

## Commentary

### Beyond Mapping Experience: The Need for Understanding in the History of American Sporting Women

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In a recent essay reviewing the historical works on women in politics and work, Elaine Tyler May, a perceptive social historian, argued that women's history in general is flourishing. She based her judgment on a course correction, a change in direction, which the sub-discipline had reflected during the last few years. Once its task had been to "uncover women's buried past and place the female experience on the map of history." Recently, however, the results of those discoveries have been enabling historians to actually redraw the historical map, "to correct the distortions and rethink several of the guiding principles of historical inquiry." Women's history has established the bases for re-interpretations of politics and work; it has confirmed gender as a fundamental historical variable; and it now lies at the center of "theoretical debates and methodological innovations." Much remains to be done, to be sure, especially the task of reuniting the experiences of both sexes in an historical whole. But, in May's judgment at least, the weaving of "new conceptualizations into the historical fabric" marks a solid transition from the past to the future of women's history."<sup>1</sup>

For sport historians, May's discussion of women's history provides some guidance and some questions which we might use in examining that sub-field of ours which intersects with women's history-women's sport history. The interest of scholars in the history of women in sport is quite obvious; conference presentations and published papers and anthologies are common.<sup>2</sup> Yet,

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1. Elaine Tyler May, "Expanding the Past: Recent Scholarship on Women in Politics and Work," in Stanley I. Kutler and Stanley N. Katz, eds., *The Promise of American History, Progress and Prospects* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 216, 228.

2. In the spring of 1983 alone, two conferences offered sessions for audiences interested in women's sport history: IWO at the American Alliance of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance convention (Minneapolis, April) and one highlighted at the North American Society for Sport History annual conference (Mont Alto, PA, May).

The most recently published and lengthy anthology is that of Reet Howell, ed., *Her Story in Sport: A Historical Anthology of Women in Sports* (West Point, NY: Leisure Press, 1982). It combines a few previously published monographs and book chapters with numerous unpublished papers and conference presentations.

There is, as well, a growing body of "popular" literature in both book and periodical form. Though aware of much of that literature, this author has not treated it in this essay, nor has she included many articles which do not include references.

whether our literature is primarily increasing in bulk or whether it is flourishing in May's terms remain problematic. We have yet to answer the questions which she asked about the literature on politics and work. Has our literature moved beyond the parochial to the universal questions which historians ask; has it begun to suggest what "ultimate difference" women's sporting experiences makes in our "total understanding of the human experience?"<sup>3</sup> Is it contributing to theoretical debate and methodological innovation?

This essay attempts to synthesize the history of American women in sport as is available in the material published primarily by scholars,<sup>4</sup> to render an assessment predicted on May's hierarchial tasks, and to consider other directions which historians of women in sport might pursue in the future. To some, the results will be alarming; this historiography of women in the American sporting past is both limited in terms of quality and limiting in an interpretive sense. Yet the potential is great; with a few course corrections, in May's terms, the history of American women in sport could be an enlightening body of literature.

### The Map of American Women's Sporting Experience

Concerned primarily with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sport historians have essentially established three broad periods during which evolved the American women in sport.<sup>5</sup> For the most part, these eras—ca. 1820-1860, 1860-1920, and 1920-present—mirror the traditional socio-political periods: the Jacksonian-antebellum years, the ages of reconstruction and progressivism, and the modern years. Subdivisions of each of these four or five decade periods notwithstanding, each era individually represents a stage of development in which the thoughts, actions, and struggles of women presage those in the next era. Considered in tandem, the historical periods project a picture of progress, of positive change, on the long road toward equality for women in sport.

The first period, ca. 1820-1860, might appropriately be designated as the "awakening" to sport. Activity gradually superseded passivity as women in the middle and upper strata of society increasingly appeared as participants rather than just as spectators. Having observed their male kin at horse and boat races, at picnics, or on the village greens, and spurred by the effects of urbanization, adolescent and older women gradually entered the sphere of battledore, calisthenics, and skating.

3. May, "Expanding the Past," p. 216.

4. The author conceived of this essay as an opportunity to treat a body of literature rather than as a traditional critical review of "schools" of thought or specific authors' works. In fact, in all of this material there really are no contending paradigms or "schools". The "types" of presentations, as defined by the subject (i.e., the event or activity, the person, the group and/or organization within a limited span of time, or the specific philosophy or propaganda line), do, of course, differ.

5. Sport historians have virtually ignored the colonial and early national women as a objects for research. The exceptions are included in Howell, *Her Story*, chps. 1-3. Some recent research which would not help much also exists in an unpublished dissertation, but this does not single out women for special treatment: Nancy L. Struna, "The Cultural Significance of Sport in the Colonial Chesapeake and Massachusetts" (University of Maryland, 1979).

