned."<sup>345</sup> Merode here mentioned the media, thus showing that part of the problem was how track and field female athletes were portrayed and talked about in the media and the impact this had on

<sup>343</sup> Letter to the U.S. Olympic Committee (February 27, 1969) - no name is indicated. Box 99 - IOC Commissions and Committees - Medical Commissions 1966-1969, 1970-73, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois.

<sup>344</sup> Prince Alexandre de Merode, written statement (1987) personal files - reprinted in "Sex/Gender Verification in International Sport," Alison Carlson, *Women's Sports Foundation* (1994): 4.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

the institution of sport and on society in general. Finally, Merode explained that “we were informed that in certain regions, a systematic search was taking place for young people presenting sexual anomalies, which were then knowingly aggravated. It therefore seemed to us imperative to put a stop to these shameful practices.”<sup>346</sup> Merode did not name any nation; still, considering the political context of the time, it seems fair to assume that Merode was referring to the Soviet Union and its allies. The sex tests, from that angle, appear to have been implemented to ensure that the communist nations were not cheating to claim more victories and dominate the western nations in the Olympic arena.

The IOC also argued that if a female athlete possessed a Y chromosome, then she would have an advantage over females having two XX chromosomes. As Eduardo Hay, the IOC Medical Commission Vice Chairman, stated, “the investigation for femininity verifies that the athletes are competing on an equal physical basis. It would be unfair in women’s competition to allow advantage to an athlete with masculine characteristics.”<sup>347</sup> Even though the official explanations for the sex tests only mentioned quieting rumors, preventing cheating, and preserving equality between competitors, there seems to have been some ulterior motives behind the launching of gender verification tests. First, the Soviet Union’s athletic victories had to be contained. Second, society was still struggling with notions of femininity and masculinity. The femininity tests, then, could also have reflected the IAAF and the IOC’s effort to protect the femininity of women involved in sports deemed masculine. The words chosen when justifying the first sex test during the 1968 Grenoble Winter Games support this interpretation. Reporting on the work of the

<sup>346</sup> Prince Alexandre de Merode, written statement (1987) personal files - reprinted in “Sex/Gender Verification in International Sport,” Alison Carlson, *Women’s Sports Foundation* (1994): 4.

<sup>347</sup> *Journal of American Medical Association* (August 28, 1972) - reprinted in “Sex/Gender Verification in International Sport,” Alison Carlson, *Women’s Sports Foundation* (1994): 4.

medical commission in Grenoble, Dr. Thiebault, a member of that commission, declared: “The IOC Medical Commission’s activities at the Grenoble Games were carried out in two spheres: controlling the sex of women and controlling doping.”<sup>348</sup> The wording “controlling the sex of women” was later changed to “investigation of femininity” and finally “gender verification.” The intention to control the sex of women clearly demonstrates that these tests were not simply about preventing cheating, quieting rumors, and ensuring fair athletic competitions; they were about women’s bodies and the prevalent socio-cultural construction of norms and ideals of masculinity and femininity. In other words, the tests could have been a way to ensure that these existing gender standards remained in place and that men, therefore, remained in a position of superiority.

At the 1968 Games, the test consisted of a chromosome exam called a buccal smear, which involved scrapping the inside of the athlete’s cheek. This test seemed an improvement, since it was less degrading than the earlier visual and tactile tests implemented by the IAAF. It meant, however, that the criteria for being recognized as a woman had evolved: “No longer was the presence of female genitalia sufficient to ensure a competitor was a woman; evidence at the genetic level showing each cell in an athlete’s body contained XX chromosomes was required to prove an athlete was a woman.”<sup>349</sup>

This shows that progressively, the medical team working on gender verifications acknowledged that the situation was more complicated than previously thought. One could not necessarily associate the existence of a male or female genitalia to the corresponding gender. This medical body, then, accepted that appearance and scientific findings could be conflicting concerning gender. It was not, though, ready to admit that

<sup>348</sup> Quoted in Sarah Teetzel, “Equality, Equity, and Inclusion: Issues in Women and Transgendered Athletes’ Participation at the Olympics,” in *Cultural Imperialism in Action*, Crowther, Barney, and Heine, eds., 334.

<sup>349</sup> Teetzel, “Equality, Equity, and Inclusion: Issues in Women and Transgendered Athletes’ Participation at the Olympics,” in *Cultural Imperialism in Action*, Crowther, Barney, and Heine, eds., 334.

the binary system that identified a human being as either male or female might be inadequate, failing to recognize levels of femaleness or maleness in between the two extremities. It continued, then, to classify athletes according to the strictly defined male/female dichotomy.

Females who presented the expected XX chromosomes were given a “femininity card” issued by the IOC. That card was an official statement that the athlete in question was a woman. A female whose chromosomes deviated from the standard, however, was considered “not female enough” and consequently not eligible to participate in the women’s Olympic events--“failing the test was thus the equivalent of being denied the right to call one’s self a woman in the sporting world.”<sup>350</sup> Dr. Thiebault’s language to describe such abnormalities highlights how negatively the medical commission members viewed female athletes who did not meet the requirements of the commission: “I consider that our duty as doctors comes before everything, even Olympics, and that if we find such hybrid beings, we must if possible treat them and at the very least, help them to accept their fate as we ourselves do when we discover a shortcoming of some kind in ourselves.”<sup>351</sup>

The use of chromosome tests, however, was not unanimous. The medical establishment rapidly argued that this testing method was not an appropriate option. Albert de la Chapelle, a leading Finnish geneticist, asked the IOC early on to stop its buccal smear tests. He argued that “it caught women with genetic abnormalities bearing no relation to a conceivable unfair advantage, while it failed to detect up to 90% of the women who could have such ‘advantage,’ the majority of whom would have normal sex

<sup>350</sup> Teetzel, “Equality, Equity, and Inclusion: Issues in Women and Transgendered Athletes’ Participation at the Olympics,” in *Cultural Imperialism in Action*, Crowther, Barney, and Heine, eds., 334.

<sup>351</sup> Quoted in Teetzel, “Equality, Equity, and Inclusion: Issues in Women and Transgendered Athletes’ Participation at the Olympics,” in *Cultural Imperialism in Action*, Crowther, Barney, and Heine, eds., 334-335.

chromosomes but derive advantage from doping or from having any number of other medical/genetic conditions.”<sup>352</sup> He argued persuasively that tests could easily be misinterpreted, leading to false positive and false negative results, and that the genetic anomalies it detected did not give the athlete a competitive advantage. If the IOC really implemented gender verification testing to ensure fair competition between athletes of the same gender, the buccal smear was useless, flagging athletes who did not enjoy any competitive advantage while failing to detect those who may have benefitted from such advantages. Scientifically, then, the sex tests did not address the purpose stated by the IOC. Dr. Keith Moore, Chairman of the Department of Anatomy at the University of Manitoba, also objected to the gender verification test:

No single index or criterion can signify the appropriate sex for an individual. Unreasonable dependence on buccal [cheek] smears and karyotypes [chromosome patterns] for determining the sexual identity of athletes can lead to unjustified declarations of ineligibility for sex reasons [because the tests] are merely indicators of sex, and should not be used as absolute criteria of sexual identity.<sup>353</sup>

Moore, then, believed that even though chromosomal tests were obviously more scientific than the original visual gender examinations, these tests were as faulty because they relied on a very rigid binary dichotomy. Where one was first confirmed to be female if one appeared feminine enough, one was now declared female if one had the standard amount and category of chromosomes. For Moore, determining the gender of a person was significantly more complicated than this because it was not about chromosomes; it was about sexual identity which relied on chromosomal count and physical appearance but also on the way one was raised, one identified oneself, and one was legally registered as. And for all of that to be taken into account, Moore concluded,

<sup>352</sup> Quoted in “Sex/Gender Verification in International Sport,” Alison Carlson, *Women’s Sports Foundation* (1994): 5.

<sup>353</sup> “Accuracy of Sex Tests Questioned by Doctor,” unknown Chicago newspaper (unknown date) - Box 85, IOC Meetings 1968-1969, 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the IOC, Avery Brundage Collection, University of Illinois.



more than one test was necessary. This explains why both the American Medical Association and the American College of Physicians, among others, have repeatedly asked the IOC to change its testing methods.

The *New Scientist*, in a 1992 article, reexamined the issues emerging from these tests. It first explained that molecular geneticists had, for a long time, agreed that gender is not as simple as counting how many X and Y chromosomes a person has. It then argued that a woman can present a XY combination and yet appear and behave as any other women. Accordingly to this article, the presence of X and Y chromosomes, which happened in approximately one out of 500 sportswomen, is due to a medical condition called androgen insensitivity syndrome, otherwise referred to as testicular feminization. It then stated that even though these women' bodies may produce more testosterone than the average female, they are not aware of it and they are not benefiting from it because their cells do not respond to that increased hormone level. It concluded that these women might actually even be at a disadvantage since taking anabolic steroids to become more muscular, a common practice among athletes, would have no effect on them. "Yet they would fail the IOC's "femininity control" test and probably abandon sport."<sup>354</sup>

With a few exceptions, the reaction of female athletes to the sex tests was ironically rather positive. First of all, most saw these tests as an effort by the IOC to eliminate cheating and unfair competition and thus in their best interests. Second, the media was prone to publishing articles insinuating that female athletes who performed well in manly sports and who seemed masculine were in fact males. These athletes' performances, honesty, and sexual identities were being directly challenged. For them passing the sex test proved to the world that their abilities and gender were legitimate. Such athletes may

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<sup>354</sup> Vines, "Last Olympics for the Sex Test?"

consequently have welcomed the sex tests. Third, for female athletes, the test represented a simple formality--they would easily pass the test and be done with it.

The response of female athletes to the implementation of the diverse IOC gender verification tests suggests that women athletes lacked a critical gender consciousness. They apparently identified themselves as athletes first and women after. This might explain why they supported, or at least did not vocally opposed, sex testing. These women saw the benefits of such practices for athletes, guaranteeing fair competition, but not the derogatory aspects involved for women. It seems, then, that when the gender tests were first introduced, the ideals of the 1960s feminist movement, which insisted on women's control over their bodies, had not resonated with female athletes.

During the 1970s, a few female athletes seemed to have complained, but mostly informally and mostly about the humiliation that females who failed the sex tests suffered when the media got hold of these stories. The IOC then agreed to maintain confidentiality in the case of a failed sex test, allowing the athlete to withdraw from competition with an imaginary injury. Most athletes chose to remain silent rather than have their names and previous achievements questioned throughout the world. This partly explains why the tests continued to be administered without much opposition. Another explanation is that female athletes did not dare lobbying for the end of such tests on feminist grounds because it could have been interpreted as a sign that they had something to hide. That position, in itself, would then have ensured that other athletes, sport administrators, and the media would most likely question their gender publicly. It was only during the 1980s that an athlete brought the gender tests to national and international scrutiny.

### **The case of Maria Patino**

Maria Jose Martinez Patino, a twenty-four year old Spanish hurdler, chose to fight the IOC's decision publicly and legally. This case took place in 1985, years after the implementation of sex testing, and after women's status in society had already dramatically improved. Patino, who failed the sex test during the 1985 World University Games in Japan, had already passed the femininity test in 1983 before competing in the Helsinki World Championship. But in 1985, she forgot to bring her "femininity card" and had to be retested. This time, she failed. The doctors told her that genetically, she was a man. This, again, shows how extremely binary our thinking about gender was during the mid-1980s. This doctor automatically concluded that Patino was a man because she did not have the correct number and category of chromosomes. The issue of sexual identity, which despite an abnormal chromosomal count would allow Patino to remain a female in the eyes of society, was not in his radar at the time. Without more testing, without consultations with other medical experts, and without any sensitivity, this doctor told Patino that her career as a female athlete was over because she was a man. Patino later explained how she felt when hearing the news: "I could barely comprehend what was happening. I was scared and ashamed, but at the same time angry, because I couldn't see how my body was different from the other girls."<sup>355</sup> Patino was encouraged to fake an injury during the warm-up. She explained: "I was crying, but not for my foot. I had to sit in the stands, watching the other girls run my race. And I still had another week to spend in Japan with this horrible secret. Everyone from my dorm was sightseeing and having fun, but I stayed alone in my room. I had no one to talk to."<sup>356</sup>

<sup>355</sup> Quoted in "When is a Woman not a Woman?" Alison Carlson, *Women's Sports and Fitness* (March 1991): 25-26.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Following that traumatic experience, Patino went back to Spain, once more keeping her painful secret. She did not even tell her parents or her best friends. She did, however, consult an endocrinologist, who confirmed that she suffered from a chromosome anomaly. In the first article focusing on Patino's story, Alison Carlson explains that Patino was indeed

conceived with XY chromosomes and developed testes, but a genetic mutation caused a complete and permanent inability to respond to testosterone. Without testosterone, a fetus will always become female (Maria's testes were internal and have since atrophied). She has no uterus and is sterile, but she has female genitalia, feminine body proportions and normal sexual response.<sup>357</sup>

After obtaining that medical information and despite the fact that she had to withdraw from the World University Games in Japan, Patino continued to train for the upcoming indoor season. At that point, she had been asked not to compete in Japan but the IAAF and the IOC had not officially banned her from competitions. And because she faked an injury, nobody but the Spanish athletic officials and the IAAF officials were aware of Patino's medical situation. Patino, knowing that she was a woman, thought she could continue competing. Days before the event, though, the Spanish track and field federation told her that she would no longer be able to compete in official meets. Patino decided to show up at the event anyway, arguing "I knew I was a woman--in the eyes of medicine, God and most of all, in my own eyes. If I hadn't been an athlete, my femininity would never have been questioned."<sup>358</sup> Still not banned by the IAAF, Patino ran and won. At this point though, she knew the story was going to become public so she prepared her family and friends. It first appeared in *El Pais*, Madrid's most popular newspaper. The result was drastic: she lost her scholarship and was expelled from the

<sup>357</sup> Quoted in "When is a Woman not a Woman?" Carlson, 26.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

national athletic residence, her coach was told not to train her anymore, her fiancé left her, the Spanish track and field federation struck all her records and titles, and she was banned from sports competition for life.

Carlson's coverage of Patino's story is fascinating because it not only relates the facts about what happened to Patino; it also demonstrates the emotional trauma of such an experience. Patino told Carlson: "They threw me onto the street at the stroke of a pen. I was erased from the map, as if I had never existed. I gave twelve years to sports; it never came easily. I was no "superwoman." If I had any advantage it was from my mind, not my body."<sup>359</sup> The IOC and the Spanish track and field federation left her without a home or a job. She had to live with a couple of friends who did not desert her and had to take several odd jobs to make ends meet. Still Patino was determined to set the record straight: "I knew that I was a woman, and that my genetic difference gave me no unfair physical advantage. I could hardly pretend to be a man; I have breasts and a vagina. I never cheated. I fought my disqualification."<sup>360</sup>

Albert de la Chapelle, a Finnish geneticist who had heard of the case and opposed chromosome testing, contacted Patino and offered his support. Patino also received several letters of support from two people who were upset about what happened to her and wanted to help in any way they could. One was Alison Carlson, an American track and field coach and journalist. Carlson helped Patino open up about her experience and publish that story in the press. The other person was a Spanish professor who spent time gathering all the medical evidence against chromosome testing and sent these scientific findings to the IOC Medical Commission. This professor argued that Patino's case should be reviewed during the next commission meeting scheduled in Seoul in 1988.

<sup>359</sup> Quoted in "When is a Woman not a Woman?" Carlson, 28.

<sup>360</sup> Maria Patino, "Personal Account: A Woman Tried and Tested," *Medicine and Sport Journal* (December 2005): S38.

