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# Bloomer Basketball and Its Suspender Suppression: Women's Intercollegiate Competition at Ohio State, 1904–1907

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Within a decade and a half after its inception in 1891, basketball enjoyed such a widespread popularity that it was easily the premier sport among American women. Its appeal transcended geographic and class boundaries; it was played by college women, working women, and high school students throughout the United States—in everything from private eastern women's colleges to southern finishing schools to midwest YWCAs to western high schools and public universities. As its popularity spread, the game's basic character evolved as well, growing from a simple gym class activity to a nascent modern sport, complete with rule formalizations and revisions, interscholastic and intercollegiate teams and competitions. Managers arranged season schedules, players tried out, teams were selected, captains chosen, and uniforms designed; coaches scheduled practices, fans followed teams to away games, championships were contested, and varsity letters awarded. Local newspapers announced upcoming games and then reported their outcomes, replete with statistics, while articles in national magazines like *Scribner's* and *Harper's Weekly*<sup>1</sup> further insinuated the game into the American cultural consciousness. Then, in 1917, as the standard scholarly story goes, it was the women's physical educators who banned intercollegiate competition and ultimately threw women's basketball back into the gym class and a dark age that lasted until 1972 and Title IX.

When The Athletic Conference of American Women, a national forum for women's athletic associations, met in 1917 and resolved to oppose "intercollegiate competition for women in so far as it involves the necessity of a team going from one college to another,"<sup>2</sup> their act was the culmination of moves made during the preceding years, principally in the

area of rule changes, aimed at making women's basketball more feminine. These rule changes sought to reduce everything from roughness to overexertion, and—along with the banning of interschool competition—have been interpreted as attempts by women physical educators to curtail and domesticate the sport, make it more feminine, and thereby—in the most generous interpretation—save it from extinction.<sup>3</sup> Thus, women physical educators are assumed to be solely responsible for returning women's basketball to the cloistered gymnasium. The role of men in this process has never been examined; for instance, Edward Hitchcock published his rarely mentioned article “Basketball for Women”—promoting basketball as a sport for women—in August, 1894 and anticipated Senda Berenson's own “Basketball for Women” by one month.<sup>4</sup>

An examination of the rise and fall of women's intercollegiate basketball in central Ohio—and especially at The Ohio State University—during the first decade of this century complicates these assumptions. Not only was the popular OSU women's intercollegiate basketball banned by its male Head of Athletics in 1907—ten years before the women's national overseeing body banned the sport—but, as contemporary publications indicate, his belief in the inappropriateness of intercollegiate contests for women was widely endorsed by other male sports administrators and by large segments of the public. While women administrators obviously had the authority to instigate rule changes and even to ban intercollegiate and interscholastic competition, it is not obvious that they would have had sufficient power to enforce such changes by themselves. By 1907 in central Ohio, women's intercollegiate basketball already displayed the features of a modern sport—and thus a public university fixture subject to male-dominated institutional forces beyond the control of the women physical educators.



Women's basketball at Ohio State began in the fall of 1898 as a gym class activity led by Miss Stella Elliot, the Women's Director of the Gymnasium. In the summer of 1899, a team composed of players selected from Ohio State class teams played Miss Blanche Rickey's YMCA team in the University's first ever intra-organization game. Five years later, in February 1904, the women students of OSU ushered in four seasons of genuine intercollegiate basketball by playing two games, one by the “Scrubs” and one by the “Varsity,” against teams from nearby Otterbein College.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the earlier teams pulled together by the very popular Miss Elliot (shortly to become Mrs. Canfield, wife of the OSU president's son, and then to leave the university), the 1904 team was student-sponsored and, even more significantly, sought and received the sanction of the University's Athletic Board, which also presided over men's intercollegiate sports.<sup>6</sup> The 1904 team was thus a true intercollegiate team: not only in its uniforms, manager, and coach, but also in its status within the university's administrative hierarchy. Women's basketball at OSU was conspicuously out of the gym class.

OSU was not alone. In 1904 five other colleges in central Ohio—Ohio Northern, Miami, Otterbein, Heidelberg, and Defiance—fielded teams. Six high schools, including the private Columbus School for Girls, Columbus's East High, as well as teams from the towns of Clyde, Spencerville, Marion and Kenton, engaged in interscholastic and interscholastic/intercollegiate games. By 1907, Ohio University, Muskingum, Wilmington,

Ohio Wesleyan, Bliss College, Lima College, and Cedarville College and the high schools of Columbus Central, Worthington, Columbus School for Girls, Reynoldsburg, Cambridge, Bellaire, Lima, Zanesville, and Marysville were also fielding teams. There was no formal league binding all these schools, but, at various times and in various combinations, they all played one another. Between 1904 and 1907, for instance, Ohio State played Muskingum, Ohio Northern, Otterbein, Miami, Wilmington, and the Columbus School for Girls, while Ohio Northern competed against Defiance, Otterbein, Bliss, and six different high school teams, along with Ohio State. Seasons consisted of as few as four games and as many as twelve, depending on what the coach or team manager could schedule. Ohio State played six games in 1904, eleven in 1905, seven in 1906, and six in 1907, all spread over the winter months.<sup>7</sup>