In large part they entered the world of participatory sport through the back door—privately rather than publicly and armed with a typically American utilitarian justification, health. Good Jacksonians all, the literate spokeswomen joined and invigorated the drive for health and sanitary reforms for the “common man” and the common, or the too common as the case might have been, woman and child. Books and educational magazines, including the *Annals of Education and Instruction*, the *American Journal of Education*, and Godey’s *Lady’s Book*, provided the rationales and the recipes for the physical training of women, and individuals like Catharine Beecher and Lydea Huntley Sigourney devoted themselves almost passionately to this task.<sup>6</sup>

The newly-opened women’s seminaries and academies became a major source of physical activity for young Jacksonian and antebellum women. Here, students and teachers alike, though in step with the current views on the need for health, moved beyond Beecher’s prescriptions and augmented calisthenics with games and more robust exercises. The Litchfield Academy in Connecticut, for example, organized occasional bowling contests, while at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary Mary Lyons perceived of exercises as a religious duty and required each student to either walk a mile or to exercise outdoors for an hour daily.<sup>7</sup>

Of such exercise we today are not likely to think that sportswomen are made. But, as the literature describes, the mid nineteenth century was a different time, and given legal and other cultural constraints, Beecher and her counterparts did promote activity for the “weaker sex,” perhaps even sufficiently so to make the inferiority more palatable. Gymnastics and mild exercises remained the norm for sportswomen until after the effects of the Civil War and rapid industrialization emerged. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the war and industrialization generated both positive and negative consequences for American society in general and for American women in particular. On the one hand, the war and industry required the efforts of and provided more opportunities outside of the home for some women; they aided in the magnification of sport as a cultural symbolic system; and the latter, at least, provided the equipment and facilities, and for some the leisure, which facilitated the spread of sport.

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<sup>6</sup> John Lucas and Ronald Smith, *Saga American Sport* (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1978), pp. 73-75, 91; Ellen W. Gerber, *Innovators and Institutions* (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1971), pp. 252-258; Betty Spears and Richard Swanson, *History of Sport and Physical Activity in the United States* (Dubuque: William C. Brown, 1978), pp. 72-73; Roberta J. Park, “The Attitudes of Leading New England Transcendentalists Toward Healthful Exercise, Active Recreation and Proper Care of the Body: 1830-1860,” *Journal of Sport History*, 4 (Spring 1977), pp. 34-50; idem., “‘Embodied Selves’: The Rise and Development of Concern for Physical Education, Active Games and Recreation for American Women, 1776-1865,” *Journal of Sport History*, 5 (Summer 1978), pp. 5-41, esp. pp. 9-23; Jack W. Berryman and Joann Brislin, “The Ladies Department of the American Farmer, 1825-1830: A Locus for the Advocacy of Family Health and Exercise,” *Associates Notional Agriculture Library Today*, 2 (September 1977), pp. 8-15; Kathryn K. Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Patricia Vertinsky, “Sexual Equality and the Legacy of Catharine Beecher,” *Journal of Sport History*, 6 (September 1979), pp. 38-49.

<sup>7</sup> Spears and Swanson, *History of Sport*, pp. 78-84; Joanna Davenport, “The Eastern Legacy: The Early History of Physical Education for Women,” *Quest*, 32 (Fall 1980), pp. 226-228; Roxanne Albertson, “Sports and Games in Eastern Schools, 1780-1880,” in Wayne M. Ladd and Angela Lumpkin, eds., *Sport in American Education: History and Perspective* (Washington, DC: AAHPERD, 1979), pp. 19-32; Park, “‘Embodied Selves,’” pp. 13-19; Howell, *Her Story*, pp. 369-379; Elizabeth A. Green, *Mary Lyon and Mount Holyoke* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1979).

On the other hand, the destructive and restricting tendencies of these two enterprises heightened the need for health, for fitness and vigor, and prolonged the earlier appearing but now even more radically protectionist mentality, "Victorianism." Eventually, certainly by the late 1880's, however, even these initially negative consequences would operate in favor of some women.<sup>8</sup>

As the literature suggests, probably the most significant post-war departure from past cultural ways was the diversification, or at least the potential for it, of thought, action, and emotions. In this transition stage, from the limited involvement of the previous four decades to the modern era of active recreation and competition, women, again primarily middle and upper class urban ones, engaged in an ever broadening range of activities, locations, and social contexts. In the 1860's and 1870's women found both sex-segregated and family opportunities for bowling, skating, archery, and croquet, among others. By the early 1880's, with the sunset of Victorianism, women joined husbands in country clubs for golf, tennis, and riding, and they participated in a melange of other out-door activities. College students also became involved in numerous sports, and faculty proponents of physical culture revitalized gymnastics. Finally, by the 1890s, the bicycle, basketball, nearly uncountable national organizations, and the resurgence of health concerns established a climate of opinion amenable to expressions of independence, relative though these were, and, hence, to the appearance of the "athlete." During the final two decades of this stage, 1900-1920, continuing participation consolidated these gains.<sup>9</sup>

Historians suggest that the pivotal decade in this nearly fifty year span was the one between the mid 1880's and the mid 1890's. Science, technology, and aspiration combined to broaden women's involvement in sport. Having bemoaned the post-war croquet "craze," feminists escaped from that relatively inactive activity on the bicycle, the machine of the first real machine age which provided consummate freedom, at least in travel and dress. Newer forms of sub-community, many of which incorporated sport as a focal activity, allowed some women to justify participation and accomplish social goals. Country clubs spawned tennis and eventually golf for husbands and wives, and by the mid 1890's women readied themselves for socially-acceptable regional and national competition and, shortly, international action. Then, too, some women acknowledged the benefits of sport, particularly team

8. John R. Betts, "The Technological Revolution and the Rise of Sport, 1850-1900," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 40 (March 1953), pp. 231-253; Lucas and Smith, *Saga*, pp. 250-253; Spears and Swanson, *History of Sport*, pp. 96-98.

