

Communications

To the Editor of the *Journal of Sport History*:

In Vol. V, No. 2 Dr. Mary H. Leigh published a review of my monograph "A Historical Analysis of the Role of Women in the Modern Olympic Games."

While some of Dr. Leigh's criticism is well founded (and I thank her hereby for this criticism), the review unfortunately does not stop at constructive criticism and I feel the need to react to misquotations and to the presentation of bits of content out of context.

Worst of all Dr. Leigh questions my objectivity (and can a male be objective toward women at all these days?) because in one case I fail to defend the women's position in a legitimate argument with the I.O.C. This argument, to which I refer on p. 9, concerns the possible inclusion of synchronized swimming and modern rhythmical gymnastics in the Olympic Games, and I feel strongly that Lord Killanin has a point when he refuses to add events that cannot be judged objectively to the Olympic program, due to recent refereeing scandals at the Games.

Furthermore it is definitely legitimate for a researcher to leave problems unanswered, once he admits that the problem exists and he does not possess the answer to it. Does this mean, however, that I am "more concerned about the ways in which woman's participation in the Olympic Games has affected the men's program"? (Leigh, p. 100). I simply do not have the answer whether the inclusion of basketball and hazena in the Women's World Games of 1934 contributed to the inclusion of basketball and team handball in the 1936 Olympic program for men, in order to prevent these from becoming "female" sports, or not. If Dr. Leigh has this information, I would be very grateful to her for it.

As to misquotations let me only bring two examples:

- a) Nowhere do I claim (as Dr. Leigh states on p. 99) that the drop in percentage of female athletes in the Berlin Games of 1936 "was caused by the belief that the German women would do well in the Games." On p. 20, I do state that this was caused by the fact that the German organizers did not translate their words concerning women's sports into deeds.

- b) Dr. Leigh claims (on p. 99) that I fail to explain the “significant” greater drop in female participation in the Los Angeles Games of 1932. On p. 18 of the monograph I state that there was indeed a significant drop in participation of both male and female athletes, (obviously because of the great distance to Los Angeles) “the drop among the females being even slightly greater than among the men (56% compared to 53%).”

Dr. Leigh is definitely entitled to her opinions, as I am to mine, but this does not show that my opinions are wrong, especially when I substantiate my opinions with facts. It seems to me that the I.O.C. should be more blamed for the situation in female athletics in the Olympic Games and I bring more than one example for this in the monograph. At the same time I do criticize the I.O.C. for certain positions, but this does not mean that the I.O.C. is all wrong. Paragraph 33 of the I.O.C. rules (see p. 26 in the monograph) is but one example that this is not so, and I therefore cannot understand Dr. Leigh’s question whether I can show (for I do show) “that the I.O.C. has held a positive attitude towards women during the past 25 years?”

Two final remarks:

- a) Dr. Leigh claims (p. 98) “that errors in reporting the results of women’s competitions clearly reflect the low status of these events.” One has only to study Kamper’s excellent “Encyclopedia of the Olympic Games” in order to realize that many hundreds, if not thousands, of mistakes have been made in the reporting of Olympic competitions for men and this does not justify Dr. Leigh’s statement.
- b) Dr. Leigh claims (on p. 99) that men’s individual gymnastics competitions started in 1932. The fact is they started in 1896! Dr. Leigh claims that I do not explain why women’s individual gymnastics competitions started only in 1952, while I do state (on p. 16) that this was due to the attitude of the International Gymnastics Federation (which the I.O.C. cannot overrule).

The fact that over two pages of the *Journal* are dedicated to Dr. Leigh’s review flatter me, because it proves the relevancy of the topic. This is also shown by the fact that the first edition of the monograph is practically sold out and a second (revised, enlarged and updated) edition is due in 1979.

Wingate Institute for Physical Education and Sport, Israel Uriel Simri

To the Editor of the *Journal of Sport History*:

I must say that I was surprised at Dr. Simri's reaction to my review of his monograph. In fact, when I sent it in, I was convinced that I had been far too gentle in my criticism of his work. One of my colleagues at Brockport indicated to me that although she felt I was very fair, I could expect to receive an objection from Simri as a matter of course. I would like to suggest to the reader another review by Jean Leiper, recently appearing in the *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*, which is also critical. Further, the reader should keep in mind that authors of published material give permission to have their work reviewed. In this "answer" I would like to do two things. First, I would like to attend to those objections which I believe are important to answer, and second, I want to re-emphasize significant points in my review that were not refuted.

