

# The Historical Development of AIAW

JOANNA DAVENPORT

Auburn University

Most people undoubtedly believe that the history of AIAW, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, began when the organization was formed in 1972. However, the entire history of intercollegiate athletics for women is intertwined with the development and growth of AIAW. Thus, it is necessary to highlight certain noteworthy events which culminated in the idea for, as well as the establishment of, a national governing body for highly competitive events for women.

The real beginning was 1891 when Dr. James Naismith invented the game of basketball. Before the introduction of this game, intercollegiate competition for women was practically non-existent. Within a short time, however, female collegians enthusiastically played the game and had begun to engage in interschool contests. Since there was no national governing body, there was a lack of continuity as the game spread from area to area. Some schools and colleges published material concerning the sport, and many sets of printed rules appeared all over the country. In order to standardize the game, in 1899 the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education, known today as the Alliance, appointed a committee whose task was to organize all the modifications of the game into one set of rules suitable for girls and women. This was the first time in history that a national committee was established for women's athletics, and the present NAGWS, the National Association for Girls and Women in Sport, is an outgrowth of this committee. The committee's work resulted in the first official girls' and women's basketball rules published in 1901.

Soon, however, the women physical education leaders became concerned about keen varsity competition because of the so-called abuses occurring in basketball. Using their influence these leaders brought a halt to intercollegiate competition and introduced the famous, or infamous, playday as a substitute. By the 1920's sport programs for women in most institutions consisted of intramurals and playdays.

The break from playdays and the pivotal step toward the germination of AIAW occurred in 1941 when Gladys Palmer, head of the Women's Physical Education Department at Ohio State University boldly issued invitations to a National Collegiate Golf Tournament. Miss Palmer truly believed that healthy competition was beneficial to female athletes and that the so-called playdays did not meet these competitive needs and rights. Despite protests and resolutions against Ohio State, the event was held and succeeded. It continued to be an annual event, and eventually the skeptics were convinced that the idea had been a good one.

This tournament paved the way for intercollegiate athletics for women. In the 1950's a national committee, the Tripartite Golf Committee, studied and observed the golf tournament. It expanded and became the National Joint Committee on Extramural Sports for Women whose role was to officially sanction all the increasing extramural sports.

In the early 1960's NAGWS dramatically changed from years of playdays and intramurals and committed itself to the concept of sport opportunities for all levels of skill. NAGWS and AAHPER, in cooperation with the United States Olympic Development Committee, held sport institutes for coaches and teachers so that they would be more knowledgeable about teaching the skilled athlete.

In 1965 the Joint Committee on Extramural Sports dissolved, thus necessitating a structure to guide and control women's intercollegiate athletics. Consequently, in 1967 CIAW, the NAGWS-affiliated Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, organized and assumed sponsorship of national championships. This was as bold a step then as the golf tournament had been in 1941. Yet, it was time to provide this avenue for the highly skilled, and the die was cast. The first national championships in gymnastics and track and field occurred in 1969, at which time the golf tournament also came under the aegis of CIAW.

When a more structured governing body was needed, CIAW became AIAW in 1972. As an institutional membership organization, AIAW has had phenomenal growth. From its charter membership of 278 schools, it now has over 900 members. Not only is it recognized as the controlling body for women's intercollegiate athletics, but it is also the largest collegiate sport regulatory organization in this country. As an indication of its growth and maturity, on July 1, 1979, it became a separate legal entity with liaison to NAGWS and AAHPERD.