Within this loose, geographically based alliance, rivalries and pecking orders soon developed and championships were contested. Helping to fuel these rivalries was the early tradition of schools playing home-and-away series with one another. Even then teams looked forward to homecourt advantage. Sometimes that advantage lay with the traditional source—fan support—but sometimes the advantages were more quixotic, particularly at the smaller schools. When Otterbein traveled to Heidelberg College in Tiffin, its team overcame the “inconvenience”<sup>8</sup> of a smaller than usual gymnasium, while Ohio Northern triumphed over a “slippery”<sup>9</sup> floor at Clyde, with “goals two inches smaller than regulation,” and at Defiance with a “ball that was about worn out.”<sup>10</sup> Otterbein also had to endure other travails: at Muskingum it had to play by the home team’s rules—men’s. Otterbein lost, but avenged that loss when entertaining Muskingum at home with women’s rules.<sup>11</sup> Otterbein also had another home court advantage: “Instead of a solid they used screens back of the basket,” which Muskingum found a “great hindrance.”<sup>12</sup>

Probably the biggest home court advantage was, just as today, the officiating, which even then seemed to favor the home team. *The University Herald*, Ohio Northern’s hometown paper, unwittingly deflated Ohio Northern’s victory over Clyde in 1904: “A just criticism upon the visiting team was their persistent dissatisfaction improperly expressed over the referee’s decisions.”<sup>13</sup> More straightforwardly, Otterbein attributed its loss to Central High to the “disgusting number of fouls”<sup>14</sup> called during the game, as did Muskingum on several occasions, but most loudly about a loss to OSU, which would have “no doubt been a victory had it not been for O.S.U.’s rotten referee.”<sup>15</sup> Ohio State was also involved in one of the more bitter contests of the era when Miami, after winning their first 1904 game, lost its return game with the Buckeyes. According to the Miami school paper, “OSU was determined to win, by fair or by foul,” and had “officials emphatically disagreeing on several decisions.”<sup>16</sup> The disagreeing officials happened to be Ohio State’s manager Miss Wacker, who apparently got the better of Miami’s male Coach Stone. Home-and-away between OSU and Miami ended with that game.

Among these twelve colleges and universities, Ohio State consistently enjoyed prestige status, even when other schools—particularly Ohio Northern—played equally solid and winning basketball. In 1907, tiny Wilmington College was “wild with excitement,”<sup>17</sup> because its team had beaten the three state schools of Miami, OSU, and Ohio University, while Otterbein’s victory over OSU that same year was called its “greatest triumph,” one that would “stand the team well in the rank of state teams.”<sup>18</sup> Those two defeats gave the

Ohio State women a mediocre 4–2 record for 1907, quite a comedown from the previous two years when it competed for the informal state championship.

Just as in college football, those early basketball championships were based on the number and quality of wins. In 1904, Ohio Northern claimed the state championship with an undefeated season. Then in the next two seasons, 1905 and 1906, Ohio Northern and Ohio State vied for the title. Even though the two teams split their series in 1905, Ohio State invoked the “quality of schedule” criterion and with its 10–1 record<sup>19</sup> claimed the championship because its schedule also included fewer high school games.<sup>20</sup> In 1906 the two remained on a collision course for the state title, once again splitting their series, leading to much speculation in the newspapers about a third and deciding game on a neutral court.<sup>21</sup> (Remember that home court advantage!) Before such a tie-breaker could be played, however, the Ohio State team disbanded. The team fell victim to internal dissen- sion—players actually quit—because of perceived favoritism on the captain’s part, and their aborted season ended with a 7–1 record.<sup>22</sup>

These early basketball games, open to the public and in fact quite popular, were typically played on Friday nights or Saturday afternoons and could entail the visiting teams’ traveling several hours on trains, with chaperons accompanying the high school teams. The Big Four and C.,H., & D. railroads offered fans a round-trip fare of \$4.72 from Columbus to Oxford,<sup>23</sup> and if fans did follow their teams, they might also have to spend \$0.25 or \$0.30 for admission, depending on the school,<sup>24</sup> in addition to their train fare. At Ohio Northern the fans “packed” the gymnasium,<sup>25</sup> and at OSU “enthusiastic” crowds ranged from 500 to 1,000.<sup>26</sup> The games were more than just athletic contests, as they also provided occasions—at least initially—for the social elite to congregate. “Soci- ety” was “out in force” to watch games between OSU and Otterbein,<sup>27</sup> and also at an Ohio Northern-Kenton High School game played before an audience “composed chiefly of prominent society and business people of Kenton.”<sup>28</sup> The crowds cheered, yelled, hung



Ohio State University women’s basketball team of 1905 (date of photograph unknown).  
*Courtesy Ohio State University Archives.*

from the balcony, waved banners, and, on at least two occasions, enjoyed the OSU band during halftime.<sup>29</sup>

By today's scoring standards, these early fans' enthusiasm seems unfathomable, with game scores of 11–3, 9–4, and 11–6 being typical. But newspaper coverage, which invariably praised defensive play—noting, for instance, the “splendid play” by the guards that prevented the other team from scoring and such other non-scoring skills as passing and footwork—suggests a different kind of basketball appreciation at work.<sup>30</sup> Games were described by newspapers as “fast,”<sup>31</sup> “spirited,”<sup>32</sup> “snappy,”<sup>33</sup> “pretty,”<sup>34</sup> and “clean,”<sup>35</sup> with “remarkable nimbleness”<sup>36</sup> and “skill”<sup>37</sup> that often involved “splendid teamwork.”<sup>38</sup> At Ohio Northern, play in one game was “swift”<sup>39</sup> enough to “doubtless draw out a big crowd,”<sup>40</sup> and in another “excited the admiration of the gentlemen and elicited much favorable comment.”<sup>41</sup>