9. Lucas and Smith, *Saga*, pp. 253-265; Spears and Swanson, *History of Sport*, pp. 111-116, 124-128; John R. Betts, *America's Sporting Heritage: 1850-1950* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1974), pp. 172-184, 213, 218-231; Robert Knight Barney, "Mary E. Allen: Thought and Practice in 19th Century American Gymnastics," *Journal of Physical Education and Recreation*, 51 (April 1980), pp. 82, 84-86; idem., "Adele Parot: Pathfinder for the Diocletian Lewis School of Gymnastic Expression in the American West," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*, 5 (December 1974), pp. 63-75; Patricia A. Vertinsky, "The Effect of Changing Attitudes Toward Sexual Morality Upon the Promotion of Physical Education for Women in Nineteenth Century America," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*, 7 (December 1976), pp. 26-38. Angela Lumpkin, *Women's Tennis: A Historical Documentary of the Players and Their Game* (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 1981); Ellen W. Gerber, Jan Felshin, Pearl Berlin, and Waneen Wyrick, *The American Woman in Sport* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1974), pp. 27-37.

sports, in youth associations, settlement houses, and playgrounds for children, especially those whose backgrounds and environments predisposed them to delinquency or poor health. Finally, a few traveling and exhibition teams derived solidarity and money from baseball games; and college women came to expect to build upon their childhood play experiences on, first, self-contained teams in basketball, hockey, crew, track, and recreational pursuits and, eventually, in farther reaching competitions.<sup>10</sup>

By the turn of the twentieth century, then, the physical and attitudinal patterns which would remain essentially unchanged through World War I had been established. To be sure, a few women gained entry into the Olympics and other Euro-American competitions, and some women in urban businesses used noon and after-work hours for recreative and competitive activities." In neither case, however, did these women distort or revolutionize rationales or pursue many sports which had not become popular prior to the turn of the century.

What some women did wish to do, however, was to retain control of and to engineer the future of sport among those entrusted to them. This was particularly true in the colleges and universities where educators, as many do even today, believed that they knew what was best for their "girls." Although involvement in sport benefited the coeds, this should enhance their health and womanhood and neither exploit nor injure them. More so after 1890 than before, then, physical educators, some of whom were medical doctors, assumed the responsibilities of directing and preparing teams, scheduling events, prescribing rest and exercise, writing rules, and mandating dress and behavior expectations.<sup>12</sup>

In their perceptions of the values of sport for their girls, these early college physical educators, the literature contends, reflected the perceptions of many

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10. Gary Tobin, "The Bicycle Boom of the 1890's," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 7 (Spring 1977), pp. 838-849; Andrew Richie, *King of the Road* (London: Wildwood House, Ltd., 1975), pp. 145-164; Benjamin S. Rader, "The Quest for Subcommunities and the Rise of American Sport," *American Quarterly*, 29 (Fall 1977), pp. 355-369; Dominick Cavallo, *Muscles and Morals. Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform. 1880-1920* (Philadelphia University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), pp. 125-246; J. Thomas Jable, "The Public Schools Athletic League of New York City: Organized Athletics for City Schoolchildren, 1903-1914," in Ladd and Lumpkin, eds., *Sport in American Education*, pp. ix-18; Nancy Struna and May Lou Remley, "Physical Education for Women at the University of Wisconsin, 1863-1913: A Half Century of Progress," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*, 4 (May 1973), pp. 8-21; Phyllis Kay Wilke, "Physical Education for Women at Nebraska University, 1879-1923," *Nebraska History*, 56 (Summer 1975), pp. 193-221; Angela Lumpkin, "Women's Physical Activity at the First State University—An Uphill Struggle," in Ladd and Lumpkin, eds., *Sport in American Education*, pp. 117-126; Dale Somers, *The Rise of Sport in New Orleans 1850-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972); Ronald A. Smith, "The Rise of Basketball for Women in Colleges," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*, 1 (December 1970), pp. 18-36; Howell, *Her Story*, pp. 405-431; Mary L. Remley, "From Sidesaddle to Rodeo," *Journal of the West*, 17 (July 1978), pp. 44-52.

11. Uriel Simri, *A Historical Analysis of the Role of Women in the Modern Olympic Games* (Netanya, Israel: Wingate Institute, 1977), pp. 5-19; Gerber, et. al., *American Woman*, pp. 39, 86-136; Sheila Mitchell, "Women's Participation in the Olympic Games 1900-1926," *Journal of Sport History*, 4 (Summer 1977), pp. 208-228; Betty Spears, "Women in the Olympic Games: An Unresolved Problem," in Peter J. Graham and Horst Ueberhorst, eds., *The Modern Olympics* (Cornwall, NY: Leisure Press, 1976), pp. 62-82; Spears and Swanson, *History of Sport*, pp. 345-349.

