

## **Tributes to Dr Reet Howell**

**Murray Phillips  
University of Canberra**

June 10, 1993 marked the passing of Reet Howell and the loss of a prominent personality and respected academic who achieved an international reputation in the fields of sport history and physical education.

Reet's academic career began with her gaining a Bachelor of Health and Physical Education at the University of Toronto. She then completed a Master of Arts at the University of Alberta and a Doctorate of Education at the University of California, Berkeley. After attaining her postgraduate qualifications, Reet taught at a number of institutions including Palomar College, San Diego State University, University of Ottawa, Brisbane College of Advanced Education and the University of Queensland. Her final appointment was at the Queensland University of Technology where she was appointed as a Senior Lecturer and within a year was promoted to Associate Professor.

In her career, Reet held numerous administrative positions on professional bodies and organisations. She was consultant on several major projects, received a variety of grants and was the recipient of several awards. In 1979, Reet's contribution to teaching and research was recognised with the Mabel Lee Award from the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. Little more than a decade later, the American Academy of Physical Education honoured her achievements and made her a corresponding fellow.

Much of Reet's reputation resulted from her contribution to the fields of physical education and sport history. In the latter discipline her special interests were in Soviet sport, women's sport and, most recently, Australian sport history. She wrote, or collaborated with Professor Max Howell, on fifteen books, twenty chapters in books, forty-two journal articles as well as numerous other monographs, booklets and publications in conference proceedings. A common feature of her work was a willingness to explore new topics and areas. A good example is *Her Story in Sport*, a pioneering source

about women's participation in sporting activities in North America. Published in 1982, it is still a leading volume in the area. Similarly, *Foundations of Physical Education*, was the first academic text book for secondary schools in Australia and a companion text, *Foundations of Health*, are both used widely today. There are several other books – *A History of Australian Sport*, *The Greatest Game under the Sun*, *Aussie Gold*, *The Sporting Image* and the *Genesis of Sport in Queensland* – that all attest to the initiative of Reet and Max in investigating Australian and, more specifically, Queensland's sporting heritage.

Reet's death is a particularly great loss because of her contribution of physical education and sport history. She died at a time when her career was blossoming with the potential of many productive years ahead. Moreover, it is tragic that someone who looked after herself so well and lived according to the principles of health, which she wrote about, would be cut down so quickly while in her prime. The sporting community has lost a real personality, but her work will remain as testament to a productive, energetic and valued academic.

**Edmond Scott**  
**Manager**  
**The Queensland Sporting**  
**Museum and Hall of Fame**

Reet Howell was born Reet Ann Nurmberg in a refugee camp in Angelholm, Sweden on 19 March 1945, shortly after her parents had fled Estonia to escape the communist regime. Professor Howell, forty-eight, died of cancer in the Brisbane Mater Hospital on 10 June, seventy-eight days after being diagnosed with the disease.

After her birth, her family migrated to Canada. In Toronto, Ontario, she completed her primary and secondary education and her Bachelor of Health and Physical Education Degree. In 1970 she gained her Master of Arts Degree at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada and her Doctorate of Education, at the University of California, Berkeley in 1972. Renowned as a Baltic scholar, it is not surprising that her Doctoral Thesis was titled 'Sport and Physical Education in Estonia'.

Reet Howell was a distinguished scholar, who, at the time of her death, was approaching the high point of her academic career continually gaining increasing recognition for her scholarship. Reet wrote more than seventeen books and one hundred research articles. Her primary academic interests were Soviet studies, women's sport and indigenous games. With her husband Max, they have written extensively, especially of sport in Queensland. This is exemplified by *The Sporting Image: A Pictorial History of Queenslanders at Play*, and *The Genesis of Sport in Queensland: From Dream time to Federation*. During this time she delivered papers all over the world: Estonia, Germany, Sweden, Israel, Italy, France, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, the USA, Canada, Japan, Thailand, the People's Republic of China and India.

Her academic experience was extensive:

- 1972/3 Lecturer, Department of Physical Education, Palomar College, San Marcos, California, USA.
- 1974/9 Associate and Assistant Professor, Department of Physical Education, San Diego State University, San Diego, California, USA.
- 1979/81 Associate Professor, School of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa, Canada.
- 1982 Lecturer, Department of Physical Education, Brisbane College of Advanced Education, Mt Gravatt, Queensland.
- 1983/9 Research Fellow Department of Human Movement Studies, University of Queensland.
- 1990 Senior Lecturer and Associate Professor, Department of Physical and Health Education, Brisbane College of Advanced Education, Carseldine and Queensland University of Technology.
- Associate Professor, School of Human Movement Studies, Queensland University of Technology.