Admiration for the women and their basketball prowess extended beyond the particulars of snappy passes and quick footwork in ways that both confounded and confirmed traditional gender roles. For one thing, the public approved not only of the women's play, but of their playing basketball in general. At Ohio State, according to the school newspaper, the women's team “attracted as much if not more attention than the men's basketball team,”<sup>42</sup> which at the time sported a less distinguished record than the women's team. Just as in men's sports of the day, much of the attention was prompted by the women's athletic success, not by their bloomer-girded pulchritude: “The O.S.U. girls bid fair to make a record in basket ball that rivals the athletic achievements of the university men.”<sup>43</sup> A similar emphasis on winning, this time in the Muskingum school paper, even more explicitly connects the women's success, like the men's, with school prestige:

If the prospect for a good boy's [sic] team to represent Muskingum on the basketball floor this winter is bright, that of a fast team composed of the lovelier sex is even brighter. Last year the girls made a record to be proud of, but this year the outlook is that they will go beyond that.... In fact, it looks as if the girl's [sic] team will bring home many laurels to Muskingum during the coming season and the boy's [sic] will have to hustle to keep up with them.<sup>44</sup>

This connection between basketball success and school prestige was echoed by the local New Concord paper: “Muskingum has a right to be proud of the way the ladies basketball team has been advertising her this season.”<sup>45</sup> Another school's newspaper, the *Otterbein Aegis*, reiterates these sentiments: “Captain Smith of the Varsity and Miss Bailey of the girls' team, deserve much credit in building up the teams that have represented the University so creditably during the portion of the season just passed.”<sup>46</sup> This emphasis was repeated in an end-of-the-year wrap-up:

The girls' team played an unprecedented series, losing but one game.... Thus the result of this seasons participation in athletics is an evidence of the revival of the true Otterbein interest and spirit which, mixed with earnest endeavors and ability, has made possible the development of the strong teams which have brought honor to the institution by meeting and generally defeating their opponents representing universities of equal or greater standing.<sup>47</sup>

This esteem is arresting because women playing competitive basketball before a paying public for school prestige and state championships flies in the face of so many gender platitudes of the time. It reflects women seeking and finding achievement in the public

rather than private sphere; within that public sphere, it represents women earning accolades for accomplishment within a traditionally male domain rather than a traditionally female one like caregiving; finally, it represents women achieving recognition not for who they are or for how they look, but for what they do—what they accomplish on the basketball court.

While women's basketball in Ohio thus appropriated functions traditionally associated with men's athletics, it was also enfolded into traditional female roles and rituals. The most prominent of these were the after-game receptions given for the visiting team. A regular feature of all the games, these receptions were variously given by coaches, teams, school administrators and faculty, townspeople, and even on two occasions by the college men:

Because of the friendly relationship existing between the Heidelberg and Otterbein girls, the boys of Heidelberg gave a very delightful reception to our girls after their game at Tiffin. So the boys of the Philothonian and Philomathean societies, wishing to return the compliment, gave an informal reception to the Heidelberg girls and friends after the game in Westerville.<sup>48</sup>

Once the game concluded, whatever respite it offered from traditional female responsibilities, rituals, and rites likewise expired, and the women returned to the world of social graces where conviviality, hospitality, and decorum outweighed fast feet and snappy passes, as the newspapers covered the receptions as regularly as they did the games themselves.



From 1904 through 1907, women's basketball in central Ohio, led by the teams from Ohio State, exploded onto the sport scene and enjoyed a public exposure, popularity, and institutionalization that was not seen again in Ohio until the 1980s, when women at Ohio State began playing in the Big Ten under NCAA auspices. Newspaper coverage in both school and town newspapers, particularly in the two Columbus papers, rivaled the coverage given to men's basketball. Stories about games, both those played and those upcoming, team photographs, and boxscores brought women's high school and college basketball to the general public. And the public responded with exceptional support with crowds of 500 and even 1,000, numbers far exceeding those for the first years of women's basketball's second coming in 1965, when OSU played its home games in front of 50–60 friends and family members.<sup>49</sup> These early crowd estimates are even more astonishing in light of Ohio State's enrollment at the time. Between 1904 and 1907, the total enrollment at Ohio State ranged from 1,827 (1,580 men and 247 women) to 2,277 (1,832 men and 445 women); thus, the number of fans at some of those early games eclipsed the total number of OSU women students.<sup>50</sup>

Appropriate to such fan support, the women's basketball program was thoroughly institutionalized, beginning with its sanctioning by the Athletic Board. The women's teams had coaches (frequently male), trainers, managers, and captains; games were played under the management of referees, timers, and scorekeepers. Varsity "O"s were awarded to deserving players, who took pains to include their basketball years alongside other school activities in their yearbook entries. Indeed, women's basketball was such a flourishing sport that weak coaches could find themselves publicly rebuked, like the unfortunate Tallmadge Rickey at Otterbein:

The coaching of Miss Rickey was extremely poor. New girls received no encouragement from her. The beginning of the season was unsatisfactory because of this. After Christmas Miss Milne, the new coach, took the team in charge and veritably transformed it from a collection of good individual players to a team.<sup>51</sup>

The sport-savvy, enthusiastic crowds notwithstanding, during the first decade of the twentieth century intercollegiate basketball in central Ohio was played over a social minefield for the women involved. Basketball's physicality, its potential for player contact and public spectacle, challenged gender orthodoxies which, for some people, no post-game selection of tea and cookies could domesticate. The sport soon fell out of favor. Newspaper references to society's attendance at games disappeared; by 1907, coverage of the OSU women's team in the Columbus papers had shrunk dramatically, to a few lines in the back pages of the sports section. The final blow was the banning of intercollegiate play.

At Ohio State, Dr. H. Shindle Wingert, the University's Director of Physical Education, banned women's basketball in the fall of 1907, asserting that public athletic contests were "morally and physically detrimental to women," even though "that hadn't been the case here!"<sup>52</sup> Appealing to social status, he also noted that: "None of the first class institutions of the country allow the coeds to leave the university to play basketball anymore...." In case the possibility of social impropriety seemed insufficient, Wingert also justified his decision by noting that the team had consistently failed to produce revenue. But if the women's game was not financially self-supporting through the 25-cent admission charge, the team nevertheless generated sufficient funds to purchase new uniforms for the 1904-05 season,<sup>53</sup> while the men's team, established in 1899, as late as 1903 had never been self-supporting.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, compared to the women's game, the men's was very slow to catch on; even in the midst of the OSU men's state championship season, 1905, attendance was reported at only 600 for its victory over Oberlin.<sup>55</sup> After women's intercollegiate play was banned at OSU, other central Ohio schools apparently followed suit, since newspaper and yearbook references to their games disappeared after 1907—with the exception of Muskingum, which played until 1910 against high school teams. It is interesting to note that Muskingum was the only school to play (for one year) by men's rules, and also the only one to schedule the women's games as preliminaries to the men's.<sup>56</sup>

Given the popularity of women's intercollegiate basketball in central Ohio, with its nascent but vital subculture, its abrupt and apparently unchallenged termination by Wingert at Ohio State is shocking and should beggar the imagination. Yet, at another level, Wingert's action was utterly commonplace—a supporting footnote in the standard history of women's basketball. During the century's first two decades, colleges and universities from coast to coast followed a similar pattern of sequestering, and ultimately suppressing, the sport behind closed gymnasium doors—either by never endorsing interschool play, like eastern women's colleges such as Vassar and Wellesley, or by eventually prohibiting it, like Ohio State. Again, according to the traditional history, the impetus for suppression came from the women physical educators who "domesticated" the sport through progressively restrictive and "feminizing" rule changes, at first informally and then formally with the publication of the *Spalding Women's Basketball Guides* beginning in 1901. Between the rule changes

and the policy statements published in both the basketball guides and the women's professional journals, there is no doubt that women physical educators opposed rough play, rowdiness, and the interschool competition that promoted such unwomanly behaviors. As Elma Warner succinctly stated, "There is absolutely no reason for our contests for girls partaking of the same public character as those for boys and men."<sup>57</sup> Strikingly, despite this widely and well-articulated condemnation of intercollegiate play, not one of the succession of four women physical educators who presided over women's physical education at Ohio State between 1897 and 1907 ever mounted any attack against the activity. Indeed, it was the very first one, Stella Elliot, who introduced the activity to OSU women.

Conceivably, these women believed that the later basketball teams were beyond their administrative jurisdiction. Unlike the eastern women's schools or even some private midwestern schools like Oberlin College, the OSU women's basketball team operated under the auspices of an athletic association, just like the OSU men's teams. When the women formed their own basketball team in 1904, they also created a women's athletic association. Besides its existence and the fact that it orchestrated women's intercollegiate basketball, little is known of this organization, not even its name. It originated in January of 1904, when the University Athletic Board granted the women's petition requesting permission to organize. After receiving the Board's sanction, the women's association operated independently of it, although not always by financial choice. When the association petitioned the Athletic Board for financial backing for the basketball team's scheduling needs in January, 1906, their request was denied: "The girls have their separate organization and are expected to meet their obligations. They are privileged to whatever games they choose so long as they maintain strict responsibility."<sup>58</sup> Thus, except for the teams of 1899 and 1900, which Eliot organized in her position as the Associate Director of Gymnastics, women's intercollegiate basketball was administratively independent of the women's physical education program. Its closest administrative connection was the 1906 team's employment of Frances Paterson, a student gymnasium assistant, as manager.<sup>59</sup> Regardless of this apparent lack of administrative authority over the women's team, the women physical educators' response to the team must have been cordial since in their university positions of Associate Director of Gymnastics (1897–1900), Associate Professor of Physical Education (1900–1903), and then Director of Physical Education for Women (1903–1907),<sup>60</sup> they did oversee women's use of gymnasium time and permitted the women's team to both practice and play in the OSU gymnasium, the Armory.