12. Davenport, "The Eastern Legacy," pp. 233-235; Betty Spears, "The Influential Miss Homans," *Quest*, 29 (Winter 1979), pp. 46-57; Spears and Swanson, *History of Sport*, pp. 184-188; Gerber, et. al., *American Woman*, pp. 68-71.

of their country men and women. In fact, broadening support for the values of sport had set the stage for what sport historians in general have typically called the “golden age” of sport, the 1920’s, which marked the beginning of the third, the modern, period. In line with the general process of modernization, Americans had been developing an ideology of sport since the 1820’s. Now, a century later, that ideology was fervently invoked, and women uttered nearly every conceivable justification for their involvement in sport. These justifications—economic opportunity, character development, prestige, health, and a social safety valve, among others—did not translate into universally accepted practices, and some were valued more than were others. Nonetheless, over the next fifty years, they did provide the basis for increasing varieties of activities and competitive levels among women, for the emergence of stiking personalities, and, ultimately, for the gradual but increasingly strident demands for equality of opportunity.<sup>13</sup>

During the 1920’s one might have observed women arranging and engaging in both newer arenas of sport and more traditional ones. In Chicago, for instance, Catholic nuns, the Big Sisters, accepted the proceeds of boxing matches in order to fund charities. In 1926 Gertrude Ederle became the first woman to swim the English Channel, while Glenna Collett and Helen Wills achieved record successes in golf and tennis, respectively. By 1922 international track and field competitions prevailed for women, under the auspices of the Federation Sportive Feminine Internationale and the Amateur Athletic Union, despite the protestations of the International Olympic Committee and the American Physical Education Association’s Women’s Athletic Committee. At the grass roots level, too, high schools, churches, clubs, industry, and the YWCA’s sponsored programs, especially in track, basketball, and baseball.<sup>14</sup>

Despite this scene of relative opportunity, however, the sport forms and situations countenanced by society maintained, rather than fractured, traditions. Based on what is now known, at least, many women’s activities were either leisure or educationally-oriented and were preferred if the two intertwined. Rare exceptions aside, women dared not accept money, appear to accept the idea of sport as an avenue of upward mobility, or display conceit about one’s skills. Some women, again primarily physical educators, wanted to maintain feminine-directed programs to improve both the quality and quantity of leisure and educational sporting experiences, and they reacted to what

13. Mary Lou Remley, “Women and Competitive Athletics,” *The Maryland Historian*, 4 (Fall 1973), pp. 89-94; Galen Cranz, “Women in Urban Parks,” *Signs*, 5, Supplement (Spring 1980), pp. S79-S95; Lucas and Smith, *Saga*, pp. 307, 342-349; Spears and Swanson, *History of Sport*, pp. 231-238, 259-268, 271-275; Gerber, et al., *American Woman*, pp. 17-21.

14. Spears and Swanson, *History of Sport*, pp. 205-211; Angela Lumpkin, “The Growth of National Women’s Tennis, 1904-1940,” *Quest*, 27 (Winter 1977), pp. 47-53; Betts, *America’s Sporting Heritage*, pp. 260-263; Lucas and Smith, *Saga*, pp. 344-351; Howell, *Her Story*, pp. 266-272, 509-540, 572-578; Mary Leigh, “Pierre de Coubertin A Man of His Times,” *Quest*, 22 (June 1974), pp. 19-24; Mary H. Leigh and Therese M. Bonin, “The Pioneering Role of Madame Alice Millat and the FSI in Establishing International Track and Field Competition for Women,” *Journal of Sport History*, 4 (Spring 1977), pp. 72-83; Simri, *Historical Analysis* pp. 14-16; Joanna Davenport, “The Women’s Movement into the Olympic Games,” *Journal of Health Physical Educational and Recreation*, 49 (March 1978), pp. 58-60.

they viewed as infringements by men, to the cupidity of girls, and to what have since been established as physiological fairy tales. As a result, the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation and the APEA's Women's Athletic Committee, two groups (among others) whose membership largely overlapped, developed an alternative, in both forms and philosophy, to competitive events. This was the play day which survived in one form or another for more than three decades.<sup>15</sup>

To the dismay of physical educators and others who either supported or acted zealously to preserve propriety and femininity as goals of sport, an occasional athlete either ignored or was ignorant of both the conventions and the expectations. Mildred Didrikson Zaharias, the "Babe," was one such woman, or perhaps better, athlete. She began her career, her profession, in athletics at the age of eighteen competing in basketball for the Golden Cyclone Athletic Club of the Employers Casualty Company of Dallas. An All-American in AAU competition, she also earned medals in the Olympic track and field competitions in 1932, pitched against the St. Louis Cardinals of the National League, became a nationally renowned exhibition golf professional, and eventually propelled the formation of the LPGA, born with a sponsor and Babe's demands for appearance money. Brazen, obnoxious, self-centered, insecure, she became, according to the Associated Press, Woman Athlete of the Half Century in 1950.<sup>16</sup>