The commission agreed. After hearing about this case, the IOC decided that based on new medical evidence, Patino was indeed a female without any specific advantage and was therefore once more allowed to enter women's athletic events. Her records and titles were also reinstated. Three months later, Patino was officially re-qualified for international competition. She was given a new femininity card so she would not have to be retested in the future.

Though Patino's story helped advance the debate about sex testing, it was a traumatic and costly experience for her. She later commented: "I paid a high price for my licence--my story was told, dissected, and discussed in a very public way--and my victory was bittersweet. After three years away from sports, my momentum was lost."<sup>361</sup> Patino did go back to training and competitions but she failed to qualify for the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona by ten hundredths of a second. She then put an end to her athletic career and tried to focus on the positive outcome of this story: "I have helped other sportswomen with genetic variance participate without fear and my experience has made me stronger; having had my womanliness tested--literally and figuratively--I suspect I have a surer sense of my femininity than many women."<sup>362</sup>

## **The evolution of the femininity tests**

### **The IAAF's working group**

Progressively, the IAAF realized that gender verification was more detrimental than useful. In 1990, a working group of medical experts used the Patino case and tried to

<sup>361</sup> Maria Patino, "Personal Account," S38.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

come up with logical, practical, and fair recommendations.<sup>363</sup> They concluded that women with chromosomal birth defects did not benefit from any athletic advantage and should not be excluded from women's athletic events. Since chromosomal screenings mostly flagged women with such defects, they recommended no longer using them to determine athletes' femininity and eligibility for Olympic competitions. The group also commented on the unlikelihood of male athletes trying to compete as female athletes in the 1990s. With the adoption of close-fitting athletic clothing and mandatory urine tests, it seemed quite impossible to cheat that way without being caught.<sup>364</sup> This also made systematic gender verification tests unnecessary.

The working group recommended a system of medical check-ups. Each federation would be responsible for requiring a Certificate of Health from its athletes, thus guaranteeing that a doctor would see all the athletes. That doctor would then have the opportunity and time to verify the athletes' gender. To prevent any possible corruption on the federations' part, the group suggested that the IAAF practice random medical check-ups during international meets. Finally, the group agreed that the IAAF's medical officials would retain the right to intervene and investigate any questionable individual. These recommendations were accepted and implemented in 1991.

### **The IOC's new sex test**

The IOC, however, decided to continue with the gender verifications, finding them necessary to ensure the rights and opportunities of female athletes against potential male

<sup>363</sup> The conclusions of this Working Group were published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* 267 (1992): 850-852.

<sup>364</sup> The urine tests improved over the years. To prevent any possibility of cheating, by providing a different person's urine sample for instance, the international sport organizations have been asking athletes to urinate in front of officials, thus ensuring that the samples given and tested are really coming from the athletes the organizations intend to test.

imposters. In 1992, it adopted a new, supposedly more accurate, test based on the polymerase chain reaction (PCR). The IAAF and several medical organizations denounced this new test but the IOC implemented it for the 1992 Barcelona and the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. In 1999, the IOC Executive Board, pressured by doctors and the IOC's Athlete Commission, finally agreed to suspend the gender test. The 2000 Sydney Olympics were the first Games since 1968 for which there was no sex test for female athletes. Like the IAAF, the IOC maintained the right to intervene and have appropriate medical personnel evaluate any athlete whose gender identity was questioned.

### **The case of transgendered athletes**

Still in debate after this decision was the fate of transsexual athletes. The most famous case to date in the world of sport was Renee Richards, born Richard Raskind in New York. This professional tennis player underwent sex reassignment surgery in 1975. A year later, she tried to resume her tennis career. The U.S. Open, administered by the United States Tennis Association (USTA), denied her entry on the ground that she was not born a woman. Richards took it to the New York Supreme Court which, in 1977, ruled in her favor.

Despite that landmark case, international sports organizations have reserved the right to treat such decisions on a case-per-case basis and have not, over the years, been officially or legally challenged. Still, a formal policy had to be agreed upon. In October 2003, the IOC Medical Commission met and, after much debate, produced the *Statement of the Stockholm Consensus on Sex Reassignment in Sports*, often referred to as the



*Stockholm Consensus*. Following the release of that statement, the executive committee of the IOC ruled, on May 17, 2004, that athletes who underwent male-to-female or female-to-male medical procedures and had been legally recognized as members of their new sex could compete in the Olympic event corresponding to that gender as long as the athletes had completed reconstructive surgery, had their ovaries or testes removed, and had undergone a minimum of two years post-operative hormone therapy to eliminate any advantages.<sup>365</sup> This policy officially allows transgendered athletes to compete in the Olympics. Still, it is interesting that, despite the progress this represented, “the similarities between the sex testing era and newly entered *Stockholm Consensus* era are prevalent as, in both, competitors are only allowed to compete in the women’s division if they can meet the IOC’s standards for being considered a woman.”<sup>366</sup> That is, the IOC still dictated what or who was female and therefore eligible for women Olympic competitions.

Many sports administrators, female athletes, and fans expressed concerns over this new policy, on the grounds that it was only going to continue fueling the debate over female athletes’ “real” gender and the legitimacy of their performances. So far, though, the debate as not so much been about transgendered athletes as it has been over hermaphrodite and intersex athletes. The most famous case involves South African track and field athlete Caster Semenya.

<sup>365</sup> Teetzel, “Equality, Equity, and Inclusion: Issues in Women and Transgendered Athletes’ Participation at the Olympics,” in *Cultural Imperialism in Action*, Crowther, Barney, and Heine, eds., 335.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

### **The case of Caster Semenya**

Caster Semenya was born in 1991 in Limpopo, a South African province where most people live extremely rural and sedentary lives. Few have running water or cars. Still, there is an athletic club in Limpopo--the Moletjie Athletic Club. Semenya, who originally began running to practice for soccer, trained at that club until she entered the University of Pretoria to study sports science. As a member of that club, Semenya won a gold medal in the 800 meter race at the 2008 Commonwealth Youth Games in India. Later that year, she also won two gold medals at the African Junior Athletics Championships, running the 800 meters in 1:56.72, or seven and a half seconds less than her previous personal best. With that 800-meter time, Semenya also improved the South African record and won a spot in her first senior competition.

This race, the 800 meters at the August 2009 World Championships in Berlin, made Semenya a hero, a martyr, a cheater, a male, a female, a hermaphrodite, and definitely a world-wide sensation, all at the same time. The questions started right after she won the 800-meter semifinal event, when a television reporter interviewed Semenya on her way out of the stadium. He bluntly asked her: "With that [victory] comes rumors. I heard one that you were born a man.?" Semenya answered only, "I have no idea about that thing.....I don't give a damn about it," and walked away from the cameras.<sup>367</sup> Two days later, she won the gold. Because she dominated the race, ran effortlessly, crossed the finish line two and a half seconds ahead of the pack, and improved her personal best by eight seconds, many people questioned her performance. She is, in addition, very muscular, with broad shoulders and a low voice. The rumors were nothing new. Her coach, Phineas Sako, commented:

<sup>367</sup> Quoted in Ariel Levy, "Either/Or--Sport, Sex, and the Case of Caster Semenya," *The New Yorker* (November 30, 2009): 51.

What I know is that wherever we go, whenever she made her first appearance, people were somehow gossiping, saying “No, no, she is not a girl.” It looks like a boy--that’s the right words--they used to say, “It looks like a boy.” Some even asked me as a coach, and I would confirm: it’s a girl. At times, she’d get upset. But, eventually, she was just used to such things.<sup>368</sup>

He explained that when Semenya’s gender was questioned before a race, she usually would walk to the bathroom with a member of the competing team and show her private parts; that had always been enough to confirm that she was indeed a woman and could go on with the race. This method was similar to the first IAAF sex tests, although it was conducted on an individual and informal basis.

This time, though, informal visual tests were not enough. Right after receiving her gold medal, a reporter asked Semenya about rumors that the IAAF had requested that she undergo gender verification tests prior to the competition. Semenya did not answer the question. The rumor kept growing. Now most reporters, athletes, and federations were commenting on this case. Several of Semenya’s competitors in the 800 meter and 1500 meter races publicly complained that Semenya had been allowed to compete in the Olympics as a woman when it was clear that she was not. Elisa Cusma, of Italy, said: “These kind of people should not run with us. For me, she is not a woman. She is a man.”<sup>369</sup>

The IAAF later confirmed that it had indeed performed some gender verification tests on Semenya. This announcement clearly violated the 1968 policies adopted by the IAAF and IOC after the Klobukowska case. Many people had complained about the public humiliation Klobukowska suffered when the media took hold of her story. As a result, both sport organizations had agreed to guarantee confidentiality for tested female athletes. It did not, though, for Semenya, which immediately made her the main focus of

<sup>368</sup> Levy, “Either/Or--Sport, Sex, and the Case of Caster Semenya,” 48.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

these championships, the center of the ongoing debate over female athletes and issues of femininity and sexuality, and the subject of a badly mishandled case. Several athletes, South African civic leaders, reporters, and politicians criticized the IAAF, some arguing that the debacle was rooted in racism, some claiming that Semenya's privacy and human rights had been violated. In response to an inquiry journalist Ariel Levy sent to the IAAF, Nick Davies, Director of Communications for the IAAF, replied that two factors pushed the IAAF to investigate:

First, the incredible improvement in this athlete's performance....and more bluntly, the fact that SOUTH AFRICAN sport Websites were alleging that she was a hermaphrodite athlete. One such blog (from sport24.co.za) stated, "Caster Semenya is an interesting revelation because the 18 year old was born a hermaphrodite and, through a series of tests, has been classified a female." With this blatant allegation, and bearing in mind the almost supernatural improvement, the IAAF believed that it was sensible to make sure, with the help of ASA, that the athlete was negative in terms of doping test results, and also that there was no gender ambiguity which may have allowed her to have the benefits of male hormone levels, whilst competing against women.<sup>370</sup>

Athletics South Africa (ASA) also came under fire when it became known that Leonard Chuene, ASA President and a member of the IAAF board, not only knew about those tests, but had organized gender verification tests for Semenya prior to the World Championships, the results of which indicated some concerns about her gender.<sup>371</sup> Still, Chuene did not communicate this to Semenya and maintained her on the list of competitors. According to Levy, "countless editorials have accused Chuene of sacrificing her in his quest for a gold medal and have demanded his ouster."<sup>372</sup> Wilfred Daniels, a member of the ASA, was one of the most vocal of Chuene's opponents. He

<sup>370</sup> Levy, "Either/Or--Sport, Sex, and the Case of Caster Semenya," 50.

<sup>371</sup> The Athletics South African, often referred to as ASA, is the South African governing body for track and field athletes and competitions.

<sup>372</sup> Levy, "Either/Or--Sport, Sex, and the Case of Caster Semenya," 56.

was so upset at Chuene and the way the ASA handled the whole situation that on September 9, he resigned from the ASA and later declared:

It's the day before the championships. Eighteen years old, your first World Championships, the greatest race of your life. You can't focus, because you have to go for gender testing. And you come back and you have to watch on TV: they are explaining the possibilities. I found her in her room, sitting in front of the TV like this. And they're talking about her and she's trying to understand what they're saying. Because nobody has spoken to her, to tell her, Look, this is what these tests might mean. I felt so ashamed.<sup>373</sup>

Daniels also argued that the IAAF's call that Semenya's performance was so impressive and "supernatural" that it had to test her was abhorrent. He explained that it failed to recognize that her improved performance could simply be the result of the better training conditions she benefitted from when she moved from the dirty roads of Limpopo to the world-class facility of the University of Pretoria. For Daniels, the damage done to Semenya was irreparable:

Now her life is over. Not only as an athlete but as a human being. Even if the IAAF says there's nothing wrong with her, people will always look at her twice. There should be hell to pay for those responsible. I've got a daughter. If that was my daughter, what would I have done as a father? Somebody might have been dead by now.<sup>374</sup>

Once the IAAF confirmed that testing was done on Semenya, most discussion focused on what these tests would prove. On September 11, an article in Australia's *Daily Telegraph* mentioned that the results had been leaked and that they proved that even though she was raised as a girl, defined herself as a girl, and had external female genital, she lacked ovaries and a uterus. The reports then argued that because of these biological facts, she benefited from three times more testosterone than other female competitors, thus enjoying an enormous unfair advantage over them.

<sup>373</sup> Quoted in Levy, "Either/Or--Sport, Sex, and the Case of Caster Semenya," 59.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

The scientific community also became involved in Semenya's case. Most experts questioned about this situation explained that Semenya was not a hermaphrodite, an inaccurate term with a negative connotation. "Hermaphrodite implies a double-sexed creature, fully male and fully female, which is a physical impossibility for human beings. (You can be half and half, but you can't be all and all.)"<sup>375</sup> Most scientists agreed that Semenya was probably suffering from "disorders of sex development," or DSD, a medical condition in which sexual organs develop in an atypical manner. There are several types of such disorders. Apparently, Semenya suffers from androgen-insensitivity syndrome (AIS). An individual with that condition "has XY chromosomes, a vagina, and undescended testes, but her body develops without the ability to respond to the testosterone it produces. In fact, people with complete AIS are less able to process testosterone than average women."<sup>376</sup> In that case, an athlete with AIS would not benefit from any testosterone advantage over other women in the competition.

Alison Carlson claimed that whether Semenya was at an advantage or not was irrelevant and that the IOC's argument that the gender verification test was necessary to maintain physical equality between competitors was "absurd":

If some women are extra strong, others are taller, or smarter, or have more fast-twitch muscle fibers, all of these things are genetically programmed. And what of an athlete like Flo Hyman, who suffered (and died from) Marfan's Syndrome, which causes unusual height? At 6'5", Hyman was one of the most revered volleyball players in history. Since her stature derived from an abnormal genetic condition, shouldn't she also, to be consistent, have been barred from competition? Height is in fact the physical parameter that correlates best with athletic success. By extrapolation from IOC theory, one might suggest that all athletes over 5'10" be barred from women's competition, since on average men are taller than women.<sup>377</sup>

<sup>375</sup> Levy, "Either/Or--Sport, Sex, and the Case of Caster Semenya," 53.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Carlson, "Sex/Gender Verification in International Sport," 8.

When writing her story on Semenya, Levy reached the same conclusion, arguing that “different bodies have physical attributes, even abnormalities, that may provide a distinct advantage in one sport or another.”<sup>378</sup> Even though Levy is not a scientific or sport administration expert, her article presents some interesting points to take into consideration.<sup>379</sup> She for instance gives the example of several NBA stars who have been diagnosed with acromegaly--a disorder caused by the production of an excessive amount of growth hormone in the body--which gives them an above-average size. She also mentions fourteen gold-medal Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps, “who has unusual long arms and is said to have double-jointed elbows, knees, and ankles.”<sup>380</sup> Given this perspective, some athletes will inevitably enjoy some physical advantages over others.

What should the IOC and other sports organizations do about these athletes? Should something be done about athletes who have a physical advantage? What about athletes who do not fit precisely into the strictly defined Olympic categories, like Semenya, who was raised as a woman but scientifically does not possess all the usual female attributes? Should a new system be developed, guaranteeing physical equality for all competitors?

Levy addresses this:

Theoretically, athletes could be categorized by size, as they are in wrestling and boxing. But then women would usually lose to men. Or athletes could be categorized by skill level. Almost always, this would mean that the strongest elite female athletes would compete against the weakest elite male athletes, which would be pretty demoralizing all the way around.<sup>381</sup>

<sup>378</sup> Levy, “Either/Or--Sport, Sex, and the Case of Caster Semenya,” 55.

<sup>379</sup> Ariel Levy is a staff writer at *The New York Magazine* and author of *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2005). Levy has explored topics including American drug use, gender roles, lesbian culture, and the popularity of U.S. pop culture icons. Her articles appeared in several publications, such as *The Washington Post*, *The New Yorker*, *Vogue*, *Slate*, *Men's Journal* and *Blender*.