When Wingert disbanded women's intercollegiate basketball, he was presumably acting as head of the Department of Physical Education for Men and Athletics, a position newly created by the University in 1906. Until this time, men's intercollegiate sports were entirely under the auspices of the Ohio State Athletic Association, the same organization<sup>61</sup> to which the women applied in 1904 for sanctioning of their intercollegiate sports. The Association consisted of three faculty members, three students, and three alumni, all male. It operated independently of the nascent physical education department at OSU, which had begun in 1897 with the hiring of Dr. Christopher P. Linhart as Director of the Gymnasium.<sup>62</sup> In June, 1906, however, the Board of Trustees accepted the faculty's approval of a report from the Athletic Council which recommended, among other things, the employment of a single official as both the Head of the Department of Physical Education for

Men and Athletics and the Director of the Gymnasium. Among the duties of this new official were overseeing the Gymnasium; directing the physical education of men; and supervising athletics, which included coaching, scheduling, purchasing, and approving all expenses connected with athletic contests.<sup>63</sup> In the women's case, Wingert apparently extended these duties to include his personally certifying each sport as an intercollegiate one. This contrasts markedly with his management of men's sports. In his first report to the Athletic Board, he recommended that the men's baseball team be disbanded due to lack of interest. He did not simply disband it by fiat but worked with the Athletic Board in performing his supervisory role.<sup>64</sup> But he did not extend that same collegial and supervisory relationship to the women's association. Thus, despite the independent status of the Women's Athletic Association in the eyes of the Athletic Board, Wingert apparently felt that his authority exceeded that of the association.

The gender role reversals displayed at Ohio State, where the women administrators endorsed intercollegiate basketball and Wingert dismissed it, raise questions about the general process by which women's intercollegiate basketball was suppressed. At very least, the tacit approval given the sport by four successive Ohio State women physical educators disrupts the traditional, essentialized story in which all women physical educators systematically opposed intercollegiate sports. It also exposes that story's regional, and probably class, biases. For instance, Steveda Chepko's article, "The Domestication of Basketball," which otherwise offers one of the best histories of early women's basketball, consistently makes universalizing comments like these: "Women physical educators faced the dilemma of how to make a competitive game appear noncompetitive. The women adopted a 'cookies and milk' strategy...."<sup>65</sup> But in the evolution of women's basketball, even in its infancy, the privileged role of eastern women physical educators is unequivocal. Sophia Foster Richardson of Vassar, an eastern woman physical educator, first promulgated an anti-competition platform in her 1897 article, "Tendencies in Athletics for Women in Colleges and Universities," writing: "In this connection the question has arisen whether we shall endeavor to stimulate general interest in athletic games by intercollegiate contests. The Western colleges seem inclined to answer this question in the affirmative....On the other hand the Eastern colleges unite in disapproving of intercollegiate contests."<sup>66</sup> In 1898, Helen Ballintine of Vassar wrote in an *American Physical Education Review* article that "We do not advocate intercollegiate contests...."<sup>67</sup> In her 1903 book, *Athletics and Outdoor Sports for Women*, Lucille E. Hill of Wellesley passes on her Dean's warning that

The girl of to-day ... may ride a horse without an accompanying groom; she may stride a horse; she may row and run and swim and take part in a hundred athletic exercises without being one whit less a woman, but some things she had better leave to men. Fiercely competitive athletics have their dangers for men, but they develop manly strength. For women their dangers are greater, and the qualities they tend to develop are not womanly.<sup>68</sup>

At the famous 1899 Conference of Physical Training held in Springfield, Massachusetts, the first committee appointed to standardize the rules of women's basketball was dominated by eastern physical educators. Besides the influential Senda Berensen of Smith College, the committee also included Ethel Perrin of the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics and Elizabeth Wright of Radcliffe.<sup>69</sup> The lone midwesterner was Alice Foster of Oberlin College. She had a medical degree, which itself suggests acculturation to the dominant

male values. Similarly, Oberlin's women's athletic director, Delphine Hanna, another medical doctor trained in the east by Dudley Sargent at his Sargent School for Physical Education in Cambridge, Massachusetts, also opposed women's intercollegiate athletics. Given these circumstances, it is unclear to what extent Foster represented a midwestern point of view.<sup>70</sup>

The extent to which histories of women's basketball gloss over a possible eastern-midwestern division of opinion can be suggested by an anonymous writer's observation in *The Miami Student* for 1903: "Those people in the East who have been trying to make the decisions that basket ball is detrimental to the health have surely never played the game, or at least never played it by the modified rules."<sup>71</sup> The plausibility of such a regional difference is also suggested by the results of a 1909 survey which reported "that most of the women's colleges in the East and many of the co-educational institutions do not play outside games but have interclass contests.... In the Middle West and West, intercollegiate contests are more common, but the percentage playing them is less than one half."<sup>72</sup>

Unfortunately, we have little biographical information on those four OSU women who supported intercollegiate basketball. Stella Elliot, the first Director of Physical Education for Women, had been a student for three years at the University of Nebraska,<sup>73</sup> and Bertha Hopkins, the last director, was a 1902 graduate of Ohio State and played on Ohio State's very first intercollegiate team, coached by Elliot. Yet without knowing precisely why, we can still infer that these midwestern women were indifferent to the feminizing ideology of the eastern women physical educators, a group who in 1907 had not yet coalesced themselves into the national professional juggernaut of the 1920s and later.