In her quest for competition and money, Babe Didrikson was probably an anomaly, and a well-publicized one at that. She may well have had no peers, and in that respect she probably did not represent an assemblage of sport participants who posed a threat to the platform of educators. On the other hand, however, she and others who broke fewer conventions—Eleanora Sears, Eleanor Holm, and Stella Walsh—established performance standards far beyond what was expected of women, even by many women, and they demonstrated that women could view sport as something in addition to a training ground for learning how to be a "proper" young woman.<sup>17</sup>

Aside from the experiences of individuals like Didrikson and some women in church and industrial leagues, participation in sport by many women mirrored the styles and dictates of the leisurites and educators until the early 1960's. Even the All-American Girls' Baseball League, a professional enterprise engineered by Chicago's Philip Wrigley in 1943, mandated charm lessons, dresses, and chaperones for the skilled and unmasculine players. And World War II itself, although it presumably precipitated increasing numbers

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15. Alice A. Sefton, *The Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1941); Laura Robicheaux, "An Analysis of Attitudes Toward Women's Athletics in the U.S. in the Early Twentieth Century," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*, 6 (May 1975), pp. 12-22; Spears and Swanson, *History of Sport*, pp. 218-225; Ellen W. Gerber, "The Controlled Development of Collegiate Sport for Women, 1923-1936," *Journal of Sport History*, 2 (Spring 1975), pp. 1-28; Stephanie L. Twin, *Out of the Bleachers. Writings on Women and Sport* (Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press, 1979), pp. xxviii-xxxii.

16. William O. Johnson and Nancy P. Williamson, "*Whatta Gal.*" *The Babe Didrikson Story* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977), pp. 8, 62-85, 102-110, 130-154, 184-198. Scholars have used two dates for Didrikson's birth, 1911 and 1914. I have used the more commonly appearing 1911.

17. Lucas and Smith, *Saga*, pp. 344-347, 356-359.

in the work force, heightened concerns for health and fitness, indirectly benefited equipment materials and prices, and generated more and even some novel opportunities for women (such as Wrigley's league), it did not in any sense transform women's sport. After the war participation in the Pan American Games proceeded in accord with the pre-war Olympic model, international tennis remained feminine and amateur in focus, and colleges and high schools continued to prepare teams to compete for a day. Only golf and bowling provided professional options, and not very lucrative ones at that. Except for a group of university rebels who launched the Women's Collegiate Golf Tournament in 1941, Babe Didrikson, and unknown numbers of women in "underground" sport competition, the war and the immediate post-war events, organizations, and personalities deviated little from the patterns and philosophy institutionalized in the "golden" 1920's.<sup>18</sup>

As the literature relates, however, the post-war decades presumably did have one long-range positive effect: more women had more opportunities in sport. In part, of course, this was a function of the leisure, affluence, and educations of girls and women in the 1950's and 1960's. In part, too, the "game for every girl and a girl for every game" aim of physical educators in the 1920's was closer to being realized during these two decades. Television, sponsorship, and the acceptance, albeit probably an unconscious one, of sport as a cultural institution were also important factors. But, regardless of the reasons, more girls and women expected or, in some cases, were expected to sport. Thus, participants and organizers alike were well-equipped to seize and ultimately to fight for new opportunities when the social climate was right.<sup>19</sup>

Such a time came in the early 1960's when women on many fronts experienced another "awakening." In part spurred by civil rights battles and achievements, advocates for women's rights orchestrated a visible and volatile offensive against traditional gender role expectations and opportunities. In educational institutions some spokeswomen for athletics recognized the need to break with the past and to bury the play days. By 1972 they had established the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women and thereafter obtained a formal divorce from the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (now AAHPERD). Finally, and perhaps most important, litigation, especially Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act of 1972, and the actions of individuals, most visibly Billie Jean King, challenged stereotypes and shattered barriers to equality of access to and experience in sport for women. Even professional leagues in basketball and football,

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 363-366; Spears and Swanson, *History of Sport*, pp. 241-243, 259-261, 263-265, 281; Mary H Leigh, "The Enigma of Avery Brundage and Women Athletics," *ARENA Review*, 4 (May 1980), pp. 11-21; Betty Spears, "Prologue: The Myth," in Carole A. Oglesby, ed., *Women and Sport: From Myth to Reality* (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1978), pp. 12-13; Howell, *Her Story*, pp. 590-607; Elva Bishop and Katherine Fulton, "Sporting Stars-The Heyday of Industrial Women's Basketball," *Southern Exposure*, 7 (Fall 1979), pp. 50-56; Joan S. Huh and Roberta Park, "The Role of Women in Spots," in William J. Baker and John M. Carroll, eds., *Sports in Modern America* (St. Louis, River City Publishers, 1981), pp. 118-119. The term "underground" has been used by Joan S. Hult, Department of Physical Education, University of Maryland, College Park.

