
PIEROTH, DORIS H. *Their Day in the Sun: Women of the 1932 Olympics*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996. Pp. xii, 186. Notes, illustrations, index. \$16.95 pb., \$30.00.

Doris H. Pieroth was awarded a grant from the Stroum Book Fund, established by Samuel and Althea Stroum for her book, *Their Day in the Sun: Women of the 1932 Olympics*. Pieroth focuses on the sports in which American women competed during the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games: swimming

and diving, track and field, and fencing. Pieroth depicts the preparation, pageantry, competition, and, to some extent, the affective aspects of sport that surrounded the American women's participation in Los Angeles. Scholars and less zealous followers of the Olympic movement can learn from Pieroth's insightful descriptions of women who competed in international sport more than 35 years ago. The author clearly states that her intent is to offer "an account of a select group of women who did challenge . . . a 'heritage of exclusion'" (p. xi). She also points out that there was no intent "to examine inequality, sexuality, or repression" (p. xi).

The book's eight chapters are organized into themes that focus on the setting for women's sports during the first two-and-a-half decades of the twentieth century. Pieroth first examines pioneering performances in track and field, swimming and diving, then moves to the Olympic trials, women's events on the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games program, and concludes with an epilogue describing the different ways taken by many of the athletes after the Games.

The author utilizes mostly secondary sources in the introduction and in chapter one in order to place her subjects into the context of their competitive era. Numerous research articles and books concerning the history of women's sport, interviews, official reports, handbooks, and an impressive number of newspapers from different cities are included in the notes of the remaining chapters. The oral history interviews of several 1932 women Olympians add an especially important contribution to Olympic and sport history. Many women in the Games of the IX Olympiad were born during the first decade-and-a-half of this century. Their valuable insights into pioneering achievements in sport are indeed a contribution. Most of the book's 30 pictures of the Olympians are from private collections and reveal unique snapshots of the past.

Pieroth weaves the significance of the athletes' accomplishments into several examples of long-standing records. For instance, Eleanor Holm swam a 200-yard backstroke race on July 8, 1932, in two minutes and twenty-eight seconds. Pieroth inserted: "Her time stood as the record for twenty years" (p. 76). After reading the interesting descriptions of equipment used in the 1930s, the reader gains an appreciation for the records women achieved in that era.

Pieroth's explanations of the Olympic swimming and diving trials and the Olympic events are especially good examples of the way in which she captures the essence of competition in the era. Her treatment of track and field in this context is likewise well-written. Unfortunately, fencing is not accorded the same in-depth descriptions and she devotes no single chapter to that sport. Another omission includes a lack of an explanation regarding Betty Robinson's absence from the 1932 Olympic Games. Robinson, the 1928 100-meter champion, had been injured in an airplane crash and was unable to tryout for the 1932 Olympic team. She eventually recovered and ran the third leg on the gold medal 4-by-10-meter relay team at the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. Pieroth lauds Charlotte Epstein as the "guiding genius" (p. 50) of the Women's Swimming Association of New York (WSA), overlooking Elsie Viets Jennies and Coach Louis DeBrada Handley, the power structure of the famed WSA. Epstein and Handley were

more widely known outside aquatic circles, but the power structure revolved around the tripartite formed by those pioneers. Based on an interview with Eleanor Holm's 1932 and 1936 roommate, Lenore Right, Pieroth wrote that Holm would not have had problems with members of the United States Olympic Committee had Epstein been with the controversial swimmer in 1936. The same could have been written about Handley who was also very influential and highly regarded by Holm.

Although *Their Day in the Sun* is not a definitive history of the American women who competed in the 1932 Olympic Games, it does offer the reader a glimpse into the glory days of sport. Pieroth skillfully captures the essence of competition in an era when women had limited opportunities to compete.

—PAULA D. WELCH
University of Florida