<sup>380</sup> Levy, “Either/Or--Sport, Sex, and the Case of Caster Semenya,” 55.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

Levy then introduces another option--dividing athletes biochemically. Testosterone has been proved to help athletes run faster and recover more quickly from training and competitions. The level of testosterone in their bodies could then be used to triage athletes into different categories. According to research performed by Eric Vilain, a professor of human genetics and pediatrics at UCLA,

Those with a certain level of functional testosterone (testosterone that the body can actually make use of) could be in one group, and those below it could be in another. Although the first group would be almost all male and the second group would be almost all female, the division would be determined not by gender but by actual physical advantages that gender supposedly, yet unreliably, supplies.<sup>382</sup>

In such a system, Semenya would have been cleared right away. Despite her masculine physical appearance, her testosterone level would place her in the second group.

Although her actual level might be higher than that of other women, experts agree that for women with DSD, that testosterone is not productive. Her functional level of testosterone, then, is similar, or even below, that of her female competitors.

It is improbable that such an absolute revamping of Olympic categories will take place because it would, by extension, entail a total reorganization of our way of thinking about gender, sexuality, and society. The Semenya case, however, did lead to more discussions and debates about the best way to proceed with such cases. First, the IAAF, in November 2009, officially announced that Semenya would retain her 800-meter gold medal from the Berlin World Championships and that the results of the gender verification tests she went through would remain confidential. After consulting extensively with a panel of experts and after organizing two special conferences on gender issues--one with medical experts and one with athletes, lawyers, and human rights groups--the IAAF announced, in July 2010, that Semenya was cleared to return to track and field competitions. More recently,

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<sup>382</sup> Levy, "Either/Or--Sport, Sex, and the Case of Caster Semenya," 55.



Arne Ljungqvist, chairman of the IOC's medical commission, announced that the commission had been working on developing new guidelines to address situations involving athletes with ambiguous sexual characteristics. During the press conference, Ljungqvist was extremely vague about these new guidelines or the way the commission came to agree on these guidelines, simply stating: "What we are aiming at is finding ways to establish rules and regulations for participation in female competition. I am hopeful we will arrive at that."<sup>383</sup> The new rules, which will first need to be approved by the IOC executive board in January 2011, will serve as recommendations for all the international sports organizations. These rules will be implemented for the 2012 London Olympics.<sup>384</sup> The vagueness, even secrecy, surrounding the issues and guidelines set up during the medical commission meetings demonstrates how complicated and controversial the gender question is for sport administrators. It is hard to predict what will happen in London and how these new rules will impact female athletes and the ongoing debate about femininity and gender in the world of sports. It is easy to predict, however, that such issues will remain an obstacle for female athletes--especially for those excelling in strength-oriented events and who look too muscular or masculine for society's tastes. On the verge of the 2012 Olympics, female athletes are also still facing several other obstacles. Chapter 6 provides an overview of the remaining major obstacles.

<sup>383</sup> "IOC, IAAF to issue guidelines on gender cases," (November, 19, 2010). Accessed February 4, 2011. <http://www.teamusa.org/news/2010/11/19/ioc-iaaf-to-issue-guidelines-on-gender-cases/39590>

<sup>384</sup> "Gender rules will apply to 2012 games," *espn.com* (November 19, 2010). Accessed December 16, 2010. <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/print?id=5824519&type=story>

## Chapter 6 – Remaining Obstacles

The gender verification tests mandatory for female Olympians from 1968 to 1996 and their impact on the persisting debate over femininity, gender, and sexuality clearly has constituted an obstacle female athletes have yet to overcome. Other obstacles, however, are still preventing American sportswomen from enjoying equal opportunities and rewards in sport competitions such as the Olympic Games.

### **Disagreement over women's athletic capability**

The appropriate athletic activities women should engage in and the extent of that engagement have always been controversial. As we have seen, when Coubertin revived the Olympic Games, women were considered inappropriate competitors because of nineteenth-century gender roles and because they were assumed to be unfit for such activities. More than a century later, women's athletic capabilities are still being questioned, especially in sports historically deemed inappropriate for them. Male sport administrators continue to use biological characteristics about the female body to justify regulating, and often suppressing, women's access to competition. During the last thirty years, women still have had to prove that they were physically capable to practice and compete in certain sports for those sports to finally be added to the Olympic program. The battle women led to enjoy long distance running, weightlifting, and boxing events in the Olympics demonstrates the tenacity of this concern. Moreover, even when such events were finally adopted, the discourse surrounding the capacity of women to compete in certain events has changed little in the last hundred years. It remains a major obstacle for sportswomen today.

Track and field has historically been the most controversial Olympic sport for women because of its reliance on power and strength, qualities women athletes were assumed to lack. The IOC eventually agreed to include a limited number of these events for women. But as late as 1979, the men's program included a 5,000 meter, a 10,000 meter, and a marathon, while the longest race on the women's program was the 1,500 meter.

That year, the newly formed International Runners' Committee (IRC) began lobbying the IAAF and the IOC for additional events for women. In its first newsletter, the IRC explained that it wanted to increase competitive opportunities for runners and improve the administration of running, and that its first goal was to obtain "a full program of women's distance races in the 1984 Olympics, and in all other international championships leading up to the Los Angeles Games."<sup>385</sup> Soon after, the IAAF decided to support the inclusion of the marathon for women in all international competitions. However, the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC) said that it could not logistically accommodate more athletes in the Olympic village. The IOC, on the other hand, rejected distance events on the grounds of women's supposed incapacities: "We need more information. More medico-scientific research and experience need to be achieved. We'll study it again after the European Championships in 1982 and the World Championships in 1983."<sup>386</sup> Since an event needs to be approved four years before an Olympics, this meant that a women's marathon could not be included before 1988. It is interesting to note that men never had to prove that they were physically fit for the IOC to approve events for them. By 1912, for instance, men already enjoyed a lengthy track and field Olympic program. In fact, only two events were added to that program

<sup>385</sup> International Runners' Committee, Newsletter One (February 1980) IRC Newsletters and Correspondence, Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles.

<sup>386</sup> Quoted in International Runners' Committee, Newsletter Six (July 1980) IRC Newsletters and Correspondence, Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles.

thereafter and no medical examination, doctor's report, or lobbying was necessary for that to happen.

On behalf of women athletes, the IRC obtained the support of Dr. Anthony F. Daly, Jr., medical director for the 1984 Games. In his report to IOC members, Daly mentioned the 1928 incident. In his view, women were not exhausted because they could not run an 800-meter race; they were simply unprepared for longer races--that is, women had not been adequately trained for distance running. Daly, then, did not make it a biological matter but a socially constructed one. Since then, the situation had changed: "It seems that women are now fit to run the marathon. Women have been running marathons in sanctioned events and in quite large numbers for at least the last eight years in our country with no untoward effects."<sup>387</sup>

Ironically, Daly contended that women were actually biologically better suited than men for marathons because they "tend to have a fat content which may run 10-15% higher than men."<sup>388</sup> As a result, women had more fuel to run longer races. Daly added that women's muscles fitted long-distance races better than sprints. He concluded that women "possess a better endurance capability than the male musculature lends itself to."<sup>389</sup>

Finally, Daly looked at race times to justify adding the marathon to the women's program. He noted that women's times had improved at a much quicker pace than men's: "The total improvement in the men's record from 1967 to the present was less than 1%, whereas the women have improved their record by 22%."<sup>390</sup> These times proved that female athletes had mastered the marathon and were getting better at it. He

<sup>387</sup> Quoted International Runners' Committee, Newsletter Eight (November 1980) IRC Newsletters and Correspondence, Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

concluded that there was no medical reason for women not to be allowed to participate in this event.

The LAOOC and the IOC finally agreed to add the marathon for the 1984 Olympics, but not the 5,000 and 10,000 meter races. The IRC cited three reasons for this. First, sport organizations had traditionally “ruminated gravely over the medical and physiological effects of endurance events on women.”<sup>391</sup> The IRC claimed that this was discriminatory, since the consequences of long distance events on men had never been considered. It also argued that this argument was null since women had by then participated in many such events without any incident. Second, the IRC cited a “modern ‘official’ requirement imposed on women (but, historically, never demanded of men).”<sup>392</sup> The IRC was referring to Rule 32 of the Olympic Charter, which stated: “Only sports widely practiced by women in 25 countries and two continents may be included in the program of the Games of the Olympiad.”<sup>393</sup> The IRC contended this rule was used only when it suited the IOC’s agenda. Third, the IRC complained about Rule 33, which stated that a program needed to be approved four years before the competition. The IRC noted that exceptions had been made in the past and that the IOC was only using the regulations to keep women out of events they deemed inappropriate for them.

Despite the pressure from the IRC, the IAAF, and many female runners, the IOC and LAOOC, as of mid-1983, had still not approved the women’s 5,000 and 10,000 meter races for the 1984 Olympic program. The IRC therefore contacted the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and filed suit on behalf of female distance runners. The ACLU requested an injunction ordering the LAOOC and IOC to schedule the two races for the

<sup>391</sup> Quoted in International Runners’ Committee, Newsletter Fifteen (August 1982) IRC Newsletters and Correspondence, Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

1984 Olympics. The ACLU mentioned several discriminatory practices in the suit. First, it argued that the procedures required for athletes to request the addition of an Olympic event were “obscure and arbitrary and have been used as a pretext to justify discrimination against women Olympic competitors.”<sup>394</sup> The ACLU then attacked Rule 32, saying that this requirement was only in place for women, which was discriminatory. Finally, the ACLU alleged that the real issue was that the two running events in question did not attract much popular attention because they did not showcase feminine attributes. It stated that “marketing analysis data showed these races ‘were not glamorous events, that they were “boring,” unlike women’s flag drill, synchronized swimming and the marathon.”<sup>395</sup> Those standards, the ACLU pointed out, had never been applied to any men’s events.

On April 16, 1984, U.S. District Court Judge David Kenyon expressed sympathy toward women runners but concluded that there was no proof of violation of anti-discrimination laws.<sup>396</sup> The 5,000 and 10,000 meter races were not on the women’s program for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.<sup>397</sup>

The difficulties encountered to add these women’s distance events into the Olympic program, including having to form an organization to lobby the IOC and LAOOC, having to prove that women could physically compete in such events, and having to go to court, highlight the rough situation sportswomen still faced as late as the 1980s. The obstacles women encountered during the last two decades to add weightlifting and boxing to the

<sup>394</sup> Quoted in International Runners’ Committee, Newsletter Twenty-Four (August 1983) IRC Newsletters and Correspondence, Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles. A copy of the first letter sent by the ACLU to the LAOOC president Peter Ueberroth appears as Appendix V. In Appendix VI, one can also find a copy of the IRC newsletter of March 1984, focusing entirely on the ACLU lawsuit.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> A more detailed explanation of Judge Kenyon’s verdict can be found in Appendix VII. Also, the IRC newsletter containing the reprint of Judge Harry Pregerson’s dissenting opinion concerning the verdict can be found as Appendix VIII.

<sup>397</sup> With continued pressure, the 10,000 was finally included at the 1988 Seoul Olympics, while the 3,000 was transformed into a 5,000 meter race for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

Olympic program show that the issue of women's athletic capability and the supposedly unseemly appearance of women in particular events are, to this day, problematic.

The first women's Weightlifting World Championship took place in 1987, but it was thirteen more years before the IOC approved weightlifting for women at the 2000 Olympics. Even today, men have seven Olympic weightlifting categories, while women have only four. In 2005, the request by the Weightlifting Federation to add four categories for women was rejected by the IOC. Though the IOC did not provide any information to justify this rejection, limiting the numbers of athletes could not have been the reason, since that same year, the IOC approved the addition of several events for women (including two swimming events), increasing the total number of female athletes by eighty. The rejection of additional weightlifting events for women seems related to a perception that women should not be weightlifters to start with.

The same appears to be true for boxing. Women from twenty-seven countries participated in thirteen different events during the first Boxing World Championship in 2001. Yet, the IOC rejected requests to include women's boxing for the 2004 and 2008 Olympics. After the second rejection, in 2005, IOC sports director Kelly Fairweather immediately stated that the decision was taken on a "purely technical basis," but provided a very vague explanation: "The IOC did not feel it has reached the stage where it merits inclusion. We will watch the progress of women's boxing in the next few years."<sup>398</sup> Different boxing federations insisted that women were interested in the sport and capable of competing in it. These federations were extremely active, trying to educate people and sport leaders through workshops and exhibition games designed to show both the excitement and relative safety of the sport for women. This tactic appeared to help. The

<sup>398</sup> Stephen Wilson, "IOC rejects women's boxing, OKs swimming, steeplechase," *The Associate Press*, accessed February 14, 2011. <http://www.ioussports.org/articles/ioc-rejects-womens-boxing-oks-swimming-steeplechase>

IOC finally agreed to add boxing to the 2012 Olympic program, though the number of events for women still is far fewer than those for men.

The IOC did end up adding long distance, weightlifting, and boxing events for women in the Olympics. So there is progress. The fact that every time, however, women had to prove that they were not only interested but also physically competent indicate that negative assumptions about women's athletic capabilities, especially in sports deemed masculine, are still omnipresent and are still preventing women from enjoying equal opportunities in the world of sport. Even though sport has finally become a heterosocial space, it still remains a gendered space--not because it is gender-exclusive, but because it is gender-hierarchic. Being accepted in a space does not mean being treated and perceived as equal within that space. As barriers broke down and women increasingly penetrated the masculine world of sport, a system of gender differentiation, and by extension gender hierarchy, developed. Since men and women are biologically different, men and women's sports came to be seen as different too. That in itself is not necessarily negative. When questioned on the difference between men and women's basketball, Anne Donovan, head coach of the U.S. women's basketball team for the Beijing Olympics, admitted: "We don't play as physical. We're a different game so we're not attracting the same people. Our game attracts team play, more fluidity, etc. So I agree that we are a different game; but that we are not as fun to watch or as good quality, no."<sup>399</sup>

With differentiation came hierarchy. Men are stronger, faster, and rougher than women, therefore men's sports are considered more interesting than women's sports. In most professional tennis tournaments, for instance, men need to win three sets to win a match while women only need to win two. The argument traditionally justifying such

<sup>399</sup> Anne Donovan, phone interview (February 14, 2007): 6.



gendered rules is that women cannot physically play five-set matches, which sometimes means three or four hours on the court. In basketball, the same gendering occurs.

Women play forty minutes while men play forty-eight minutes. Women also play with a smaller ball than men do. The reasoning is that the men's ball is too heavy for them, thus slowing down the game too much. These examples show that women are assumed to be less athletically capable than men. Tara Cunningham, gold medalist in weightlifting at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, suggested that people stop comparing men and women's sports:

In weightlifting, men triple their body weight, where women only lift double their body weight. Women are physically not as strong as men, but women can train as hard, are as good technicians as men. I think people need to learn how to appreciate the differences between men's and women's sports. We need to stop comparing them and realize that it is okay to be different and appreciate what they both have to offer.<sup>400</sup>

So far, Americans have not been able to do this.

### **Title IX--an unintentional obstacle**

Another remaining problem is Title IX and some unintended consequences it is having on American sportswomen. This legislation, while dealing with sports in academic institutions, directly affected the participation of women in the Olympics--not so much because it was, in itself, negative, but because it failed to fulfill its promise. In the long run, it gave the false impression that the problem of inequity between men and women athletes had been solved, while in fact, it did not at all accomplish that goal. Title IX did create more opportunities for women, but not on an equal basis with men. In 2000, women's intercollegiate programs received only 42 percent of athletic scholarship

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<sup>400</sup> Tara Cunningham, email interview (March 2007): 5.

money, 32 percent of the recruiting money, and 36 percent of the operating budget, while women represented 54 percent of the students.<sup>401</sup> Despite the passage of Title IX, then, most colleges and universities across the country continued to offer fewer funding and participation opportunities for women.