19. Spears, "The Myth," pp. 13-14; Benjamin Rader, *American Sports From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Spectators* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1983), pp 339-340.

though short-lived, suggested how far into the mainstream of American sport women had moved in the most recent past.<sup>20</sup>

### A Critique and Suggestions for the Future

Ideally, at least, this admittedly generalized story has adequately synthesized the contents of the currently available, published literature about the history of American women in sport. For the most part, the predominantly descriptive material is placed in a relatively simple, straightforward framework: between 1820 and today, American women became progressively more involved, both in terms of quality and quantity, in the sporting mainstream. That women did not do more and do so rapidly is also explained simply: what deterred or, in some cases, prevented fuller and more rapid involvement was society, particularly its conventions associated with gender role differentiation. As were their counterparts in many other fields of endeavor, sports-women were assigned limited, sometimes nearly invisible roles and opportunities by a masculine-oriented society intent on maintaining the female as a passive or, at most, a reactive creature. Even during most of the twentieth century, only a few notable individuals succeeded in escaping the prescribed "weaker sex" role, and not until the 1970's did American society really explore "new frontiers in women's sports."<sup>21</sup>

Straightforwardness and simplicity are often goals of historians, but not at the expense of fact, explanation, and meaningfulness. And this is exactly the trade-off which seems to have been made in this particular sub-discipline. Few women other than educated, presumably middle class women are considered, and the potential breadth of what sport was and what it offered and meant at any given point in time is ignored. There seem to have been few attempts to supply, in Richard Gruneau's terms, either "concrete examples of the possibilities and choices that have presented themselves to people both in and as a result of specific game or sport forms" or "examples of the collective representations that have been associated with these forms."<sup>22</sup> Further, relationships among individual motives, social structures and forces, other behaviors, and time are undeveloped. In fact, influencing factors are essentially listed, perhaps because of the difficulties associated with causation. Finally,

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20. Robert Lipsyte, *Sports World, An American Dreamland* (New York: New York Times/Quadrangle, 1975), pp. 220-230; Mark Naison, "Sports and the American Empire," *Radical America*, 6 (July-August 1972), pp. 95-120; Shelley Armitage, "The Lady As Jock: A Popular Culture Perspective on the Women Athlete," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 10 (Summer 1976), pp. 122-132; Lucas and Smith, *Saga*, pp. 366-370; Spears and Swanson, *History of Sport*, pp. 282-287; Howell, *Her Story*, pp. 460-471; Patricia L. Geadelmann, Christine Grant, Yvonne Slatton, and N. Peggy Burke, *Equality in Sport for Women* (Washington, DC: AAHPER, 1977); Mark A. Kadzielski, "Postsecondary Athletics in an Era of Equality: An Appraisal of the Effect of Title IX," *Journal of College and University Law*, 5 (1978-1979), pp. 123-144; Ellen W. Gerber, "The Legal Basis for the Regulation of Intercollegiate Sport," *Educational Record*, 60 (Fall 1979), pp. 467-481; Patricia Huckle, "Back to the Starting Line. Title IX and Women's Intercollegiate Athletics," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 21 (January/February 1978), pp. 379-392.

21. Judith R. Holland and Carole Oglesby, "Women in Sport: The Synthesis Begins," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 445 (September 1979), p. 87.

22. Richard S. Gruneau, "Freedom and Constraint: The Paradoxes of Play, Games, and Sports," *Journal of Sport History*, 7 (Winter 1980), p. 84.

the traditional time periods and explanations are imposed upon rather than derived from the material, and questions which might have resulted in new insights are unasked.

To gain more understanding than this abbreviated synthesis and the works upon which it is based provide, the student of the history of American women in sport must rely on his or her ability to infer and to raise questions and answer them with information other than is provided in histories of sports-women. Numerous sub-themes lurk beneath the surface in this literature—identity, conflict, the nature of domesticity, elitism, record-making, institution-building, power, the relativity of equality (and relationships to justice), and women's conceptions of service, work, and maleness, for example—but most are unexplored. Some of these are more obvious than are others. For instance, in the literature focusing upon the mid-nineteenth century, there is the sense that Catharine Beecher and other “developers” of organized sporting activities for women differed considerably in regard to their expectations of roles for women and in their perceptions of sport in light of these roles. Perhaps there was not the unanimity of thought about either domesticity or the subordination of women that sport historians have implicitly accepted. Perhaps, too, rather than being the beginning of a “new” stage in the meaningfulness of sport for women, Beecher and her cohorts were completing one begun about the 1760's when domestic labors became organized and competitive.<sup>23</sup> One must wonder, also, whether it was an implicit maternalism which prevented them from reaching out to the growing mass of factory workers, or whether some other characteristic or bias, perhaps one shared with men, was more important.