The regional acceptability, at least for some in the midwest, of women's interschool play could also explain why Dr. Christopher P. Linhart, Wingert's predecessor as Ohio State's Director of the Gymnasium from 1897–1904, originally allowed Stella Elliot to form the women's team. Linhart, a native Ohioan, attended Wittenberg College in Springfield, Ohio, and received his medical degree from Western Reserve University in Cleveland.<sup>74</sup> Before his tenure at Ohio State, he held various physical education positions in New York and New Jersey, and was a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education. We can only speculate that Linhart's eastern and professional experiences were insufficient to overcome the apparently midwestern acceptability of women's intercollegiate basketball.

Shindle Wingert, a graduate of Philadelphia Normal School of Physical Training, the Yale University Summer School of Physical Training, the Philadelphia School of Anatomy, and the medical department of Maryland College, was thoroughly eastern in his education<sup>75</sup> and apparently harbored no conflicting views on women and intercollegiate competition. Given Wingert's background, it is conceivable that he acted wholly on behalf of eastern women physical educators and their anti-intercollegiate principles—bringing their message to the Ohio hinterland—but it seems just as likely that he was acting on behalf of other males: physical educators in particular and many middle class men in general.

For while many women physical educators found much of competitive basketball objectionable by 1907, as national publications attest, they may have been only echoing—

even following—their male counterparts. Clearly the main theme in Chepko's "The Domestication of Basketball" is that women physical educators acted defensively in steadily removing all "vestiges of rough play" so that the game would be "safely within the boundaries of acceptable behavior for women."<sup>76</sup> Certainly no male physical educator ever published an article advocating intercollegiate competition for women; in 1906, a bellwether year just before Wingert shut down women's intercollegiate play at Ohio State, a number of male leaders publicly opposed women's intercollegiate basketball. Dr. Luther Gulick concluded his Presidential Speech to the Public School Physical Training Society with this very clear anti-competition crescendo:

I believe, for the reasons already stated, that athletics for women should for the present be restricted to sport within school; that they should be used for recreation and pleasure; that the strenuous training of teams tends to be injurious to the body; that public, general competition emphasizes qualities that are on the whole unnecessary and undesirable. Let us have athletics for recreation, but not for serious, public competition."

William Orr, also in a 1906 speech read before the American Physical Education Association meeting and then published in 1907, flatly asserts: "One proposition can be regarded as established, girls should under no circumstances engage in struggles for supremacy with teams from other schools. These games are necessarily spectacular and sin against the psychical as well as the physiological well being of women."<sup>78</sup> Intercollegiate basketball, with its intensity, its inevitable collisions and bumps, and aggressive competition for the ball, exemplified precisely the kind of women's sport that men objected to as a perceived threat to their masculinity. As Dudley Allen Sargent put it in 1906 in the *American Physical Education Review*: "In nearly every instance, however, it will be found that the women who are able to excel in the rougher and more masculine sports, have either inherited or acquired masculine characteristics."<sup>79</sup> And if women become more "masculine," men will inevitably suffer, for "The time may come when effeminate man will succumb to virile woman."<sup>80</sup> Given this climate of male opposition to basketball competition, Wingert's action appears to reflect a widespread professional antagonism to women playing basketball publicly rather than a specifically women-centered opposition.

Male physical educators have always played some role in regulating women's basketball. It was James E. Sullivan, Secretary-Treasurer of the Amateur Athletic Union, who first invited Senda Berenson to submit her now famous "women's rules" to the American Sports Publishing Company for publication.<sup>81</sup> The notoriety of Berenson's women's rules can lull us into forgetting that men had already begun modifying and adapting the rules of basketball specifically for women, as Berenson herself reminds us in her "Editorial" in the first edition of the Spalding rules: "Dr. Sargent made some [rule] changes . . . His Normal School pupils play the game with his rules and it is natural to infer that the pupils teach it with his modifications."<sup>82</sup> Theodore Houg, in his article "Physiological Effects of Basketball for Women" in that first 1901 *Guide*, justifies Berenson's modifications of the men's game for women on a physiological basis. When the Women's Basketball Committee, the sponsor of the Spalding rules, became a part of the American Physical Education Association in 1905, a new Executive Committee on Basketball Rules was created; three of its seven members were men: Luther Halsey Gulick; George T. Hepbron, editor of the *Men's*

*Official Basketball Guide*; and Harry Fisher, editor of the *Official Collegiate Basketball Guide*.<sup>83</sup> In this context, Berenson's *Guide* appears to be as much a codification of men's rules for women as women's rules for other women.

