

Have the Reports of the Death of Competitive Women's Athletics, 1920-35, Been Greatly Exaggerated?

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The dominant view of sport historians is the claim that there were widespread competitive athletic programs in the early 1920's followed by the death of athletics for girls and women. The platform of the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation and the Women's Athletic Committee of the American Physical Education Association were credited with the demise of competitive athletics and the emergence of the play day. The purpose of both organizations was to provide the "Magic of Sport" for all girls and women instead of a select few and to combat all forms of highly competitive sports. Certainly the "specialized play day" as inculcated through the Women's philosophy was a significant form of sport for girls and women in the late '20's through the mid '30's. And the WD/WAC accomplished its de-emphasis of competitive athletics.

It would be misleading, however, to assume that because the socialized "play day" and the WD/WAC platform were so visible and so widely publicized that interscholastic, intercollegiate, and recreational and industrial competitive athletics for girls and women did not exist. For, despite the efforts of these women, girls and women desired competitive athletics as has been seen in field hockey and in the feminine accepted "Sports." The sports forced "underground" - basketball and track and field - emerged stronger than ever in the industrial leagues, AAU and small town high schools and colleges. The will to find competitive opportunities surfaced even in the absence of any long sport tradition and despite the social taboos against such participation. The realization that competition triumphed in spite of great odds in the 1920-35 era is an interesting phenomena which leads to the conclusion that the death of competitive athletics 1920-35 has been greatly exaggerated.



Joan Huh to Roberta Park: "That was good for a snack. Now when do we eat'?"