In the post Civil War period a simple but important question still begging an answer is whether women were able either to exploit or to ignore the contradictory effects of the war and industrialization and expanding opportunities (if, in fact, these existed). If, indeed, post-war women did experience “new” opportunities in sport, they may have done so only after transferring domestic duties to servants, many of whom were also women.<sup>24</sup> Despite the conventional wisdom, then, a scenario such as this identifies post-war “middle class” women as contributors to social inequality; and the underlying process may, when clarified, help to explain how a hierarchy of social positions was formulated. This suggests, further, that rather than using only occupation, property, and residence as indicators of social position,<sup>25</sup> post-war Americans (possibly both men and women) also conceived of sport as such an indicator. To examine these and other potential themes and social processes, historians of women in sport will have to concentrate on the years prior to the mid

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23. James Parker, “Diary,” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, <sup>69</sup> (January 1915), pp. 10-14; *Essex Gazette*, 12 August 1768; *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, 16 October 1769; Joseph E. A. Smith, *The History of Pittsfield, Massachusetts* (Boston: Lee and Shepherd, 1869), pp 205-206.

24. Daniel E. Sutherland, *Americans and Their Servants: Domestic Service in the United States from 1800 to 1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1981).

25. Michael B. Katz, Michael J. Doucet, and Mark J. Stem, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

1880's. In the process they may uncover as fact that the last decade and a half of the nineteenth century were neither the pivotal years in the "making" of "modern" sport as they have traditionally been argued, nor the years of opportunity for all.

The history of sportswomen in the twentieth century also raises innumerable questions about relationships between sport and society and why people became involved, in varying degrees, in sport. Motives, in particular, have not been examined in depth. For instance, did socially elite individuals like Eleanora Sears and Ethel McGary compete primarily for the "love of it" and were they essentially conforming, as the literature suggests? If they had simply wanted to conform while being active, they might have spent their time and money in social and philanthropic tasks or uplifting the waifs and unfortunates, but they did not. Was their competition, instead, perhaps a form of social resistance, an effort to establish a non-subordinate mode of living? Did they envision competition as a personal quest for power and a unique identity? Or was their involvement another kind of response to what John Modell has called the "widespread externally-imposed uncertainty" of life in America's years of lingering industrial transformation.<sup>26</sup> The same questions might be asked about Didrikson. Further, whether or not Didrikson was really such an anomaly remains an unknown, if for no other reason than that little knowledge about what happened outside of the "mainstream," which has come to mean educational institutions and restrictive clubs, exists. We must complete considerably more research about the sporting styles of rural, small town, and urban working women, particularly daughters of immigrant families. Based on the findings of research among Irish immigrants, for whom American middle class aspirations and rhetoric were essentially meaningless, one may suspect that more instances of women not bound by the predominantly urban middle class image of the "proper" sportswoman existed. Some initial research does indicate the existence of "highly intensified church leagues, private clubs, industrial leagues and YWCA programs" in cities and towns by the 1920's. Working class women and the daughters of recently migrated laboring families may well have perceived sport paradoxically: as an arena in which to compete with their peers for prestige, admiration, and perhaps even money, and as an escape, perhaps more psychological than physical, from the grueling confines of their own competitive environments. Or, they may have sported differently than what the middle class mainstream prescribed as "acceptable" because neither their conception of nor their material base for sport was rooted in the idealized, capitalist-inclined middle class version.<sup>27</sup> Other

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26. John Modell, "Changing Risks, Changing Adaptations: American Families in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in Allan Lichtman and Joan R. Callinor, eds., *Kin and Communities: Families in America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1979), p. 119.

27. Joan S. Hult, "Have the Reports of the Death of Competitive Women's Athletics—1920-1935—Been Greatly Exaggerated?" (Unpublished paper presented to the North American Society for Sport History annual conference, Banff, Alberta, Canada, May 1980), p. 5. Also, Virginia Culin Roberts, "Horseback to Mount Baldy: A Ranchwoman's Holiday, 1913," *Journal of Arizona History*, 21 (Spring 1980), pp. 25-42. Some examples of helpful research include: James Henretta, "The Study of Social Mobility: Ideological Assumptions and Conceptual Bias," *Labor History*, 18 (1977), pp. 165-178; Daniel J. Walkowitz, "Working-Class Women

explanations are possible, to be sure, but they all await demographic and longitudinal data, a knowledge of access to power and resources, psychohistorical investigation, and more.

Without a doubt, questions and inferences like the preceding ones about material in a relatively new historical sub-discipline are matters of some controversy. Certainly more experiences need to be located; we still know relatively little about what women actually did. Yet, if women's sport history is ever to move beyond the task of locating experience, or even to determine whether *more* experiences over time constituted *progress* and whether there were actually *more* experiences, to what May and others maintain must be done—to understanding the experiences and what they tell us about the whole of the past—such inferences and explanations must accompany the descriptions.

What then might historians of American women's sport do if they are to provide depth and meaningfulness? An essential first step must be to broaden the evidential base, to seek records other than popular journals and other literary sources. Census data, wills and estate inventories, pictures, artifacts, records from immigrant and rural associations (e.g., lodges, granges), interviews, and materials from businesses and industries, among innumerable other sources, should be examined.

