

The Teaching of the History of Physical Education and Sport to Undergraduate Students — Is It Possible?

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This paper is based solely on the personal experiences of the writer. After teaching the history of physical education to graduate students as an elective course for twenty-three years, he was confronted with a new required course in Foundations of American Physical Education for juniors and seniors. Many differences between graduate and undergraduate students were observed and taken into account in the teaching of the new course. One basic difference was that few undergraduate students had any interest in the history of anything. There are very few twenty-year-old historians. Thus a fundamental criterion in teaching the undergraduate class was to develop a variety of techniques to try to arouse some interest in our heritage and to reduce lecturing to a minimum.

Throughout the course there were six major emphases:

1. The contributions of people; who they are and what they have done.

2. The origin and development of particular sports. How is basketball today different from the kind of basketball played in 1910?;

3. Use of primary sources to some degree, including not only written materials but also older people as sources of information.

4. Girls' and women's athletics.

5. Participation of blacks in sports.

6. Origins of activities and apparatus used in a modern program of physical education.

Along with these particular emphases, a number of special techniques were gradually evolved and incorporated into class procedures, such as the following:

1. Use of the first five minutes of class each day for discussion of any current event or other item of interest. In most cases these were suggested by students; occasionally the instructor would bring up something from current events.

2. Seven-minute oral reports selected by the students from an extensive bibliography of articles in various magazines such as *Outing*, *Sports Illustrated*, the *American Physical Education Review*, and the like.

3. Once a week for ten or fifteen minutes the instructor discussed a prominent sports figure such as Walter Johnson, Joe Louis, Eleanora Sears, Bobby Jones, Jesse Owens, and others.

4. Several small group discussions on various topics. One lively subject was male attitudes towards women's participation in vigorous sports.

5. Use of local visiting speakers on topics of historical interest. These included a retired staff member who was a student of Dr. Thomas Wood and Dr. Jesse Feiring Williams at Teachers College in the 1920's; a former Turner; a black who broke the color barrier in pro football in 1946; a panel of coaches who attended the 1972 Olympic Games; a retired faculty member who studied under Dr. Jay B. Nash at New York University; and others.

6. Class participation in a Swedish calisthenic lesson.

7. Indian club demonstration by a member of the faculty.

8. The opportunity to look over various historical documents, pictures, and other memorabilia in the possession of the instructor.

9. Use of slides collected by the instructor featuring the Basketball Hall of Fame, Warner Gymnasium at Oberlin College (built in 1903), Thomas Beecher and the Park Church, etc.

10. Other teaching aids: the filmstrip on colonial sports from Williamsburg; the movie, *Man of Kintail*, on Dr. R. Tait McKenzie. Unfortunately, such sources are very limited.

11. Observation of artifacts on campus or in the vicinity — a Swedish boom, inclined ladders, Sargent apparatus, wands, iron dumbbells, and other items.

12. Use of Menke's *Encyclopedia of Sport*. This was done by giving each student a question and having him look up the answer. Two examples were: What college has won the most NCAA team wrestling championships and how many did they win? In what year was the first National AAU basketball tournament held for women and who was the champion? The purpose of this assignment was to enable students to find out first-hand what an excellent reference this book is.

These and other ideas were developed and tried out in five undergraduate classes over a two-year period and were generally received with enthusiasm and interest. They are offered here to other teachers in the hope that they may serve to encourage further exploration and experimentation into other productive techniques for better teaching.