There are several reasons why Title IX has failed to fulfill the goals of its drafters. First, it took too long for Title IX's regulations to be defined and implemented. Title IX was enacted by Congress on June 23, 1972. It took two years for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) to publish a set of implementing regulations and another year for the final regulations to go into effect.

The second issue with Title IX is the flexibility it gives educational institutions to be in compliance. The HEW regulations established the following three-prong test:

- 1 - Proportionality: The college must provide athletic opportunities for female students that are "substantially" proportionate to their enrollment.
- 2 - Program expansion: The college must show a "history and continuing practice of program expansion which is responsive to the interest and abilities of female athletes."
- 3 - Interest and abilities: The college must demonstrate that the "interest and abilities of female students have been fully accommodated by the present program."

These criteria give educational institutions considerable leeway to achieve compliance. They only need to comply with one of the criteria. There is also no timeline for achieving compliance. As long as an institution shows a "history and continuing practice of program expansion," it is in compliance. An institution can do this for years with impunity. Moreover, a school that does not comply with Title IX may still be "in compliance" simply by agreeing to rectify its Title IX violations. Finally, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), which is in charge of enforcing Title IX, only reviews schools

<sup>401</sup> *Gender Equity Report*, National Collegiate Athletic Association (2000).

selected randomly or based on complaints brought by individuals. The OCR lacks funding to investigate more educational institutions and implement more efficient plans to enforce Title IX.

The third issue with Title IX is its impact on decision-making and power within sports administrations. Michael Villalobos, professor at the Loyola School of Law, believes that women have lost control of women's athletics. Statistics support his argument: in 1972, women directed almost all the women's athletic programs and only six percent of the Division I programs had, by then, merged into single athletic departments under the leadership of men. By 1979-80, the situation was totally different: over eighty percent of the programs had merged and men directed ninety percent of them.<sup>402</sup> Villalobos concludes that "between 1975 and 1985, over three hundred women have disappeared from athletic decision-making positions" and that "the female directors who survived the merger found that they were powerless."<sup>403</sup>

The same phenomenon took place at the coaching level. Right before the passage of Title IX, women head coaches led ninety percent of women's collegiate teams. By the 2001-2002 season, however, they only led forty percent of women's intercollegiate athletic teams--the lowest since Title IX. A similar downfall took place at the high school level.<sup>404</sup> Problematic too was the fact that this crossover of male coaches to women's teams was not accompanied by a similar crossover of women coaches to men's teams.

The problems with Title IX are important because this act set the tone about women's right to equal opportunities and participation in sports, not just for federally funded

<sup>402</sup> Michael Villalobos, "The Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987: Revitalization of Title IX," *Marquette Sports Law Journal* 1 (1990-1991): 153.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> Susan Ware, *Title IX - A Brief History with Documents* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), 155.

institutions, but for society at large. There is a direct correlation between Title IX, female participation in sports, and female achievements in international athletic competitions, including the Olympic Games. When many high school girls are prevented from practicing and competing at the same level as the boys, the number and training of potential female Olympians suffers. As a result, men have a better chance of shining at the Olympics, which, in the end, reinforces the prevalent idea that men are more suited for competitive sports than women.

### **The lack of female leadership in sports organizations**

Yet another obstacle is the limited number of women playing essential leadership roles within the institution of sport. One way to increase women's opportunities in the Olympic Movement, for example, is to have women in decision-making positions. This, however, has been hard to achieve. The IOC was, at its conception, an elitist male organization and its members worked diligently to maintain their privileged status. Even though there was no stated rule preventing women from becoming IOC members, by tradition, this was not an option. Count Jean de Beaumont was the first to suggest, during a 1968 IOC meeting, adding a woman to the committee. The fact that this took so long to materialize highlights the homosocial nature of the IOC.

The introduction of the first woman was facilitated by the 1972 election of Lord Killanin--a leader more open to female involvement than Brundage--as IOC president. Killanin stated from the start that one his priorities was to add women to the committee. He later explained, "I could see no reason why women should not take their place in the IOC, although I was not going to pick a few token bodies just to make my point. I did

have several potential members in mind.”<sup>405</sup> Nonetheless, when Killanin left the IOC presidency in 1980, there were still no female IOC members. Women only appeared in the group a year later, when new IOC President Antonio Samaranch selected two women.<sup>406</sup> The next five years saw the addition of three more women.<sup>407</sup> This improvement, however, was short-lived. From 1987 to 1995, the IOC added fifty-four members, only three of whom were women. By 1995, women accounted for only seven out of one hundred and six members.<sup>408</sup> Today, there are 111 members; only nineteen are women.<sup>409</sup>

The lack of women in key positions within the Olympic Movement is also evident in the IOC’s commissions. In the mid-1990s, the IOC sponsored twenty-two commissions and working groups. Only one of these commissions--the Working Group on Women and Sport--was chaired by a woman (Anita DeFrantz).<sup>410</sup> Ultimately, the IOC recognized that such a gender unbalance was anachronistic, and began to encourage women’s representation within the different sports administrations. In 1996, its objectives stated that the national Olympic committees, the international federations, the national federations, and the sports organizations belonging to the Olympic Movement were strongly encouraged to have “by December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2000, at least 10% (ten per cent) of women in all their decision making structures (in particular all legislative or executive organs), such proportion to reach 20% (twenty per cent) by December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005.”<sup>411</sup>

<sup>405</sup> Joanna Davenport, “Breaking into the Rings: Women on the IOC,” *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance* 67 (May-June, 1996): 28.

<sup>406</sup> Flor Isava-Foseca of Venezuela and Pirjo Haggman of Finland.

<sup>407</sup> Mary Alison Glen-Haig (1982), Princess Nora of Liechtenstein (1984), and Anita DeFrantz (1986).

<sup>408</sup> Wayne Wilson, “The IOC and the Status of Women in the Olympic Movement: 1972-1996,” *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 67, No. 2 (June 1996): 185.

<sup>409</sup> Official website of the Olympic Movement (accessed February 11, 2011)  
<http://www.olympic.org/content/the-ioc/the-ioc-institution1/ioc-members-list/>

<sup>410</sup> Wilson, “The IOC and the Status of Women in the Olympic Movement: 1972-1996,” 185.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

That same year, the IOC also decided that “the Olympic Charter will be amended to take into account the need to keep the equity between men and women.”<sup>412</sup>

Since these resolutions were passed, there has been some progress in the number of women holding leadership positions in various sports governing bodies. There is still no parity, however. In fact, the modest objectives outlined above had, by 2003, still not been achieved. Information collected from 187 national Olympic committees and thirty-five international federations illustrates the difficulty of the task at hand:

- 61% of NOCs had achieved the objective of 10%.
- 90% of NOCs had at least one woman on their executive body.
- 26% of NOCs had more than 20% of women on their executive body.
- 57% of Olympic IFs had achieved the objective of 10%.
- 91% of Olympic IFs had at least one woman on their executive body.
- 23% of Olympic IFs had more than 10% of women on their executive body.<sup>413</sup>

Moreover, even though some women have assumed leadership positions, the specific tasks they are assigned often leave them without much power when key decisions are made. In *The Olympics at the Millennium*, Schaffer and Smith explain that the few women in leadership positions

tend to take up positions related to affirmative action, youth, disabilities, women’s events, human resources, and public relations. They are not visible in the fields of sports finance, marketing, policy, talent identification, or scientific research. Sports culture has its core and periphery. Men occupy the core occupations and positions of authority while women remain marginalized.<sup>414</sup>

The paucity of powerful women in Olympic administration means that male IOC members have been making the decisions concerning women’s participation. To this day, then, men still decide what sports are appropriate for women, how intensely women

<sup>412</sup> Wilson, “The IOC and the Status of Women in the Olympic Movement: 1972-1996,” 186.

<sup>413</sup> Kristine Toohey and Anthony James Veal, *The Olympic Games: A Social Science Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: CAB International, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2007), 205.

<sup>414</sup> Schaffer and Smith, eds., *The Olympics at the Millennium*, 13.

can practice and compete in sports, how female athletes are portrayed in the Olympic Movement, and what leadership positions women can be entrusted with. In short, men allowed more women to participate or lead, but only to the extent that men remained in control--superior in numbers and authority.

### **Media representation of female athletes**

Another continuing obstacle is the portrayal of female athletes in the media. Not only do the media not yet cover Olympic events for women in equal proportion to men's, they continue to trivialize female athletes and their performances by focusing on the athletes' femininity and sexuality rather than on their athletic skills.<sup>415</sup> In *Women's Sport and Spectacle: Gendered Television Coverage and the Olympic Games*, Gina Daddario identifies four trivialization methods.<sup>416</sup> First, commentators use condescending descriptors when covering women's sports. Using basketball as an example, Daddario remarks that "unlike commentary surrounding male athletes in basketball, commentary on the female players virtually ignored their physical skills and focused on their physical movements instead. Framed in aesthetic terms, a move was called 'very pretty' or 'beautiful.'"<sup>417</sup>

Second, the media marginalize female athletes by casting them in the role of "other." Daddario explains that "if an accomplished athlete is also portrayed in roles that are valued in a patriarchal society, such as wife and mother, then she cannot threaten

<sup>415</sup> For the 2004 Athens Games, female athletes only received 5% of the coverage prior to the Games while men received 87.6%, and during the Games only 25.2%, while men received 40.2%. *Olympic Women and the Media: International Perspectives*, Pirkko Markula, ed. (England: Palgrave Macmillian, 2009), 232.

<sup>416</sup> Daddario, *Women's Sport and Spectacle*.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

masculine sports hegemony.”<sup>418</sup> In short, the media portray the athletic engagement as a parenthesis in an otherwise “normal” life--a life full of activities socially acceptable and expected of women. By doing this, the media reconcile the usual opposition between athleticism and femininity. Because women’s participation in sport is only temporary and not at the expense of her other social duties, it is seen as less threatening to men and society in general.

Third, the media rely heavily on physical attractiveness and desirability. Daddario explains that “the athletes’ popularity as subjects of sports photographs is attributed to their glamour and beauty in accordance with conventional standards of female attractiveness.”<sup>419</sup> This also applies to other media, such as TV and newspapers. Tennis player Anna Kournikova is a good example. In May 2002, *Sports Illustrated for Women* reported that Kournikova, who had yet to win a major or an Olympic medal, earned an estimated \$15 million per year, more than Grand Slam and Olympic winners Martina Hingis and Serena Williams.”<sup>420</sup> *Sports Illustrated* journalist Jon Wertheim described Kournikova’s presence in a tournament as follows:

As soon as one of Anna Kournikova’s matches end, usually with her defeat, a cluster of fans, mostly in the age group that might be called Generation Wassups--that 18-34 male demographic coveted by beer and snack-food manufacturers--gather courtside. Unfailingly they act like idiots, hoping to get Kournikova to acknowledge that they exist. Some ask for her hand in marriage; others invite her to spend time at their fraternity. As an observer once noted after witnessing this tsunami of hormones, Kournikova has the singular ability to turn a tennis tournament into a construction site.<sup>421</sup>

Better players who lack Kournikova’s sex appeal get less media attention and fewer endorsement deals. For women, looks, clearly, are sometimes worth more money and

<sup>418</sup> Daddario, *Women’s Sport and Spectacle*, 24.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>420</sup> “Court Appeal,” *Sports Illustrated for Women* (May-June 2002): 30.

<sup>421</sup> Jon L. Wertheim, “More Than Just a Pretty Face?” *Sports Illustrated* (October, 2002): 87.



popularity than performances. As Rick Morrissey, from The *Chicago Tribune*, comments, “Men just have to be good at what they do. Women have to be successful and pretty to cash in fully on their success.”<sup>422</sup> For Mary Jo Kane, Director of the Tucker Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sport at the University of Minnesota, this approach is discriminatory: “All I’m asking is equal treatment. When Tiger Woods is on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* naked, holding a golf ball with the Nike swoosh in front of his genitals, I’ll be quiet.”<sup>423</sup>

Physical attractiveness is also still defined by the white middle class. In an article on the dichotomy between femininity and muscularity, Vikki Krane explains that the concept of femininity has been socially constructed and that it regulates the way women are supposed to look and behave.<sup>424</sup> She then argues that femininity is not a fixed concept--it changes based on historical context as well as criteria such as class, race, and sexual orientation. There are, then, several standards of femininity. According to her, though, “there also is a privileged, or hegemonic, form of femininity and this hegemonic femininity is constructed within a White, heterosexual, and class-based structure.”<sup>425</sup> The “ideal” feminine body is thin and toned, like Kournikova’s. But “different bodies are afforded differential value in comparison to the ideal feminine body; for example, Black, queer, and disabled coding of bodies are considered inferior to this heterosexual, White ideal.”<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> “Sex Sells,” *Chicago Tribune* (June 1, 2005).

<sup>423</sup> Mary Jo Kane in “Exploitation or Pride? Female Olympians’ Revealing Poses Stir Debate,” Mark O’Keefe, *Newhouse News Service* (2000). Last accessed February 21, 2011. <http://corinth.sas.upenn.edu/dgr/sitecache/clips/newhouse.htm>

<sup>424</sup> Vikki Krane, “Living the Paradox: Female Athletes Negotiate Femininity and Muscularity,” *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* (March 2004).

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

Toure, a journalist for *Sports Illustrated*, argues that this is why tennis grand slammer and Olympic medalist Serena Williams is not perceived as a beautiful athlete and why she is not marketed and endorsed as such. Williams has gone out of her way to feminize her sport and her image--designing her own, very feminine tennis outfits for instance. Yet, this extremely talented player is an African American powerhouse and the perfect example of strength and muscularity. She thus fails to embody the “beautiful” paradigm. Toure explains: “She’s beautiful, but in ways that stretch the traditional image of American female beauty, ways that demand you demolish your vision of sweet and soft, demand that you redefine beauty to incorporate strength and musculature and iconoclasm.”<sup>427</sup> The importance of a female athlete’s appearance, and subsequent acceptance by the media and society, is still an obstacle for sportswomen.

The last method for trivializing female athletes is to question their gender, accusing them of being disguised men, stating that they play like men, or casting doubts on their sexual orientation. According to Cahn, lesbianism became a taboo by the mid-twentieth century.<sup>428</sup> By then, sports educators feared for the reputation of their programs and many female athletes were labeled as lesbian simply because they played masculine sports. Educators therefore specifically designed their women’s programs on notions of femininity, while female athletes made sure to showcase heterosexual behavior, including the use of makeup, jewelry, and dresses, and publicized male romantic interests. Athletes competing in sports involving contact and strength were especially conscious of the need to appear heterosexual. This led to a systematic suppression of lesbianism in sport. If

<sup>427</sup> Toure, “The Queen,” *Sports Illustrated* (December-January 2003): 62-63.

<sup>428</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 193.

you were heterosexual, you were afraid to be labeled as gay; if you were lesbian, you were afraid it would become known.

Today, the stigma of lesbianism is still very present in women's sport. In *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport*, Pat Griffith gives several reasons why female athletes are so heavily stereotyped as lesbians.<sup>429</sup> First, many fans assume that some athletes are lesbians because they practice a sport considered masculine and play it as roughly as men. Second, team-sport athletes are often considered lesbians because of the solidarity and emotional bonds created by team play. Even though men's team-sport athletes operate under similar conditions, male athletes are rarely labeled as gay because their participation in a strenuous and competitive contact sport is considered all the more proof that they are manly. Third, many men view successful female athletes as lesbians because they cannot accept women who excel at a supposedly male activity.