Such evidence may prove fruitless, however, unless scholars abandon what has been to this point a restrictive assumption about the object of their search—that the contemporary characterization of sport as male, modem, and athletic is appropriate for every period and every person in the past. Characterizing sport as male, modem, and athletic may seem logical today given the aspirations of sportswomen for “equality” with sportsmen, the acceptance of a patriarchal society in the past, and the influence of the modernization paradigm as a major thought-organizing and explanatory structure. However, for historians examining the past it is inappropriate for several reasons. First, many preceding generations shared neither our world view nor our conception of sport, including its organized and amateur-professional obsessions. Thus in looking for modem forms of enterprise in the past, sport historians have accentuated what people did not do, in our terms, rather than what they did do, in *their* terms. Second, because women, who constituted the historically presumed “inferior sex,” were less evident in the male sphere than were men, they were only infrequently active or even visible in public places and in male-mainstream cultural forms and rituals. However, if one examines the women's sphere (or spheres), one suspects that the scholar will find sport and a women's conception (or conceptions) of it, just as historians have seen evi-

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in the Guilded Age: Factory, Community and Family Life Among Cohoes, New York, Cotton Workers,” *Journal of Social History*, 5 (1972), pp. 464-490; Thomas Dublin, “Women Workers and the Study of Social Mobility,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 9 (1979), pp. 647-666; Mary P. Ryan, *The Cradle of the Middle Class The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981)

dence of love, hate, and work.<sup>28</sup> Further, one might discover something about that most unsatisfying, non-process oriented, non-explanation known as sex-role stereotyping.

Finally, as historians of women in sport proceed, they might well remember the words of the renowned English historian, E. P. Thompson. More than a decade ago, he contended that "the discipline of history is, above all, the discipline of context; each fact can be given meaning only within an ensemble of other meanings. . . ."<sup>29</sup> At one level, this suggests that historians of women's sport need to see sport as a part of a larger whole—to stop, in other words, treating the forms, the attitudes, the participants, and the spectators as if they existed in a social vacuum. Sport is and was one of many behavioral sets in any given society, and it ought to be studied in light of other behaviors and attitudes. In fact, it might best be examined along with other behaviors and attitudes. Why should we continue to examine sport alone, as if it were a social disjunction? If scholars wish to explain the nature and the significance of sport in a social context, they simply can not ignore the other behaviors which occurred or intersected with sport.

Historians of women in sport should, as well, consult other historians' literature about women specifically and the human experience generally. Studies on politics in the nineteenth century are stimulating a rewriting of, among other things, Victorianism, a concept which has permeated the sport literature. The consensus seems to suggest that rather than being a stultifying influence, the conception of a "women's sphere" based on an ideology of domesticity gave women power and leverage and allowed the emergence of a double standard fostered by women for the advantage of women. Suffragettes claimed moral superiority over men but demanded the vote to achieve equality and bring a different perspective to the issues. In other words, they wanted equality but held fast to the notion of moral superiority. Unfortunately, none of the work on sporting women deals with this double standard, whether or not it affected or was affected by sport, the consequence of women's politicizing domesticity, or even if such a distinctive ideology really existed.<sup>30</sup>

The scholarship on women and politics is but one of many areas which may help the study of sport among women in the past. The same may be said about the work on economics, on the family, and on religion, among other facets of the life experience. But one need not examine the scholarship solely to discover what understandings about women currently prevail or to revise either the explanations for why women did or did not participate or the descriptions

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28. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The New Woman and the New History," *Feminist Studies*, 3 (Fall 1975), p. 191.

29. E. P. Thompson, "Anthropology and the Discipline of Historical Context," *Midland History*, 3 (1972), p. 45.

30. Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America* (Middleton, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1981); Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981); Estelle Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930," *Feminist Studies*, 5 (Fall 1979), pp. 512-529; idem., *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980).

of the types and extent of sport possible in society at various points in time. Instead, one needs to know the literature in order to exert both an independence from and his or her possible contribution to it. The historian of women's sport needs to be cognizant of what questions other historians are asking and whether, and if so in what ways, they may be uncovering aspects of the historical experiences which may relate to the sporting experience. Historians of women's economy are already redefining work, an operation which may be significant for our endeavors since we have traditionally tended to view sport relative to work. Further, historians of women's sport need to understand what the body of literature relates so that they can more adequately interpret their evidence about sport as a part of the human experience.<sup>31</sup>

The goal of women's sport historians, as for all sport historians, ought to be to understand and contribute to the entire body of social historical literature. Certainly expanding the evidential base, eliminating suspiciously presentist assumptions, and attending to the questions and inferences in both general and specific histories will help. But these alone will not enable to historians of American women's sport to complete the transition from mapping experiences to understanding the human experience. To truly accomplish this, a different conception of history is required. That ideal history is, as both May and Thompson imply, "holistic" history. This history requires that, at the very least, the investigator view sex as a dependent variable, rather than as an independent one, and sport as a component of social processes. Compared to the other suggestions in this review, writing "holistic" history is the consummate course correction, the one that can enable scholars to answer *the* significant question: what "ultimate difference" has American women's sporting experience made in our "total understanding of the human experience?"

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31 Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1981); Maurine Weiner Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1980); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Lois Scharf, *To Work and Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1980); and Winifred D. Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values: 1920-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981). See also, the entire volume of *Feminist Studies*, 8 (Summer 1982).