Reet Howell was also an experienced administrator. Having held many positions including Head of Department of Physical and Health Education, Brisbane College of Advanced Education, Head (acting), School of Human Movement Studies, Queensland University of Technology, Women's Commandant, 1982 Commonwealth Games (Brisbane) and National Co-ordinator for Women in Sport in the Australian Council of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, 1981-3. In 1990 she was elected as an International Fellow of the American Academy of Kinesiology and physical Education. Her philosophy of life was exemplified in her writings and her beliefs. She was committed to a healthy life style this was supported by her sporting achievements and her commitment to fitness and diet.

The Australian Society of Sports Historians has certainly benefited greatly by the presentation and research contributions of Reet Howell. It is marvellous to know that due to a generous donation to the association by Max, her contributions and memory will remain a cherished part of our conferences.

Reet Howell will be sadly missed by all who knew her, especially her students with whom she worked tirelessly and unselfishly. As a teacher she put her students first, always making herself available and accessible. Many of Reet's attributes were outlined to those who attended her funeral by several prominent citizens and leading sportspersons. It gave them the opportunity to express their feelings towards this lady whom they cherished as their special friend.

To me, Reet Howell was not only my teacher, my examiner and a very dear friend, but due to her sincerity and belief in of what she did, she along with her husband Max, gave me the motivation, inspiration and determination to strive for and achieve my professional goals.

I feel privileged to have known her and to have been classed, by her, as her friend. My family and I, along with many other people from all walks of life, are better people for having known her and for being touched by her in our passage through life. To Max, my dear friend, we join with you during this very sad time, but are comforted by the fact that Reet has left us with the direction, determination and enthusiasm to continue her work.

## Research Contributions of Dr Reet Howell

[Below are some extracts of three sections of Dr Reet Howell's most recent curriculum vitae – under the headings of Publications, Conference and Professional Presentations and Honours – which were written by Reet Howell herself.]

The evidence of my research achievement can be measured by the productivity record in the form of publications, professional presentations and honours, as well as grants and supervision of higher degrees. As these have been made at the local, state, national and international levels, there has been external recognition by one's peers and other professionals.

### Publications

The summary of the publication record would attest to the fact that I have written, or co-written some fifteen books, twenty-five chapters in books, thirty-seven journal articles, fifty-five conference proceeding publications, and ten monographs and booklets. Due to the extensiveness of the publications, I will only highlight a selected number.

In one of my major research areas, that of sport history, there have been publications in all the major journals, namely, the *Journal of Sport History* (North America), *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*, and *Sporting Traditions* (Australia). The articles, 'Women in the Medieval and Renaissance Period: Spectators Only' in the *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*, and, 'The Atalanta Legend in Art and Literature' in the *Journal of Sport History* could be singled out for particular recognition. The publication of 'The First Intercolonial Rugby Tour in 1882' in the *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, and, the 'Holua: The Ancient Hawaiian Sport of Sledding', accepted for the *Hawaiian Journal of History*, attest to recognition in the general discipline of history.

The article, 'The USSR: Sport and Politics Intertwined', was the first sport/physical education publication in the journal, *Comparative Education*, which is the official organ of the Comparative Education Society of Britain.

Special attention should be drawn to the publications in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *The Physician and Sportsmedicine* and the *Canadian Journal of Applied Social Sciences*.

The chapter, 'Physical Education and Sport in Early Societies', is of particular importance as the book, *History of Physical Education and Sport*, has been the premier text in North America for the past decade. The historical chapter on 'Sport in Australia' was invited for the six volume World History

of Sport and Physical Education (*Geschichte der Leibesübungen*) published in three languages – German, English and French. For the international *Medicine and Sports Science Series* on women in sport I was invited to write the chapter titled, ‘Women in Leisure Activities in Ancient Greece and Rome’.

A special mention must be made of the chapter, ‘Sports and Physical Education in the Estonian SSR’, which was part of the first book (in English) of a socio-historical analysis of Estonia, titled, *A Study in Depth of a Soviet Republic*.