According to Griffith, the greatest fear is that lesbian athletes will somehow convert other female athletes into lesbianism: "according to this stereotype, lesbians coerce innocent, young, weak, and unwilling heterosexual women into unnatural sexual liaisons."<sup>430</sup> As a result, lesbian athletes or coaches are viewed as a danger to the players' sexuality and reputation. This can have several negative implications for female athletes, including a loss of self-esteem, athletic opportunities, financial gain, and career progress. The media's focus on athletes' femininity and sexuality is thus problematic because it dictates the way female athletes should look, marginalizes athletes whose physical appearance does not fit the hegemonic cultural norm, and ensures that sports for women will continue to be split into two distinct categories--"appropriate" feminine sports and

<sup>429</sup> Griffith, *Strong Women, Deep Closets*.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

inappropriate sports that should be reserved for men. It is also problematic because it encourages society to sexualize female athletes' bodies and trivialize their athletic skills and performances.

### **Financial inequity**

Another obstacle female athletes still face is the fact that women's sports are not as financially rewarded as men's sports. Anne Donovan, head coach for the American women's basketball team in Beijing, complained: "a top WNBA player makes \$93,000. Nobody can make more. You compare that with the least NBA player--one who is injured, never plays, etc.--and he makes four times more than that."<sup>431</sup> Donovan is correct. Statistics provided by the Women's Sports Foundations confirm this financial gap. When comparing the 2005 WNBA season and the 2004-2005 NBA season, it found that for women, the "minimum salary was \$31,200, the maximum salary was \$89,000, and the team salary cap was \$673,000." For men, "the minimum salary was \$385,277, the maximum salary was \$15.355 million, and the team salary cap was \$46 million."<sup>432</sup> The 2002 and 2003 soccer world cups also provide a telling example. Members of the U.S. women's national soccer team were awarded \$25,000 for their third place in the 2003 Women's World Cup. If they had won the cup, they would have received \$58,000. For their participation in the quarterfinal of the 2002 World Cup, members of the U.S.

<sup>431</sup> Anne Donovan, phone interview (February 14, 2007): 6.

<sup>432</sup> Women's Sports Foundation, "Pay Inequity in Athletics." Last accessed February 21, 2011. <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/Content/Articles/Issues/Equity-Issues/P/Pay-Inequity-in-Athletics.aspx>

men's national soccer team received \$200,000.”<sup>433</sup> A look at the fifty top-earning American athletes highlights the same financial discrepancy. Every year, *Sport Illustrated* compiles and publishes this list based on athletes' salary, winnings, endorsements, and appearance fees. For the year 2010, the top fifty included fifteen NFL players, sixteen NBA players, thirteen MBL players, three NASCAR drivers, two golf players, and one boxer--fifty men, zero women.<sup>434</sup> Professional female athletes, then, now enjoy more economic benefits, but by comparison with men, they remain significantly underpaid.

Concerning the Olympics, the U.S. Olympic Committee developed financial policies that strive for gender equitability. For the 2008 Olympics, for instance, each Olympic athlete benefitted from the same financial support, receiving:

- Competition and village expenses (airline, room/board, accreditation fees).
- Monthly stipend ranging from \$250 to \$2000 per month based on national ranking.
- Performance incentives in the form of a “medal bonus” of \$25,000 for an Olympic gold medal, \$15,000 for a silver, and \$10,000 for a bronze.
- Access to the Olympic Training Camp Resident Program.
- Elite Athlete Health Insurance (EAHI).
- Nike apparel.

Male Olympians, however, cashed significantly more on salary and endorsement deals than female athletes. In a *Miami Herald* article, sports journalist Michelle Kaufman ranked Beijing Olympic athletes according to the money they made. The top ten included:

<sup>433</sup> Women's Sports Foundation, “Pay Inequity in Athletics.” Last accessed February 21, 2011. <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/Content/Articles/Issues/Equity-Issues/P/Pay-Inequity-in-Athletics.aspx>

<sup>434</sup> Jonah Freedman, “The Fifty Highest Earning American Athletes,” *Sport Illustrated* (January 2011). Last accessed February 21, 2011. <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/specials/fortunate50-2010/>

1. Kobe Bryant (\$39 million annual salary/endorsements)
2. LeBron James (\$38 million)
3. Ronaldinho (\$37 million)
4. Tie: Roger Federer and Lionel Messi (\$35 million)
5. Yao Ming (\$29 million)
6. Dwayne Wade (\$27 million)
7. Dirk Nowitzki (\$25 million)
8. Carmelo Anthony (\$23 million)
9. Dwight Howard (\$21.5 million)
10. Jason Kidd (\$20 million)

There are no women in the top-ten sports Olympic money-makers. The first two Olympic women on the list are Serena and Venus Williams, making \$12.5 and \$6.5 million, respectively.<sup>435</sup> Women, then, are still, not reaping the same financial benefits than men in the world of sports.

Clearly, there are continuing obstacles for women in the Olympic Games and in sports more generally. Women are still not on an equal par with men regarding training and competing opportunities, endorsements and prizes, media representation, and public recognition. It is evident then, that even though the world of sport and sport competitions, such as the Olympic Games, have become heterosocial spaces, they do remain gendered and unequal spaces, thus allowing men to preserve a certain degree of cultural hegemony.

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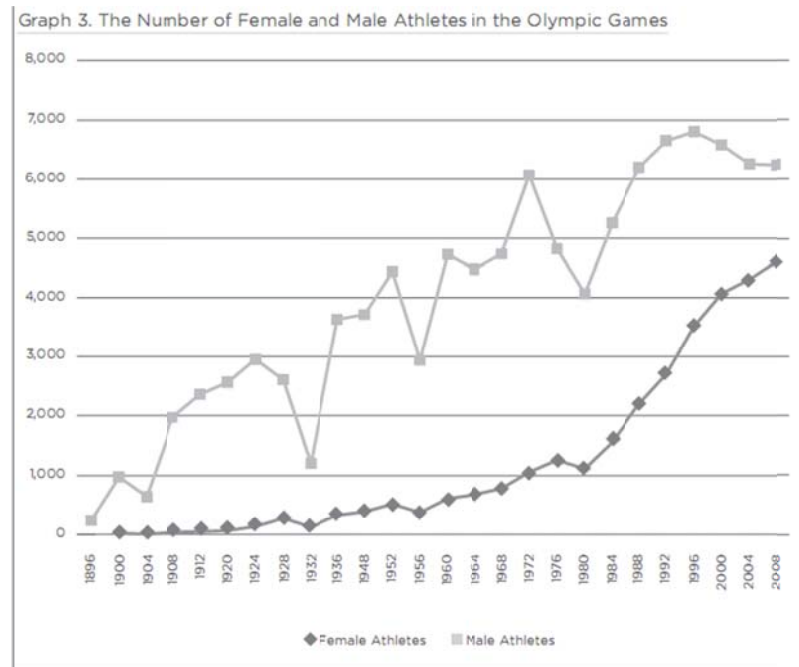
<sup>435</sup> Michelle Kaufman, "Lifestyles of rich and famous Olympians," *Miami Herald* (August 19, 2008).

## Conclusion

As this review illustrates, the Olympic Movement was developed as a male-exclusive domain because sport was not, during the nineteenth century, an appropriate space for women: established norms of gender prescribed only domestic and charitable duties for women; the medical establishment claimed that women were not biologically suited for strenuous activities; the white middle and upper class imposed a concept of femininity that clashed with athletic characteristics; and even social and education reformers defined masculinity as difference from and superiority over women. Analyzing the obstacles that female athletes encountered--and are still encountering--to obtain access to Olympic competitions and to benefit from equal treatment in the Olympic Movement therefore sheds light on essential economic, political, social, and cultural assumptions, values, and changes in American society.

The fact that the U.S. delegation to the 2008 Beijing Games comprised 310 male and 286 female competitors shows that women's participation has improved throughout the century--almost as many females as males are now trained and compete in such global athletic events as the Olympics. From that perspective, it seems fair to say that women's athleticism in America has become mainstream. Twenty-first century American girls and women are indeed practicing sports much more than their nineteenth and twentieth century counterparts. They do it because they choose to have fun, stay in shape, exercise, improve in an activity they are good at, obtain a collegial scholarship, compete, or earn a living. They are present in the world of sport--not just in one sport, not just in sports deemed "feminine," but across the board. There has indeed been a gender reformation in

sport and society. Sportswomen now enjoy more opportunities. The following graphic highlights the steady improvements made concerning the participation of women in the Olympic Games.<sup>436</sup>



Clearly, the proportion of female competitors has increased significantly, especially since the 1980s, and in 2008, women represented 42 percent of the Olympians. Women have also progressively received more media coverage, economic rewards, and public recognition.

Because of this positive evolution, several scholars have argued that sport functions as a transformational space. In 1998, Mariah Burton Nelson declared that “sport alters the balance of power between the sexes. It changes lives. It empowers women, thereby

<sup>436</sup> The Women’s Sport Foundation. *Women in the 2000, 2004 and 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Games: An Analysis of Participation, Leadership and Media Opportunities* (2009): 18. Accessed February 16, 2011. <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/~media/Files/Research%20Reports/2008Olympicreport%202010.pdf>



inexorably changing everything.”<sup>437</sup> Is that so? Does the institution of sport indeed offer a terrain where masculinity and femininity can be re-negotiated and balanced? Does it function as a transgressive space for women or is it, in fact, a hegemonic space, defined and used to preserve masculine superiority? The history of American women in the Olympic Games and the testimonies of American female Olympians, including oral histories covering the years 1920 to 1968 and interviews covering the years 1948 to 2008, seem to indicate that sport empowers individual female participants at the same time that it maintains them, as a group, in a position of subordination.

American female athletes who have testified about their Olympic experiences agreed that they benefited tremendously from their Olympic participation. Donna De Varona summarized some of these benefits, with a nod to the continuing drawbacks:

Through the Olympics we had found a global community, a community that embraced us, and although that same community exhibited great prejudice toward women, each of us appreciated the opportunity we had been given to experience, for however brief a time, equality through excellence.<sup>438</sup>

Other gains they mentioned included increased self-esteem, life-changing human and cultural opportunities, memorable relationships, and, more recently, important career and financial advantages. Of course, as the testimonies highlight, these benefits varied significantly based on criteria such as the athletes’ economic and racial background, individual attractiveness, the years of competition, their achievements, and the level of media exposure for their events. Still, the benefits for sportswomen of training and participating in the Olympics seem indisputable, if still nowhere near those reaped by

<sup>437</sup> Mariah Burton Nelson, “Who We Might Become,” in *Nike is a Goddess: The History of Women in Sports*, Lissa Smith, ed. (New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998), X.

<sup>438</sup> Pemberton *More than a Game: One Woman’s Fight for Gender Equity in Sport*, Foreword by Donna De Varona, XVI.

male athletes. At the individual level, then, participating in the Olympics was an empowering experience for American female athletes.

This individual empowerment, however, did not, for women, translate collectively. One reason for this is that the institution of American sport was, from the beginning, assigned a specific socio-cultural function--to develop robust and healthy men. From the start, there was on the national level a collective presumption and discourse that encouraged men to practice sport and reach for the highest level of competition--the Olympics Games. In contrast, women who competed at the Olympics did so despite cultural impediments that dictated their domestic and reproductive roles.

This failure to identify with potential collective goals comes through clearly in the testimonies of women who competed in the Olympics throughout the twentieth century. While most experienced a personal impact, they generally did not understand themselves as part of a larger social construct. Instead of lobbying for equal access and opportunities, most pre-1970s female athletes simply felt privileged to be able to compete at the Olympic level. Lesley Bush, a 1964 gold medal diver, explained that there were so few opportunities for women to compete, especially at such a high level, that the existing gender inequities were far from her mind: "I think women at the time looked at it as if they were lucky to be on the team and be coached by the best coaches. For a long time, I felt that I was lucky to be coached at all."<sup>439</sup> For the most part, these athletes had internalized the prevalent gender structure. Middle class socio-cultural, economic, and political forces were so efficient at proclaiming sport a male domain that this norm was accepted and supported not only by a majority of the public, but also by the people it subdued.

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<sup>439</sup> Lesley Bush, phone interview (February 2007): 3.

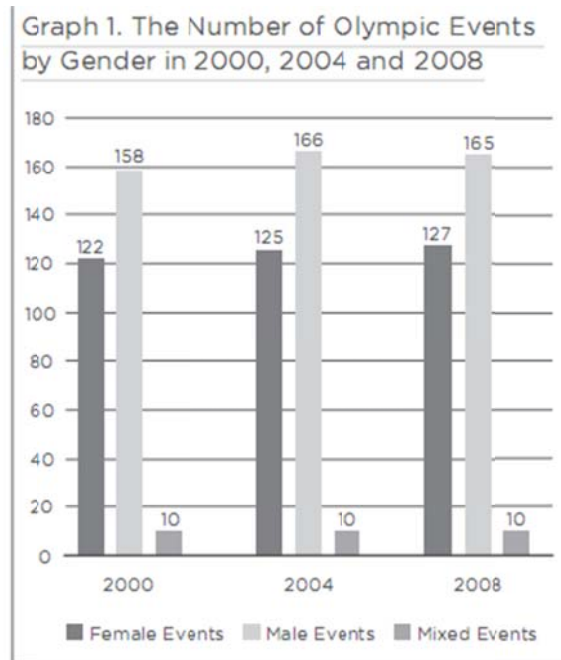
The 1970s civil rights and feminist movements and the passage of Title IX helped change the way women perceive themselves in the institution of sports and international competition. The creation of the Women's Sports Foundation (1974), the International Running Committee (1979), and the IOC Women and Sport Commission (1995) highlight the slow formation of a collective gender consciousness. Largely because of this evolution, women progressively benefitted from more athletic opportunities.

Despite this progress, however, women are still lagging behind in the world of sports. There indeed seems to be a disconnect between the impact of an Olympic participation on individual female athletes and on female athletes as a social group. While it is clear that at the individual level, women are being empowered by their Olympic involvement and achievements, it is also clear that collectively, women and their events are still not the equal of men in the Olympic movement, and that the Games remain a hegemonic space in which men remain in a position of domination.

While opportunities for female athletes have increased, there has been no gender revolution. First, men are still enjoying more athletic opportunities and reaping more benefits from their athletic participation. In the Olympics, although the proportion of female participants and events has increased, men still compete in greater numbers and in more events than women (165 vs. 127 in 2008).<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> The Women's Sport Foundation. *Women in the 2000, 2004 and 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Games: An Analysis of Participation, Leadership and Media Opportunities* (2009): 14. Accessed February 16, 2011. <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/~media/Files/Research%20Reports/2008Olympicreport%202010.pdf>



Second, the roles men and women are encouraged to fill in the sports world still reflects the traditional and constrictive roles that men and women assumed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Female athletes are still respected and valued in proportion to how feminine their sports are, while the socio-cultural and economic cost for women entering male-identified sports is still high. It is no accident that the most-watched women's events in the Olympics are figure skating and gymnastics--two sports that, from early on, were declared appropriate for women because they involved grace, elegance, and feminine outfits. The increasing popularity of beach volleyball, rhythmic gymnastics, and synchronized swimming, points to the same conclusion. The current attempt to add women's pole dancing to the 2016 Olympic program also emphatically supports it.

Even though they are present in the Olympic Games in increasing numbers and even though they are now more celebrated than ever before, female Olympians are still relegated to second-class status because of their gender. With the exception of certain

famous female athletes, such as Mia Hamm, the Williams sisters, and Lisa Leslie, women remain a lesser version of “real” athletes or beauty objects showcased for the enjoyment of the predominantly male audience. In a time and milieu where sport as commercial entertainment is daily becoming big business, there is a real possibility that sex and economics will increasingly define what women and sports look like in the future. A women’s soccer league, launched after American Olympic and World Cup victories, folded, while a “lingerie football” league is rapidly gaining popularity.