The professional antagonism of physical educators towards women's interschool competition mirrors a similar antipathy held by some segments of the general public. Women's basketball may well have been popular, but because it pushed the boundaries of acceptable middle-class feminine behavior, it was also controversial. The greatest controversies concerned anything perceived as roughness, a feature that interschool competition with its high stakes was believed to inspire and inflame. Senda Berenson, through the *Spalding Guides*, relentlessly campaigned to eliminate or curtail any behavior that promoted it:

Unless a game as exciting as basket ball is carefully guided by such rules as will eliminate roughness, the great desire to win and the excitement of the game will make our women do sadly unwomanly things....Rough and vicious play seems worse in women than in men. A certain amount of roughness is deemed necessary to bring out manliness in our young men. Surely rough play can have no possible excuse in our young women.<sup>84</sup>

The conceit of acceptable female behavior which Berenson is evoking here, as Gerda Lerner points out, is wholly a construction of the middle and upper classes and has nothing to do with the experiences of lower class women. Their sense of the feminine was entirely ignored.<sup>85</sup> As Lerner also observes, this conceit arose with the industrialization of the northeast: one "result of industrialization was in increasing differences in life styles between women of different classes.... As class distinctions sharpened, social attitudes toward women became polarized."<sup>86</sup> Eventually, this eastern and middle class concept of femininity evolved into something like a national standard, so that during their games, women had to consciously avoid crossing an invisible, but nonetheless real, boundary between acceptable hard play and unacceptable rough play—a line that lay somewhere between "good clean play" and play fraught with "disgusting fouls." Overstepping this boundary invariably led to comment and censure.

Being highly gendered and distinctly regionalized, this boundary fluctuated. In a key game between OSU and ONU in 1906, some eighteen fouls were called on OSU and thirteen on Ohio Northern, prompting the Columbus *Evening Dispatch* to report them as "a matter of dissatisfaction among the spectators....The men present thought perhaps politeness had something to do with the girls' foul rule and therefore made no objection [sic]."<sup>87</sup> But if the men thought it fitting and appropriate that women play a polite and restrained game, the women themselves did not: "The girls, however, were wise to the game and a number of arguments, highly interesting to the spectators, followed the decisions of the officials."<sup>88</sup> The patronizing "highly interesting" comment, elicited by the women for merely disputing the officials' calls, escalated in the *Dispatch's* coverage of another game remarkable for its spirited play: "Ohio State met the Otterbein lassies at basketball... in a game which was amusingly rough for a ladies contest [sic]."<sup>89</sup> Similarly, in an OSU–Wilmington game: "At times the contest waxed warm and pressed closely any boys' contest in degree of roughness. Some of the mix-ups afforded much amusement to the large crowd present."<sup>90</sup> Another game, this time between OSU and Muskingum, exasperated *The Lantern*, the Ohio State school newspaper, into this commentary: "Roughness, which seemed to prevail throughout the game, would hardly have provoked com-

ment regarding the 'gentler sex.'<sup>91</sup> On occasion, the implicit rationale for all the patronizing and snide remarks burst into the open: "From the reports that the girls make and the way they were treated we think that the New Concord girls acted about as masculine as their rules of playing indicate."<sup>92</sup>

The tension between popularity and offensiveness is nowhere more vividly illustrated than in two *Evening Dispatch* stories published within nine days of each other in 1904, just as women's intercollegiate basketball was blossoming in central Ohio. In the February 4 story, a headline blared "Typical Ohio College Girl is Now of Strong Athletic Trend," while the story itself reports "that women are in the college sporting arena to stay"<sup>93</sup> with four area basketball teams ready to compete that winter. Even Oberlin had entered the athletic arena with the formation of a woman's sporting association that had already collected \$1,200 from peanut and candy sales for its own athletic field. The story concluded with the following "Here is a hand to the athletic Ohio girl, who has dared to assert herself"<sup>94</sup> The second front-page story in the sport section suggests just how daring these woman were, as quadruple headlines blare: "Athletic Girls Do Not Suit Elliot: Tendency of Young Women in College to Imitate Their Brothers Condemned: Young Women Students Worry Older Heads: Maidens Will Have to Fight Opposition in Their Effort to Secure Strong Bodies."<sup>95</sup> Almost twice as long as the previous week's moderately favorable story this one relies on lengthy quotes from Harvard's President Elliot and a Boston physician to criticize and attack women's athletics. Typical of much of the era's thinking, these men saw athletics as unwomanly and hysteria-producing; Elliot complained that "Had nature intended for her to compete in man's sports she would have been differently constructed anatomically"<sup>96</sup> Only an unnamed, "serious-minded alumna of a woman's college,"<sup>97</sup> offers any rebuttal to the article's negative slant: "And it is astonishing, when one thinks of it, how very few accidents happen to girl athletes. I guess the athletic girl is here to stay, no matter how much college presidents may preach against athletics for women."<sup>98</sup> In a newspaper whose sports sections most provocative articles typically dealt with speculation about upcoming seasons, the appearance of this pair of stories is extraordinary and signals the presence of a deep, polarizing breach in public opinion about women's interschool basketball.

In such a social climate, which women had to negotiate, Wingert would hardly need to look to women physical educators' policy statements to justify terminating the OSU program. Besides the published objections of his male peers, various physicians, and the president of Harvard, Wingert could also draw on sexologists for whom lesbianism had suddenly become a preoccupying topic. Between 1896 and 1916, some 566 articles on women's sexual "'perversions,' 'inversions,' and 'disorders'" were published in America, compared with only one article between 1740 and 1895.<sup>99</sup> Sexologists' early concern about inappropriate gender behavior shifted to concern with inappropriate sexuality (in their eyes) as explained by no less a male authority figure than Richard von Krafft-Ebing, an influential purveyor of sexology in Europe and leading influence on American sexologists. Krafft-Ebing escalated the male physical educators' association of sports with masculinity to an outward sign of lesbianism:

