

Simri, Uriel. *A Concise World History of Women's Sports*. Wingate, Israel: Wingate Institute, 1983. 175 pp. Photos, notes, tables. \$15.00 (paper).

Uriel Simri is on the staff of the Wingate Institute for Physical Education and Sport in Israel, where he has lived since 1935. He has also taught at universities in several countries, and at the International Olympic Academy. The author and co-author of many scholarly works, including *Women in the Olympic Games*, Simri was the keynote speaker at the 1979 World Congress on Women in Sport.

The absence of scholarly literature on women's sport history led to his writing the *Concise World History of Women's Sports*. His thesis is that while contemporary men's sports are modelled after the sports of antiquity, women have no such ancient models. Hence, since the nineteenth century, women have copied the men's sports of the times. It is also his contention that upper class women, not working women, were the pioneers who laid the foundations for progress in women's sports, and that both women's leaders and religious leaders worldwide must share the blame with male chauvinists for the underdevelopment of women's sport.

Despite the title, only two chapters are concerned with women's sports prior to the twentieth century, and little of the book focuses on the world beyond the United States and Western Europe. Only as the Eastern European nations, and later third world countries enter the Olympics and other international and regional meets, are they included in the story.

The bulk of the 175-page monograph is devoted to sports of the twentieth century. The past eighty-four years have been divided into eight eras of varying lengths, such as: "1953-1966: From the Cold War to the Femininity Test," and "The 1980's: The Decade of Hormones?" For ease of readability, Simri chose not to footnote "excessively." While he states that there will be: "...some essential notes and a number of references to recommended readings." (p. 8) in each chapter, there are only the notes, an average of seven per chapter. Most refer either to very standard works in English, or to works in other languages. There is also an Appendix dealing with the Olympic Games, and women's records; A Glossary of Initials, and metric conversion table, but no bibliography and no index.

Each chapter covers those sports selected by Simri as having particular significance for women during the period under discussion, important sports-women of the period, international competition, problems and conflicts, and relevant sports organizations. It appears that this work was heavily dependent on data collected for *Women in the Olympic Movement*, for that topic is extensively covered, relative to other aspects of women's sports. However, because of Simri's decision to focus on history to the virtual exclusion of sociology, the information he presents lacks analysis, and is really little more than a chronology of events, winners, and records. The book is filled with statements like: "When we compare the world records of 1928 and 1939 we find an improvement of over 5 seconds in the 100 meters freestyle, of 19 seconds in the 100 meters freestyle, of 25 seconds in the 400 meters freestyle obviously the female swimmer was on her way." (p. 78)

There are other problems as well. Simri seems overly concerned with the offbeat and the bizarre. Discussing races in which European women participated on religious holidays from the thirteenth through the nineteenth centuries, he states that most of the participants were either working girls tempted by the prize, or prostitutes who used the races ". . . for public exposure and publicity." (p. 13) He also mentions races for "wenches." and a woman jockey who was permitted to ride because she was the horse owner's mistress. In the chapters on the twentieth century, there is considerable discussion of the problems of hormones, hermaphrodites, and frauds. There are descriptions of males masquerading as female athletes, "'women" who flunk the sex tests, and women who retire from international competition rather than take these tests. This topic is covered in six of the ten chapters. He also mentions several female athletes who underwent sex change operations. and the sad post-mortem on Stella Walsh. Simri is outspoken in his assertions that anabolic steroids and other hormones are routinely administered to athletes in East Europe. Of Soviet pentathlete Tkatschenko, who was "committed" for doping at the 1978 championships. he states: "Obviously her doctors had done a slight mistake of overdosage." (p. 146)

If track and field athletes are made stronger and more masculine through steroids, Simri is equally certain that gymnasts have their puberty retarded by means of other drugs: "To be true, growth retardation was not invented at the Moscow Olympics. Nadia Comaneci had obviously undergone similar treatment before the Montreal Olympics. Many of us must have noticed the sudden physical development of Nadia after 1976. Whoever saw Stella Zacharowa when she appeared in the West in 1981 could not believe his eyes. At the age of 18, Stella had suddenly began [*sic*] to grow and how! I assume you can guess for yourself the reason for this growth spurt." (p. 146)

In the final analysis, this book is simply not written well, and gives no indication of being the work of an internationally-respected scholar. Much of it reads like the unedited transcripts of some very informal talks that Simri may have presented to English-speaking audiences. The grammar and syntax are dreadful, and the book is filled with colloquialisms that have no place in a

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scholarly monograph. The women in this “book indulged in sports already yet too often,” and “it were difficult to follow their progress.”

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