Of the books, it is extremely difficult to highlight just one or two, for each one was a pioneer in the respective subject area and all have made significant contributions. For example, *Her Story in Sport* was a pioneer book on the historical evolution of women’s participation in sports activities in North America. A decade after it was published it remains the premier book in the area, A request from the publisher to bring out a second edition has not been fulfilled due to the demands of this new position, but will be completed in the future.

*Foundations of Physical Education*, a text on the academic foundations of physical education (i.e. anatomy, exercise physiology, sport history, etc.) serves as the principal book used by secondary schools in all states of Australia. With the release of *Concepts of Physical Education* in January 1991, the Foundations book will be utilised by the junior school with senior schools adopting the new text. A companion text is the *Foundations of Health*, which has also been used by schools throughout Australia since 1987. The senior text titled *Concepts of Health* has been contracted by Jacaranda Wiley and is scheduled for publication in 1992.

A special reference must be made to *Aussie Gold*, which received extensive media and community recognition during the 1988 Olympic Games. Oral interviews with all the living Australian gold medallists served as the fundamental source for the personal biographies.

The ten-part monograph series dealing with *Quality of Life* was an integral component of the nation-wide 3M Corporation Staywell Executive Program in the United States. Because of my expertise in the aquatics areas I was asked to assist in the revision of the national *Canadian Red Cross Water Safety Manual*.

With reference to the Conference Proceedings I would like to highlight ‘Sport and Physical Education in Estonia’ from the *Second World Symposium on the History of Sport*, in Canada, ‘The Development of the Socio-Cultural

Area in North America' from the *International Seminar on the History of Sports Sciences* in East Germany and 'The Western World of Sport: National Programs from the *International Seminar on Comparative Physical Education and Sport* in Israel.

The Book Reviews do not necessitate elaboration except to state that these have all been invited reviews for the principal journals in Canada, United States and Australia.

Of the newspaper publications, the eight-part features on the Olympic Games for Brisbane's *Courier Mail* were particularly noteworthy in that they heightened the awareness of the community in the world's largest sports festival.

### **Conference and Professional Presentations**

Since 1970, I have contributed to the presentation of some 124 papers at academic conferences. These include the First Canadian Symposium of History of Sport and Physical Education, the Second World Symposium of History of Sport and Physical Education, the Olympic Games Scientific Congresses in 1976 and 1984, and the

Asian Games Scientific Congresses in 1986 and 1990. Also papers have been regularly presented at the North American Society for Sport History and the Australian Society for Sport History conferences as well as those of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, and the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation. From the international perspective, the conference sat which papers have been presented have been in Canada, the United States, Australia, Japan, Israel, Korea, the People's Republic of China, Sweden, East Germany, France, Mexico and Thailand.

Three presentations deserve to be highlighted. In 1977, I was invited to give the keynote address, 'Women and Sport in the Ancient Western World', to the Japanese Society for Physical Education. When the first National Conference on Handicapped Physical Education Programs in the USA Conference was held, I was asked to give the 'History of Sport and Physical Education of the Handicapped'. Similarly, at the first International Congress on Women and Sport held in Rome, Italy, the invited paper was on 'Women and Sport: An Historical Overview from Ancient Times to the Renaissance'.

Special invited university lectures have been made at University of California, Berkeley; San Jose State University; Pacific College, California; Long Beach State University; Newcastle CAE; Oregon State University; University of Arizona; University of Queensland; State University of Brazil; Arizona State University; California State University-Pomona.

## **Honours**

The most significant honour which I have received has been the Mabel Lee Award from the American Alliance of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. This honour is awarded to the physical educator, under thirty-five years of age, who has been the most outstanding in research and teaching, and who demonstrates national professional leadership. I became only the second individual, and the only Canadian, ever presented with this award.

The receipt of the Canada Council of Arts Doctoral Fellowship was a distinct honour as it was the most prestigious award from the Canadian Government and I became the first in the discipline of physical education to receive this Fellowship.

In the United States, the Danforth Associate Association was a national program aimed to bring together academics from diverse fields. In 1978 I was selected from some 1500 faculty to be the San Diego State University's representative.

In 1991 I was elected to the American Academy of Physical Education which is the august body of the leaders of the discipline of physical education.