Ultimately, the hierarchical order and normative gender principles defining the institution of sport have not changed substantially. The balance of power, then, may have been altered, with women enjoying more power than previously, but men remain in control--they still decide, lead, and gain more. As Cahn states, “Beyond intellectually justifying the power of men, sport has also physically empowered men to maintain their dominance.”<sup>441</sup> At the collective level, the institution of sport still functions as a hegemonic space preserving and reinforcing male domination.

It remains to be seen whether some of the recent developments regarding the current issues of gender identification and sexuality will challenge or reinforce the conventional male/female binary system. Gender is not simply the combination of two separate categories, male and female. It is a system of social relations that, through strategic political, economic, and socio-cultural maneuvers, has been constructed over the years and become the defining structure for human roles and interactions within society.

Several reasons explain why traditional approaches to gender are now being reconsidered. First, women are asking for full equality with men in the sports arena and, are increasingly getting it. So far, there have always been sports reserved exclusively for

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<sup>441</sup> Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, 224.

men; this demarcation is disappearing. In 2012, women will, for the first time, be allowed to compete in the most manly of sports--boxing. Second, more female athletes are now professionals paid for their athletic performances. They also benefit from more efficient methods of training and better training equipment and facilities. As a result, they are more physically fit and muscular than athletes who competed during most of the twentieth century. This change in body type is especially significant in sports like track and field, basketball, tennis, or soccer and is beginning to blur gender differences.

Medical school professor Roslyn Carbon for instance explains that “the effect of power and aerobic training results in physical adaptation whereby the differences between male and female trained athletes are far less than those between sedentary men and women.”<sup>442</sup>

Women are even beginning to reach the range of physical accomplishment of some male athletes. Serena Williams, for instance, regularly serves harder than most male players on the USTA tour.

Third, scientific findings and advances have increased our knowledge about gender and resulted in a deeper understanding of the great variety of defining gender markers. The medical establishment has made it clear that gender is not, after all, a clear-cut binary concept, but is ambiguous and fluid. There are indeed men on one side and women on the other; but in between, there are several layers of maleness or femaleness depending on physiological, biological, genetic, and self-identity characteristics. It is no longer possible to assume someone’s gender based on physical appearance. It is even difficult to scientifically agree on someone’s gender after batteries of medical tests. It took months of tests and discussions for the IOC to allow Semenya to compete again as a woman. And even so, no one is still sure what gender category Semenya really falls in.

<sup>442</sup> Roslyn Carbon, “Female Athletes,” *British Medical Journal* 309, No. 6949 (Jul. 23, 1994): 254.

Should there be a third gender category, somewhere in between male and female?

Should the binary categorization of persons be eliminated? It seems uncertain that our natural inclination to divide gender into binary opposites will change in the foreseeable future, despite medical evidence to the contrary.

Finally, twenty-first century social trends are also playing a role in increasing gender fluidity and ambiguity. The fact that there are more transgender people and that transgenderism is becoming more accepted in society means that it is now possible to move from one gender category to the other. It also means that we can now see a self-identified man competing in a women's event and vice versa. Kye Allums, a player on the women's basketball team at George Washington University, for instance, recently announced that he was now a man. He explained that he officially changed his first name and intended to have the surgery after graduating. This means that, until then, George Washington University has a player identifying and being referred to as a man on its women's team. In another such recent case, Lana Lawless, a former police officer who had a sex change operation more than five years ago, filed a federal lawsuit claiming that the LPGA's policy requiring players to be "female at birth" violated California's civil rights law. Two months later, the LPGA officially announced that it would now allow transgender players to compete in its tournaments. Transgenderism is one of the latest equality challenges for sports governing bodies and such gender issues will come up in the coming Olympics.

Will this progressive dismantling of gender categories positively impact women in the long term? Will it continue to empower them while maintaining them in a subordinate

role or will it help reach parity in athletic opportunities, respect, representation (in participation, leadership, and media), and financial reward?

Using the Olympic Games as an analytical tool, this study has highlighted the obstacles women faced to gain acceptance in this male-defined athletic event and assesses the progress made over the last century. At the same time, it shines light on the meaning of Olympic participation for women, individually and/or collectively. Documenting the experiences and impressions of female Olympians provides critical insight into the obstacles these women faced, and what they gained in self-esteem; family and public recognition; and human, cultural, professional, and financial opportunities. It also illustrates the impact their participation had on the overall institution of sport and more generally, on American society. Finally, it demonstrates that the increasing presence of female athletes in such a global athletic showcase has helped frame questions and redefine the notions of space and gender roles in America. This approach brings new perspectives to both sports history and women's history.



## **Appendix I**

The following are the oral histories used in this dissertation. The Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles, now called LA84 Foundation, conducted and compiled them. They are listed in chronological order of Olympic participation. Also included is some general information such as who conducted the oral history, when it was done, which Olympic Games the athlete attended, which events the athlete competed in, and what medals, if any, the athlete obtained.

### **Aileen Riggin**

- Oral history conducted by Dr. Margaret Costa on November 11, 1994
- 1920 Antwerp Games – springboard diving – gold medal
- 1924 Paris Games – springboard diving – silver medal
- 1924 Paris Games – 100-meter backstroke – bronze medal

### **Thelma Payne Sanborn**

- Oral history conducted by Anita L. DeFrantz in March 1987
- 1920 Antwerp Games – fancy diving – bronze medal

### **Doris O'Mara Murphy**

- Oral history conducted by George A. Hodak in July 1987
- 1924 Paris Games – 100-meter backstroke
- 1924 Paris Games – 400-meter relay
- 1928 Amsterdam Games – assistant manager for the women's swimming team

### **Clarita Hunsberger Neher**

- Oral history conducted by Anita L. DeFrantz in May 1987
- 1924 Paris Games – platform diving
- 1928 Amsterdam Games – platform diving

### **Maybelle Reichardt Hopkins**

- Oral history conducted by George A. Hodak in June 1987
- 1928 Amsterdam Games – discus throw

### **Jean Shiley Newhouse**

- Oral history conducted by George A. Hodak in September 1987
- 1928 Amsterdam Games – high jump
- 1932 Los Angeles Games – high jump – gold medal

**Jane Fauntz Manske**

- Oral history conducted by George A. Hodak in July 1987
- 1928 Amsterdam Games – 200-meter breaststroke
- 1932 Los Angeles Games – Springboard diving – bronze medal

**Anne Vrana O'Brien**

- Oral history conducted by George A. Hodak in October 1987
- 1928 Amsterdam Games – track: 100-meter
- 1936 Berlin Games – 80-meter hurdles

**Evelyne Hall Adams**

- Oral history conducted by George A. Hodak in October 1987
- 1932 Los Angeles Games – 80-meter hurdles – silver medal

**Evelyn Furtsch Ojeda**

- Oral history conducted by George A. Hodak in December 1987
- 1932 Los Angeles Games – track: 400-meter relay – gold medal

**Simone Schaller Kirin**

- Oral history conducted by George A. Hodak in August 1988
- 1932 Los Angeles Games – 80-meter hurdles
- 1936 Berlin Games – 80-meter hurdles

**Iris Cummings Critchell**

- Oral history conducted by George A. Hodak in May 1988
- 1936 Berlin Games – 200-meter breaststroke

**Joanna de Tuscan Harding**

- Oral history conducted by George A. Hodak in April 1988
- 1936 Berlin Games – fencing

**Velma Dunn Ploessel**

- Oral history conducted by George A. Hodak in July 1988
- 1936 Berlin Games – platform diving – silver medal

**Juno Stover**

- Oral history conducted by Dr. Margaret Costa on July 27, 1991
- 1948 London Games – platform diving
- 1952 Helsinki Games – platform diving – bronze medal
- 1956 Melbourne Games – platform diving – silver medal
- 1960 Rome Games – platform diving

**Brenda Helser**

- Oral history conducted by Dr. Margaret Costa on July 27, 1991
- 1948 London Games – 4x100-meter swimming relay – gold medal
- 1948 London Games – 400-meter freestyle

**Patsy Elsener Homan**

- Oral history conducted by Dr. Margaret Costa on October 19, 1991
- 1948 London Games – springboard diving – silver medal
- 1948 London Games – platform diving – silver medal

**Ann Curtis**

- Oral history conducted by Dr. Margaret Costa on July 27, 1991
- 1948 London Games – 100-meter freestyle – silver medal
- 1948 London Games – 400-meter freestyle – gold medal
- 1948 London Games – 4x100-meter relay – gold medal

**Vicki Draves**

- Oral history conducted by Dr. Margaret Costa on April 19, 1991
- 1948 London Games – springboard diving – gold medal
- 1948 London Games – platform diving – gold medal

**Barbara Stark**

- Oral history conducted by Dr. Margaret Costa on October 19, 1991
- 1952 Helsinki Games – 100-meter backstroke

**Paula Jean Myers Pope**

- Oral history conducted by Dr. Margaret Costa on March 22, 1991
- 1952 Helsinki Games – platform diving – silver medal
- 1956 Melbourne Games – platform diving – bronze medal
- 1960 Rome Games – platform diving – silver medal

**Pat McCormick**

- Oral history conducted by Dr. Margaret Costa on June 26, 1991
- 1952 Helsinki Games – springboard diving – gold medal
- 1952 Helsinki Games – platform diving – gold medal
- 1956 Melbourne Games – springboard diving – gold medal
- 1956 Melbourne Games – platform diving – gold medal

**Maxine Mitchell**

- Oral history conducted by Dr. Margaret Costa on July 19, 1991
- 1952 Helsinki Games – fencing
- 1956 Melbourne Games – fencing
- 1960 Rome Games – fencing
- 1968 Mexico Games – fencing

## Appendix II

The following are the interviews I conducted for this dissertation. They are listed in chronological order of Olympic participation. Also included is some general information such the way the interview was performed, when it was done, which Olympic Games the athlete attended, which events the athlete competed in, and what medals, if any, the athlete obtained.

### **Juno Stover (Cox)**

- Wrote her answers to my questions
- 1948 London Games – platform diving
- 1952 Helsinki Games – platform diving – bronze medal
- 1956 Melbourne Games – platform diving – silver medal
- 1960 Rome Games – platform diving

### **Constance Darnowski (Stoll)**

- Email interview in May 2007
- 1952 Helsinki Games – 80-meter hurdles
- 1956 Melbourne Games– 80-meter hurdles

### **Nancy Ramey (Lethcoe)**

- Email interview in February 2007
- 1956 Melbourne Olympics – 100-meter butterfly – silver medal

### **Donna De Varona**

- Email interview on February 17, 2009
- 1960 Rome Games – did not compete because her event was canceled
- 1964 Tokyo Games – 400-meter medley – gold medal
- 1964 Tokyo Games – 400-meter freestyle relay team – gold medal

### **Patricia Winslow (Connolly)**

- Phone interview in April 2007
- 1960 Rome Games – 800-meter
- 1964 Tokyo Games – pentathlon
- 1968 Mexico Games – pentathlon

**Marcia Smoke**

- Email interview in November 2006
- 1964 Tokyo Games – 500-meter kayak single – bronze medal
- 1968 Mexico Games – 500-meter kayak single
- 1968 Mexico Games – 500-meter kayak doubles
- 1972 Munich Games – 500-meter kayak single

**Lesley Bush**

- Phone interview in February 2007
- 1964 Tokyo Games – platform diving – gold medal
- 1968 Mexico Games – platform diving

**Madeline Manning Mims**

- Phone interview on January 26 and 28, 2007
- 1968 Mexico Games – track: 800-meter – gold medal
- 1972 Munich Games – track: 800-meter
- 1972 Munich Games – track: 4x400-meter relay – silver medal
- 1976 Montreal Games – track: 800-meter
- 1980 Moscow Games – U.S.A. boycott

**Susie Atwood**

- Phone interview in March 2007
- 1968 Mexico Games – 200-meter backstroke
- 1972 Munich Olympics – 100-meter backstroke – bronze medal
- 1972 Munich Olympics – 200-meter backstroke – silver medal
- 1972 Munich Olympics – 4x100-meter medley relay

**Ann Meyers-Drysdale**

- Email interview on January 5, 2009
- 1976 Montreal Games – basketball – silver medal

**Nancy Lieberman**

- Phone interview on January 5, 2009
- 1976 Montreal Games – basketball – silver medal

**Lynne Anderson**

- Videorecorded her answers
- 1976 Montreal Games – discus throw
- 1980 Moscow Games – U.S.A. boycott

**Anita De Frantz**

- Email interview in March 2007
- 1976 Montreal Games – rowing – bronze medal
- 1980 Moscow Games – U.S.A. boycott

**Karin Smith**

- Phone interview in March 2007
- 1976 Montreal Games - javelin
- 1980 Moscow Games – U.S.A. boycott
- 1984 Los Angeles Games - javelin
- 1988 Seoul Games - javelin
- 1992 Barcelona Games - javelin

**Nancy Hogshead-Makar**

- Phone interview on February 23, 2007
- 1980 Moscow Games – U.S.A. boycott
- 1984 Los Angeles Games – 100-meter freestyle – gold medal
- 1984 Los Angeles Games – 4x100-meter freestyle relay – gold medal
- 1984 Los Angeles Games – 200-meter butterfly
- 1984 Los Angeles Games – 200-meter individual medley – silver medal
- 1984 Los Angeles Games – 4x100-meter medley relay – gold medal

**Denise Curry**

- Email interview in March 2007
- 1980 Moscow Games – U.S.A. boycott
- 1984 Los Angeles Games – basketball – gold medal

**Anne Donovan**

- Phone interview on February 14, 2007
- 1980 Moscow Games – U.S.A. boycott
- 1984 Los Angeles Games – basketball – gold medal
- 1988 Seoul Olympics – basketball – gold medal
- 2008 Beijing Games – head coach of the women’s basketball team – gold medal

**Pamela Shriver**

- Phone interview on March 15, 2007
- 1988 Seoul Olympics – tennis single
- 1988 Seoul Olympics – tennis doubles – gold medal

**Diana Gee-Mcdonnell**

- Athlete recorded her answer on tapes
- 1988 Seoul Olympics – table tennis single
- 1988 Seoul Olympics – table tennis doubles
- 1992 Barcelona Games – table tennis single
- 1992 Barcelona Games – table tennis doubles

**Karen Laface**

- Phone interview on March 26, 2007
- 1992 Barcelona Games – springboard diving

**Mary Ellen Clark**

- Phone interview in March 2007
- 1992 Barcelona Games – platform diving – bronze medal
- 1996 Atlanta Games – platform diving – bronze medal

**Shannon Miller**

- Email interview in January 2009
- 1992 Barcelona Games – gymnastics: floor exercise – bronze medal
- 1992 Barcelona Games – gymnastics: horse vault
- 1992 Barcelona Games – gymnastics: uneven bars – bronze medal
- 1992 Barcelona Games – gymnastics: balance beam – silver medal
- 1992 Barcelona Games – gymnastics: individual all-around – silver medal
- 1992 Barcelona Games – gymnastics: team all-around – bronze medal
- 1996 Atlanta Games – gymnastics: floor exercise
- 1996 Atlanta Games – gymnastics: horse vault
- 1996 Atlanta Games – gymnastics: uneven bars
- 1996 Atlanta Games – gymnastics: balance beam – gold medal
- 1996 Atlanta Games – gymnastics: individual all-around
- 1996 Atlanta Games – gymnastics: team all-around – gold medal

**Carla McGhee**

- Phone interview on January 6, 2009
- 1996 Atlanta Games – basketball – gold medal

**Julie Foudy**

- Phone interview on March 21, 2007
- 1996 Atlanta Games – soccer – gold medal
- 2000 Sydney Games – soccer – silver medal
- 2004 Athens Games – soccer – gold medal

**Mari Holden**

- Email interview in March 2007
- 2000 Sydney Games – cycling: individual road race
- 2000 Sydney Games – cycling: individual time trial – silver medal

**Tara Cunningham**

- Email interview in March 2007
- 2000 Sydney Games – weightlifting: flyweight – gold medal
- 2004 Athens Games – weightlifting: flyweight

**Lauryn Williams**

- In person interview on November 23, 2006
- 2004 Athens Games – track: 100-meter – silver medal
- 2004 Athens Games – track: 4x100-meter relay
- 2008 Beijing Games – track: 100-meter
- 2008 Beijing Games – track: 4x100-meter relay

**Kim Anthony**

- Email interview in January 2009
- Gymnast – did not make the Olympic team. Was selected in the second team that went to compete in South Africa

**Jacqueline Hanson**

- Email interview in November 2006
- Never participated in the Olympic Games because her even, the marathon, was not an Olympic sport for women when she competed. It was only introduced in 1984

**Michelle Kaufman**

- Email interview on January 26, 2007
- *Miami Herald* journalist
- Covered the last ten Winter and Summer Olympic Games



### Appendix III

#### **“The Women at the Olympic Games”<sup>443</sup>**

The question of allowing women to participate in the Olympic Games has not been settled. The answer cannot be negative merely on the grounds that that was the answer in antiquity; nor can it be affirmative solely because female competitors were admitted in swimming and tennis in 1908 and 1912. Not long ago, an application signed by a Neo-Amazon who intended to compete in the modern pentathlon was received. The Swedish Committee, which was free to take its own position, refused the agreement in the absence of any established legislation. So it is clear that the debate remains open.