Before it was published, it would have been quite beneficial if Dr. Simri had had his work critiqued and edited by a competent sports historian who also knew intimately the history of women. His writing and his analysis left much to be desired. If Dr. Simri had been as careful in preparing his monograph as he was in writing his rebuttal, I believe his work would have been greatly improved.

I do, indeed, question Simri's objectivity regarding the women's position on synchronized swimming and modern rhythmical gymnastics. An objective historian does not refer to women as being "somewhat fanatical" without providing supporting evidence to show irrational behavior. Just as importantly, I question the motives of the IOC regarding its position on the matter. It is quite clear that in the past the IOC, as well as other governing bodies, have used a variety of excuses to attempt to control and/or eliminate women's participation in the Olympic Games. If refereeing objectively is such a problem, then let us rid ourselves of all those sports in the Games requiring human judgment, such as diving, gymnastics, ice skating, dressage, and so on. This argument seems as valid as the one used by the IOC and by Dr. Simri.

The only point I will concede among the objections is the one regarding the drop in the percentage of women athletes in the Berlin Games. I find that I was making my own interpretations from what Simri said. The statement about the percentage drop in women's participation was followed by the sentence about German propaganda being based on the belief that the German women would do well. I assumed causation and I should not have done so. However, since I am so familiar with the subject, and know that the German women swept the Women's World Games of 1934, and knowing the fears American sports officials had

about the performances of American women, the drop in participation may well have been because German women were expected to do so well.

My objection to the statement about the significant drop in the number of female participants in the Los Angeles Games of 1932 was raised because I felt Simri's analysis was far too simplistic, i.e. the great distance to Los Angeles. It is obvious that there would be fewer participants because of the distance, but nothing is said about the effects of the Great Depression, which by 1932 had affected other parts of the world. Nothing is said about the social attitudes toward women and women athletes at that time, nor the reluctance of paternalistic societies to allow women to travel for social and moral reasons.

Generally, I believe Dr. Simri misses the intent of my criticism. When I read an analysis, I want that analysis to say *why* events happened as they did. For example, he does not say why women's gymnastics did not include individual competitions until 1952, nor did he say why the International Gymnastics Federation was opposed to their inclusion. Contradicting Dr. Simri, in 1952 the IOC *did* have the authority to make decisions regarding the number and kind of events women could participate in. Otto Mayer, former Chancellor of the IOC related a summary of the 44th Session of the IOC in Copenhagen, May 12, 1950, which tells of the joint meeting with the International Gymnastics Federation. (*A Travers les Anneaux Olympiques*, pp. 192-193) A Commission had been formed of Avery Brundage, von Frenckell and Sommer (FIG) to study the future of women's gymnastics. The Commission was not able to come to consensus and asked the IOC to make a decision. Von Frenckell (Finland) spoke in favor of eliminating women's gymnastics from the Olympic Games in Helsinki in 1952. Speaking in favor of inclusion was Seeldrayers (Belgium), Mayer (Switzerland), Lord Burghley (England), and Pietri (France). It was finally decided to include *team competitions* for women in the program. I do not yet know how women came to compete individually in the Games of 1952.

It is simply not true that the IOC has held a positive attitude toward women during the past 25 years. Avery Brundage, President of the IOC, in 1952 proposed the elimination of all women's events as a solution for reducing the program. (Otto Mayer, p. 222) The decision of the International Olympic Committee to limit International Federations to specific numbers of teams and/or events was, in effect, quite an efficient way to control the growth of women's participation. That way, in order for women's events to be included, the men's program would have to be curtailed. Another example of the IOC's negative attitude was its refusal to admit women into its organizational structure. In 1960, Zoya Roma-

nova (USSR), Frances Kazubski (USA), and Doris Magee (Australia) petitioned the IOC for female representation. It was not until 1973, however, that action was taken to allow women to be elected to that body. At that point the IOC promptly elected four new male members. Surely there is at least one woman in the whole world interested, dedicated to Olympic ideals, capable, and rich enough to warrant membership in the IOC.

The whole question of the participation of women in the Olympic Games is one of absorbing interest to me. I want to get the best possible analysis, not just the easiest. I would hope that in Simri's second edition of the monograph, he will do a more complete job.

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Editorial Note: Letters to the editor are published verbatim.