Uranism may nearly always be suspected in females wearing short hair, or who dress in the fashion of men, or pursue the sports and pastimes of their male acquaintances.... The masculine soul, heaving in the female bosom, finds pleasure in the pursuit of manly sports, and in manifestations of courage and bravado.<sup>100</sup>

Havelock Ellis, America's own Krafft-Ebing, observed in 1902 that "it was women's colleges that were 'the great breeding ground' of lesbianism."<sup>101</sup> In this male-inscribed environment, it is not surprising that women physical educators tried to domesticate basketball or that Chepko reports that a "recurring theme in the first two decades of the *Guides* is the 'fear' of the effect competition would have on a woman."<sup>102</sup>



Instead of viewing women physical educators as the primary instigators of basketball's retreat into closed gymnasiums, which clearly ascribes to them exceptional power and authority—sufficient at Ohio State to dismantle a popular and growing sport—I think it is more realistic to assume that with their anti-interscholar competition platform, the women physical educators were fulfilling the traditional female function of overseeing and implementing the dominant social mores of the time. These mores were defined by men who viewed strenuous women's sports, not only as unseemly, unwomanly and possibly even deviant, but as threats to their own masculinity. Viewed through the lens of patriarchy—the system of male dominance over both physical resources and women—the end of women's basketball competition because of, rather than in spite of, its popularity seems predictable, and it may well be one of the first instances of male backlash. That women physical educators should participate in that backlash seems equally predictable, for hegemony is typically sustained by mechanisms through which those dominated buy into their own domination. Except in the eastern women's colleges, men controlled the educational institutions in which the women worked. This insured economic coercion, while public ridicule and opprobrium provided equally potent instruments of social control. Complementing these restraints was the very real fact that the women physical educators benefited organizationally from reduced women's competition because it meshed with the concept of separate male and female spheres of expertise and authority, thus enabling them to retain their own power in marginalized arenas like women's sports.

The history of women's intercollegiate basketball, especially in the midwest, is a much more tangled story than that of simple suppression initiated by women physical educators. Its demise is far more highly overdetermined than that simple causality suggests; men worked for its suppression as well, directly and indirectly in efforts that varied according to their region and class. Ever since its introduction, girls' high school basketball thrived in the state of Iowa, as is well documented, despite the women physical educators' best efforts to eradicate it. It thrived because, for reasons that remain unclear, Iowa's male authorities rejected the women physical educators' anti-competition platform. Lerner's correlation of the doctrine of "the lady" with industrialization does, however, offers a possible explanation for both Iowa and Ohio. In rural and agriculturally dominated Iowa, in contrast to the industrialized northeast, the position of women might have resembled the position of colonial and frontier women for whom "class distinctions were not so great... and [women's] economic contribution was more highly valued, their opportunities were less restricted and their positive participation in community life taken for granted."<sup>103</sup> In Ohio, where industrialization and urbanization were having a real impact on rural culture and mores, the story is more mixed. In 1904, just when Linhart authorized intercollegiate play at OSU, the male-dominated faculty of Heidelberg voted to forbid the women to play inter-

collegiate games in public.<sup>104</sup> Then, after women's basketball bloomed at Ohio State in accordance with the wishes of the dominant male, it withered because it deviated from the doctrines of femininity spread by the eastern women physical educators but unmistakably sown, endorsed, and enforced by the dominant males with their bourgeois sense of femininity. That the issue of what constitutes femininity should be contested in Ohio reflects, in Lerner's theory, the dynamic flux between agriculture and industry and their respective values.

Of all the groups touched by this dynamic process, the group that benefitted least—not at all, really—were the women athletes themselves, and I have always wondered why they did not protest. Certainly the women back then who did dare to play would not have been shrinking violets. Indeed, yearbook entries for members of the first OSU teams reveal student leaders. Margaret Kaufman, captain of the 1899 team and “one of its best players,”<sup>105</sup> was also a member of the Kappa Kappa Gamma and Mu Alpha Phi sororities, a member of the editorial board for the school yearbook, Secretary of Arms for the Browning Literary Society, Secretary of the Student debate Society, and Vice-President of the Tennis Association.<sup>106</sup> Tallmadge Rickey, who also played in 1899 and was the inept coach about whom the Otterbein players complained so bitterly, went on to become the Assistant Supervisor of Physical Education for the Columbus Public Schools.<sup>107</sup> Francis Hite, forward on the 1904 team, went on to become the first woman architect in Mexico,<sup>108</sup> while Alma Wacker Paterson, the manager of the 1904 team who had the fierce wrangle with Coach Stone of Miami University, became Ohio State University's first woman trustee.<sup>109</sup> Since the women who played basketball clearly were not suffering followers of the status quo, perhaps their acceptance of Wingert's decision can be explained by their other activities. I am convinced that they saw themselves as New Women first and New Ohio Athletic Women second, so that basketball was for them just one among many areas of competition. As an anonymous author wrote in *The Miami Student* in 1903:

What if we jumped your hurdles?  
 What if we skinned your cats?  
 What if we played basketball?  
 All of this is but the beginning  
 Of a not too distant day,  
 When we shall enter a larger field,  
 For the state now says we may.<sup>110</sup>

This author couldn't have known how much more the state would have to say before her great-granddaughter got to play.

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