It is good that too swift a decision has not been reached, and that this matter has dragged on. It will resolve itself quite naturally at the Congress of Paris, which will give the Olympiads their final form. Which way will it go? I am not a soothsayer, but for my own part I am not afraid of siding with the no vote. I feel that the Olympic Games must be reserved for men. First, in application of the well-known proverb depicted by Musset. A door must be either open or closed. Can we allow women access to *all* Olympic events? No? Then why should some sports be open to them while the rest are not? Above all, what basis can one use to place the barrier between the events that are permitted, and those that are not? There are not just women tennis players and swimmers. There are women fencers, women riders, and, in America, women rowers. In the future, perhaps will there be women runners or even women football players? Would such sports, played by women, constitute a sight to be recommended before the crowds that

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<sup>443</sup> De Coubertin, Pierre, “Les Femmes aux Jeux Olympiques,” *Revue Olympique* (July 1912): 109-111, reprinted in *Pierre de Coubertin – Olympism*, Muller, 711-713.

gather for an Olympiad? I do not think that any such claim can be made. But there is another reason, a practical one. Would separate events be held for women, or would meets be held all together, without distinction as to sex, regardless of whether the competition is among individuals or teams? The second of these approaches would be logical, since the dogma of the equality of the sexes tends to expand. Yet this assumes the existence of coed clubs. There are hardly any such club now, with the exception of tennis and swimming. Even with coed clubs, ninety-five times out of a hundred, elimination rounds favor the men. Let us not forget that the Olympic Games are not parades of physical exercises, but aim to raise, or at least maintain, records. *Citius, altius, fortius*. Faster, higher, stronger. That is the motto of the International Committee, and the fundamental reason for the existence of any form of Olympism. Whatever the athletic ambitions of women may be, women cannot claim to outdo men in running, fencing, equestrian events, etc. To bring the principle of the theoretical equality of the sexes into play here would be to indulge in a pointless demonstration bereft of meaning or impact.

There remains the other possibility, that of adding women's competitions alongside men's competitions in the sports declared open to women, a little female Olympiad alongside the great male Olympiad. What is the appeal of that? Organizers are already overworked, deadlines are already too short, the problems posed by housing and ranking are already formidable, costs are already excessive, and all that would have to be doubled! Who would want to take all that on?

In our view, this feminine semi-Olympiad is impractical, uninteresting, ungainly, and, I do not hesitate to add, improper. It is not in keeping with any concept of the Olympic

Games, in which I believe that we have tried, and must continue to try, to put the following expression into practice: the solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism, based on internationalism, by means of fairness, in an artistic setting, with the applause of women as a reward.

This combination of the ancient ideal and the tradition of chivalry is the only healthful and satisfactory one. It will impose itself on public opinion through its own strength.

## Appendix IV

Table of the medal count between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War (1952-1988).

Country	Ranking	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
<b>1952 Helsinki Olympic Games</b>					
United States	1	40	19	17	76
Soviet Union	2	22	30	19	71
<b>1956 Melbourne Olympic Games</b>					
United States	2	32	25	17	74
Soviet Union	1	37	29	32	98
<b>1960 Rome Olympic Games</b>					
United States	2	34	21	16	71
Soviet Union	1	43	29	31	103

<b>1964 Tokyo Olympic Games</b>					
United States	2	36	26	28	90
Soviet Union	1	30	31	35	96
<b>1968 Mexico Olympic Games</b>					
United States	1	45	28	34	107
Soviet Union	2	29	32	30	91
<b>1972 Munich Olympic Games</b>					
United States	2	33	31	30	94
Soviet Union	1	50	27	22	99
<b>1976 Montreal Olympic Games</b>					
United States	2	34	35	25	94
Soviet Union	1	49	41	35	125

1988 Seoul Olympic Games					
United States	3	36	31	27	94
Soviet Union	1	55	31	46	132

## Appendix V

The following is the letter sent by the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California to Peter Ueberroth, president of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, after the IRC and other groups supporting women runners saw their request for the inclusion of a 5,000 meter and a 10,000 meter races in the 1984 women's Olympic program rejected by the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee and the International Olympic Committee. This letter was found in the IRC Newsletters and Correspondence file located at the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles (AAFLA).

ACLU Foundation of Southern California  
633 South Shatto Place - Los Angeles, CA. 90005 – (213) 487-1720

July 19, 1983

Peter Ueberroth  
Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee  
10995 La Conte Avenue  
Westwood, CA 90024

Dear Mr. Ueberroth:

In May of this year we were approached by a number of women distance runners. These runners expressed concern to us that there are no 5,000 and 10,000 M. races scheduled for women in the Los Angeles Olympics. Their numbers included the top women distance runners in the world. They also represent an impressive number of nations.

After a through examination of their cause, we have been forced to the conclusion that in this instance there can be no justification for the exclusion of these events except

discrimination based upon sex. If there are any other reasons they have not been expressed to our clients. If such reasons exist, we would welcome your so advising us.

The women have clearly exhausted all possible administrative processes with the LAOOC structure and I.O.C. They have nowhere else to turn, but the courts.

We recognize the fact that the schedule of events has already been issued for the 1984 Summer Games. But we are equally aware that no nation has held tryouts for the games as of this date. We therefore feel these two events could be added to the program with minimal effort.

In good conscience, the appeal of these women cannot be ignored. The Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee undoubtedly was a major force behind the addition of women's synchronized swimming and flag drill events among others. But women deserve to compete in sports where strength and endurance are as much a factor as beauty.

Sexual discrimination may be a matter of course in international sports competition when held in other nations, but it is prohibited by law in this State and Nation. These laws should be observed.

It is our intention to file suit on behalf of the women long distance runners by the 7<sup>th</sup> of August, 1983, unless, of course, we can reach an amicable resolution of this dispute. We would be pleased to hear from you in this regard.

Yours respectfully,

Ramona Ripston  
Executive Director

Susan McGreivy  
Staff Attorney

RR:SM:pv



## **Appendix VI**

In this newsletter, the IRC tried to explain in details the legal proceedings started by the American Civil Liberties Union concerning the addition of the 5,000 and 10,000 meter races in the women's program of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. This newsletter was found in the IRC Newsletters and Correspondence file located at the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles (AAFLA).

### **International Runners' Committee**

#### **Newsletter Thirty-One – March 1984**

#### **Decision Near for Women's Olympic Races**

This, we hope, is the last lap.

As this newsletter goes to the printer, the resolution of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) lawsuit asking for the inclusion of the women's 5,000- and 10,000-meter races in the 1984 Olympics appears to be imminent. A hearing in the Federal District Court for the Central District of California, where Judge David Kenyon presides, should be in progress early this month.

Legal proceedings are a maze for the lay-person and the ins and outs of this case have kept our heads spinning. Law student Sherrill Kushner has followed the case closely and written a lengthy article for the April issue of **L.A. Lawyer**. She has graciously allowed us to condense her work for this newsletter. Permission to reprint substantial portions of this condensation should be obtained from Kushner at 409 19<sup>th</sup> St., Santa Monica, CA 90402.

### **The Complaint**

The ACLU's initial complaint was filed August 10, 1983 against the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF), the

U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC), the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC), The Athletics Congress (TAC), the Los Angeles Coliseum Commission and key individuals connected with the staging of Olympic track and field events. The plaintiffs – 58 female distance runners from around the world (who since have been joined by nearly 30 others) – alleged that although the 5,000 and 10,000 meet IOC requirements, they were excluded for women because of sex discrimination. Claiming that they have exhausted all available administrative remedies, these women, with the International Runners' Committee and the Road Runners Club of America, now seeking redress by legal means in what appears to be an unprecedented lawsuit.

### **Discrimination Not New to Olympics**

Sex discrimination currently violates state, federal and international law, but historically has been the status quo in many facets of society, athletics being one.

Women's participation in the Olympics has been limited by sex discrimination since the ancient Games began and women were forbidden – on penalty of death – to either watch or participate. The Modern Games were established in 1896 and women joined the program in 1900, but only to play lawn tennis. The attitude of the day was summed up by the Games' founder, Baron Pierre de Coubertin in 1912:

“We feel the Olympic games must be reserved for men....we feel that we have tried and that we must continue to try to achieve the following definition – the solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism with internationalism as a base, loyalty as a means, art for its setting and female applause as reward.”

That same year the IAAF was founded and recognized as the governing body for track and field.

A few years later national women's governing bodies for athletics began to form in Europe and America. In 1921 the Federation Sportive Feminine Internationale (FSFI) was created, performing parallel function for women as the IAAF did for men. Under the auspices of the FSFI, separate Olympic Games for women were held (1922, 1926, 1930 and 1934) but women continued to lobby with the IOC for the inclusion of women's track and field events in the Olympics. They failed in 1920 and 1924, but finally gained acceptance of five events for the 1928 program, including the 100 and 800. (Women were already competing in 15 events in their own Games). When many competitors in the 800 collapsed at the finish line, Olympic officials were “aghast to see ladies in such a state of disarray” and decreed that women be barred from any race longer than 200 meters. That decision stood for 32 years.

FSFI halted its plans for a fifth women's Games and disbanded in 1938, having received assurances that the IAAF would accept women's world records and enlarge the Olympic program.

New events were added to the Olympics, but it was 1960 before women were allowed to compete again in the 800. The 1500 was not added until 1972 and another 12 years will have passed before women are permitted to run farther than a mile in Olympic competition. It was only with intense lobbying that the 3,000 and marathon were finally accepted for the 1984 Games.

### **Enter the ACLU**

The ACLU, in 1980, was prepared to take legal action against the IOC for its discrimination against women in all sports. Jacqueline Hansen, then co-President of the International Runners' Committee (IRC) and former world-record holder in the marathon, contacted the ACLU to offer her support.

Although the ACLU withdrew its threat when several new sporting events, including the women's marathon, were added to the Olympic program, Hansen kept the Union apprised of IRC lobbying efforts, which had begun in 1979, to add the women's 5,000 and 10,000 to the Olympics.

The ACLU offered to work with the IRC if it first exhausted the proper channels and met the IOC requirements for inclusion, namely evidence of interest and participation, demonstrated by being widely practiced in 25 countries and two continents.

Hansen, with the help of IRC members, gathered the names and addresses of hundreds of women who were legitimate 5,000 and 10,000 runners from more than 50 countries. That campaign eventually yielded the responses of 80 women in 27 countries who sent signed right-to-sue letters in ten different languages.

The IRC also demonstrated that "proper channels" had been tried repeatedly, without success. In late 1977, the U.S. Amateur Athletic Union (since superseded by TAC) proposed the inclusion of the women's marathon, 5,000 and 10,000-meter races in the Olympics. Pat Rico carried the proposal to the IAAF the next year but it was not taken seriously.

In 1979, Marea Hartman, chairperson of the IAAF's women's committee, requested that the 3,000 and marathon be included in the Games, despite urging from the IRC that the 5,000 and 10,000 remain in the package. Only the proposal to include the 3,000 carried, and was approved in 1980. A year later, finally dismissing the idea that women could not run the distance, the marathon was approved for the '84 Games.

The IRC, dismayed by the " yawning gap between the 3,000 and the marathon," continued to press for parity for women runners.

Hansen personally approached the IAAF President Primo Nebiolo and his secretary,

Luciano Barra, who advised her that the only way to get these races in the Olympic agenda was to take proper steps – the first being to get them recognized as world-record events.

“I was astonished,” remarks Hansen, “I was holding in my hand the **Track and Field News** issue with the rankings of these races around the world. The 5,000 and 10,000 had been established as world-record events the year before. Here was a man in the highest echelon of the government of our sport and he didn’t know that had already happened.”

Barra also told Hansen that the IAAF Program Commission (which recommends events to the IOC) would give greatest consideration to events giving the greatest yield and then proceeded to characterize the two races as “boring.”

Hansen, laden with ammunition, returned to the ACLU, where Susan McGreivy, herself an Olympic swimmer in 1956, and Daniella Sapriel took the case.

“Up until 1983, Jacqueline Hansen and the IRC kept pushing within the system to get the middle distance races, but no one within the system would take responsibility for what was requested,” comments Sapriel, “The bringing of the lawsuit was not done as a political statement, but was brought as a last resort because the plaintiffs felt there was no other solution for them.”

Noting that women’s 10,000-meter races have drawn fields in the thousands in such places as Brazil, Hong Kong, Thailand, the Philippines and Japan, McGreivy notes, “it’s looking like these races may be the singularly most popular women’s events in the Olympic competition in terms of numbers of competitors, probably because they are ‘poor people’s races’ – they don’t require great amounts of sophisticated training, they can be run barefoot, and the runners can be trained in any part of the world. The great tragedy is that thousands are there and nobody notices until finally one generation of women said, ‘enough, we deserve to be in the Olympics.’”

### **Attorney’s Nightmare**

Because of the international scope of the lawsuit and the refusal of the IAAF and the IOC to be served with legal papers, the case has become an attorney’s nightmare.

The U.S.-based defendants (the LAOOC, USOC and TAC) answered the complaint in October but the IAAF in London, and the IOC, in Lausanne, claim that service is invalid and have returned the papers to the ACLU, some opened, some unopened. The ACLU, however, contends that service has been proper, since the LAOOC, the managing agent for the IAAF and IOC, was served.

Nonetheless, as a safeguard the ACLU continued with service procedures consistent with Swiss and British law. To serve the IOC in Switzerland, the entire complaint had to

be translated into French, along with portions of applicable statutes at issue. The translated documents were forwarded to Judge Kenyon for his approval (after review by a court translator), then sent to the U.S. State Department which transmitted them to appropriate Swiss officials. Those officials must determine if there is a cause of action for sex discrimination under Swiss law. If not, the IOC cannot be served, since it has not broken any Swiss law. As for the IAAF in England, the appropriate papers went directly to British officials without the intermediate step of the State Department.

As that legal process goes on abroad, the ACLU is asking for a default judgment against the IAAF and the IOC and the remaining defendants are moving through normal court procedures. After the entry of default, the ACLU will appear at a hearing and prove its case as if it were on trial.

### **What are the Arguments?**

Why the opposition to the women's 5,000 and 10,000?

Because of the lack of response from the IAAF and the IOC and a refusal to comment from the LAOOC, a thorough analysis is hampered. Yet information from TAC, the USOC and the Coliseum Commission indicates that there are four key allegations common to the defendants' answers: 1) that none of them are empowered to authorize the inclusion of athletic events in the Games without the approval of the IOC and thus are not the real parties in interest; 2) that none of them are "the agents, servants, and employees of one another" and that each has not been and is not acting under the color of City, County, State, U.S. and international law; 3) that none of them have unlawfully discriminated against women on the basis of sex in denying the inclusion of these races; and 4) that because plaintiffs waited too long to file suit, the claim should be barred.

The ACLU maintains that the USOC and TAC, by an Act of Congress, were given plenary powers over the Olympic Games, and that the LAOOC was named in the suit since any injunctive relief has to include them as the agent of the IOC.

The real opposition to the races, alleges McGreivy, is the IOC's need to "protect the integrity of the process, i.e. from being forced by any outside entity to add an event."

But if the IOC is untouchable, queries McGreivy, "how does the international athletes get due process against a remote corporation in the Swiss Alps?"

The plaintiffs feel strongly that the "integrity of process" argument is spurious because the process is whatever the IOC wants it to be. Rules 32 and 33 of the IOC Charter have been continually bent. Rule 32 requires that for an event to be added to the Games there must be evidence of interest and participation. Yet that rule has never been applied across the board and as recently as 1972, several sports had fewer than ten nations represented. Moreover, women distance runners are not asking for the addition

of a new sport, but rather the addition of two events within the existing program. The men's 5,000 and 10,000 have been part of the program since 1912.

Rule 33, requiring all events be named four years prior to the Games, has not been strictly enforced either. Since 1982 alone, board sailing, women's kayak racing, super heavy-weight judo and two wheelchair races for handicapped athletes (to be contested within the track and field program) have been added.

Another reason for opposition to the addition of the races has been the inability to accommodate these events at this late date. The LAOOC claims that to add the events "would place an intolerable burden on the LAOOC and would disrupt planning for and conduct of the Games."

Contrary to that statement, LAOOC president Peter Ueberroth, in a deposition taken in late January, stated that it was not too late to accommodate the races.

Whatever the outcome of the suit, it is incontestable that women lack parity in Olympic competition and have since the Games began. While 17 events have been added to the 1984 Olympic program since its establishment four years ago in Moscow (ten for women exclusively) and three have been added back to the program after being discontinued, women still have about one-third the opportunities to win medals as men.

## **Appendix VII**

In this newsletter, the IRC explains the results of the legal proceedings started by the American Civil Liberties Union concerning the addition of the 5,000 and 10,000 meter races in the women's program of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. This newsletter was found in the IRC Newsletters and Correspondence file located at the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles (AAFLA).

### **International Runners' Committee**

#### **Newsletter Thirty-One – April 1984**

#### **Back of the Bus**

Welcome to the back of the bus, ladies.

The long-awaited decision on the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) lawsuit asking for the inclusion of the women's 5,000- and 10,000-meter races in the 1984 Olympics came April 16. The news was disappointing.

Women distance runners will be denied the opportunity to compete in those events in Los Angeles this summer. U.S. District Court Judge David Kenyon rejected the sex discrimination suit against the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) and several other track and Olympic governing bodies. Although Kenyon was "sympathetic" to the plight of the women, he held that no violation of anti-discrimination laws could be proven.

The thrust of the decision appears to be that in the United States, at least, there are varying standards by which discrimination against various groups is to be judged. In the case of race or national origin, very strict standards apply, making virtually any kind of discrimination – for rational reasons or not – illegal. However there is no comparable federal law dealing with sex discrimination and a more lenient standard is generally applied. (The proposed Equal Rights Amendment would place sex discrimination on the same footing as discrimination based on race or national origin.)

There are, however, various states which guarantee equal protection, regardless of sex. Ironically, California is one of those states, although the judge found the standard inapplicable in this instance.

Under the more lenient standards of judging discrimination, “strict scrutiny” is not called for and a rule may be upheld if it bears a “rational relationship to a legitimate purpose,” and if the effect may deny opportunity to a certain group (i.e. women).

In this case, Kenyon felt that rules set up by the IAAF and the IOC to control the addition of events to the Olympics were reasonable, even though de facto discrimination exists because of the lack of parity between men’s and women’s events. The important point is that there is no proof of any intentional effort to discriminate against women, at least under the current and most recent set of IOC and IAAF officials.

Kenyon acknowledged that past officials had indeed gone on record – as late as 1954 – to limit the participation of women in the Olympics. In fact Kenyon carefully detailed the history of past discrimination and opened his lengthy written opinion with a quote from the Games’ founder, the Baron Pierre de Coubertin, in 1912:

“We feel the Olympic Games must be reserved for men... the solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism with internationalism as a base, loyalty as a means, art for its setting and female applause as reward.”

Kenyon concluded, however, that the pattern of discrimination has been reversed, “While plaintiffs have submitted a volume of material, much of which presents with clarity the male-oriented approach taken in the Olympics in its modern-day inception and for many years, the plaintiffs have not shown sufficiently that the defendants have violated these laws,” he wrote.

Part of the suit was based on California’s Unruh Act, which prohibits businesses from discriminating on the basis of sex. Although Kenyon disallowed the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee’s contention that it wasn’t a business, he sided with their position that the act doesn’t apply to the Games because not everyone can participate, only an elite class of athletes.

Nonetheless, Kenyon wrote that “there must be great frustration for a woman athlete with the talent and determination to be the best and who, had she been a man, could compete in one or both of these events.”

### **Reactions: “They Win Either Way”**

- Daniella Sapriel, one of the ACLU attorneys working on the case for women runners, had mixed reactions upon reading Judge Kenyon’s 38-page decision:



It (the written decision) was real odd. The first 20 pages were so sympathetic (to the plaintiffs), but the second half seemed like it was written by a different person.”

“The facts are with us,” stated Sapriel, “but the judge can’t find the legal ground on which to provide remedy.”

“Although discrimination exists, the defendants could put up a ‘rational’ reason for their actions, to keep the Games under control. Our big problem was that we didn’t have the ‘smoking gun,’ that is, proof of discriminatory intent. We only had circumstantial evidence and signs of slow, ponderous progress,” she added. Kenyon apparently felt that progress was fast enough.

- Julie Brown, one of the 82 women from 26 countries who were plaintiffs, said, “I’m obviously disappointed. I think that it’s something that was greatly needed. The decision is an injustice and needs to be changed.”
- Mary Decker, another of the plaintiffs: “When somebody has something and somebody else doesn’t and they don’t have the right to try to obtain that something – that’s discrimination.”
- Carol Daniels, general counsel for the Los Angeles organizers: “We’re very sympathetic with the cause of the plaintiffs, but we’re relieved the court seemed to understand the court was not the right time nor the right place. These are international games, the events to be included in the Games are established by international governing bodies. They have policies and procedures for adding these events and that’s where these issues should be decided.”
- Jacqueline Hansen, plaintiff and Executive Director of the International Runners’ Committee: “I will always be angered that the integrity of the process was more important than the athletes... This means the world will miss seeing a number of very talented women in the ’84 Olympics...They didn’t ask Frank Shorter to wait another four years.”
- Plaintiff Kathy Hayes, responding to Kenyon’s statement that the number of women competing in the Games has nearly tripled since 1948 while men’s participation for the same period increased only one-fourth: “I don’t like that argument at all. We were so far behind we had to catch up. It’s also ridiculous to say that track events have been added for women while none have been added for men. That’s because all the events are already being offered for men.” (There are 61 events for women in the ’84 Summer Olympics, compared to 144 for men and 15 for both.)  
Added Hayes, “It’s also obvious that the Olympic Committee uses its rules when it suits them and goes around them when they want. They win either way.”

### **Where Do We Go From Here?**

Much of the International Runners' Committee's time and energy has gone into the lobbying effort for parity for women distance runners. The ACLU lawsuit was the frustrating culmination of a five-year struggle by this group, and longer struggle by others.

An appeal of the decision is a distinct possibility, according to ACLU lawyers, who feel that California state law does offer women the highest level of protection from sex discrimination. An emergency appeal could be forthcoming and certainly all involved in the case realize the press of time as the Games draw near.

Barring further court action, we intend to regroup and once again focus our lobbying efforts on the same channels which have rebuffed us in past attempts to get the women's 5,000 and 10,000 added to the Olympics.

We also will mourn the lost opportunity for this generation of women runners to compete at the highest level in their chosen field of endeavor.

## **Appendix VIII**

In this newsletter, the IRC included Judge Harry Pregerson's dissenting opinion in regards to the verdict given by Judge David Kenyon in response to the legal proceedings started by the American Civil Liberties Union concerning the addition of the 5,000 and 10,000 meter races in the women's program of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. Only that portion of the newsletter is here reprinted. This newsletter was found in the IRC Newsletters and Correspondence file located at the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles (AAFLA).

### **International Runners' Committee**

### **Newsletter Thirty-Five – July 1984**

#### **A Voice for Women Runners**

Judge Harry Pregerson's dissenting opinion in the recent divided federal appeals court refusal to add the women's 5,000 and 10,000 to the '84 Olympics reflects the reasoning and frustration behind the lawsuit.

The IRC would like to take this opportunity to share his opinion, in condensed form and minus the legal references, with the readers of this newsletter. The opinion is filed with the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit United States Court of Appeals:

#### **Institutionalized Discrimination**

Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic Games, described the Olympics as "the solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism with internationalism as a base, loyalty as a means, art for its setting, and female applause as

reward.” As late as 1954, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) voted to limit women’s participation to those vents ‘particularly appropriate to the female sex.’ This attitude toward women has resulted in a continuing disparity between male and female opportunities to compete in the Olympic Games.

From the beginning, women athletes have challenged the IOC’s policy of discriminating against them in track and field. Women were not permitted to participate in track and field events until the 1928 (Olympics), when the IOC included eight events for women. That year, women from the British team boycotted the Games to protest the IOC’s failure to include a full program of events for women athletes. After the 1928 Games, in which several women athletes collapsed after the 800-meter race, the IOC voted to further limit women’s races to 200 meters. This restrictive policy continued for 32 years until the IOC reinstated the 800 for the 1960 Games.

Until quite recently, the IOC and its track and field affiliates refused to sanction any distance races for women. The longest race for women at the 1980 Games was only 1500 meters.

The track and field program for men, on the other hand, was virtually complete by the 1912 Olympics. The IOC added only two events to the men’s track and field program since then. In the 1984 Games, despite the recent addition of three women’s events, the men’s track and field program will still include seven more events than the women’s program.

Against this background of institutionalized, gender-based discrimination, the IOC in 1949 adopted a facially neutral policy designed to limit the number of new events added to the Olympic program. Because women started from a position of distinct disadvantage in the total number of Olympic events, this policy, now Rule 32 of the Olympic Charter, affected women athletes disproportionately and contributed to continuing gender-based disparity in opportunities for Olympic competition. The adoption of Rule 32 does not excuse the fact that men are permitted to compete in middle-distance races and women are not.

### **The Civil Rights Claim**

The district court found that the balance of hardships tips in favor of plaintiffs, but denied a preliminary injunction (to include the two races in the ’84 Games) because the court believed that plaintiffs were unlikely to succeed on the merits of their Unruh Act (civil rights) claim. Proper application of the Unruh Act is thus crucial to the disposition of this appeal. The Unruh Act declares:

*All persons within the jurisdiction of this state are free and equal, and no matter what their sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, or national origin are entitled to the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities,*

*privileges, or services in all business establishments of every kind whatsoever.*

Because defendant organizations (including the Los Angeles Olympic Organization Committee) constitute a business establishment, and the opportunity to compete in the Olympics is a privilege or advantage that defendant provide, the opportunity for women to compete in the Los Angeles Olympics on an equal basis with me falls within the scope of the Unruh Act.

The California courts have liberally construed the business establishment requirement... “in the broadest sense reasonably possible.” An organization is within the scope of the Unruh Act unless it is “truly private.”

The Olympic Games are not run as a private club. To the contrary, the organizers of the 1984 Olympics have emphasized...that their policy is to encourage athletes from around the world to participate, subject only to their athletic qualification. Moreover, the United States Olympic Committee...operates under a congressional charter. In so doing, the Committee provides a quasi-public service.

Plaintiffs have also satisfied the second requirement of the Unruh Act – that the right denied to the women runners be accommodation, advantage, facility, privilege, or service.

I do not believe that the California legislature intended that an athletic contest such as the Olympics, which is a major public event, should be free under California law to discriminate openly against a class of participants on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, or national origin.

### **Discrimination Under Unruh Act**

The primary purpose of the Unruh Act is “to compel recognition of the equality of all persons in the right to the particular service offered by an organization or entity covered by the Act.” The Act has been construed to bar all forms of arbitrary discrimination.

Unlike the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment, the Unruh Act requires the court to find only that women are excluded from the particular privilege, facility or service. The motivation for that exclusion is irrelevant. Contrary to the majority’s belief, the existence of a facially neutral rule, such as Rule 32, which effectively perpetuates past discrimination, is also irrelevant to the Unruh Act analysis.

Defendants have not presented a compelling societal interest to justify the exclusion of women from competition in the 5,000- and 10,000-meter races. Members of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee have acknowledged that, even at this late date, it would be administratively to add the events. Further, plaintiffs have even satisfied

defendant's rule limiting the Olympic program to widely practiced events that can attract a representative field of competitors. Plaintiffs demonstrated that women throughout the world participate in the 5,000 and 10,000, even though the international track and field organizations sanctioned the two events with world-class status only four years ago.

In short, the California Supreme Court's construction of the Unruh Act...leaves little room for debate: when individuals are excluded from full and equal access to a privilege that a business establishment provides, the exclusion violates the Unruh Act unless defendant can point to a compelling societal justification for the exclusion. Because defendants have not shown a compelling reason for excluding women runners from competing in the 5,000- and 10,000-meter races, the injunction should issue.

### **Conclusion**

The IOC made concessions to the widespread popularity of women's track and field by adding two distance races this year. The IOC refused, however, to grant women athletes equal status by including all events in which women compete internationally. In so doing, the IOC postponed indefinitely the equality of athletic opportunity that it could easily achieve this year in Los Angeles. When the Olympics move to other countries, some without America's commitment to human rights, the opportunity to tip the scales of justice in favor of equality may slip away. Meanwhile, the Olympic flame – which should be a symbol of harmony, equality and justice – will burn less brightly over the Los Angeles Olympic Games.

### **Footnotes**

In a footnote to his opinion, Pregerson addressed the majority's "separate but equal" treatment of the case:

The majority apparently believes that the Unruh Act does not apply...because plaintiffs ask the court to order the addition of equal races for women, but not to compete against men. By this reasoning, a public library that provided restrooms for men only could not be compelled under the Unruh Act to provide separate facilities for women.

The courts have acknowledged, however, that separate athletic teams or competitions for men and women may provide equality of opportunity. Moreover, defendants, not the women runners, created a system of separate events for men and women in the Olympics, and therefore, should not now use that decision as a shield against legal action to end discrimination.

Finally, my concurring colleagues' views on separate but equal would be persuasive if we were dealing with invidious discrimination based on race, religion, or national origin. But the analysis misses the mark in a case dealing with gender-based discrimination in athletic contests. Comparing the odious doctrine of apartheid with separate athletic events for men and women distorts the concept of equality of opportunity in athletic contests and overlooks the physical differences between the sexes as well as the cases (cited in this opinion). If the concurrence's reasoning were carried to its logical conclusion, all Olympic events in which men and women participate separately would be banned as apartheid.

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