

# Amateurism in American Female College Athletics: A Continuing Tradition

JOAN CHANDLER

University of Texas at Dallas

Amateurism in sport is difficult to define precisely but is marked by concern with participation rather than result; the sport is played as an avocation not a job, and for personal satisfaction rather than the entertainment of others. By the late nineteenth century, male college athletics had lost the amateur ideal; by 1929, football had become “a profitable professional enterprise,” and by 1939, male physical education departments were handmaidens of intercollegiate athletics.

Female college physical educators reacted to this professionalism by stressing intramural rather than intercollegiate athletics, and by discouraging women for what were considered to be feminine roles, but to save women from becoming “meat on the hoof”.

When the AIAW was formed in 1971, its founders intended to provide an alternative model for intercollegiate athletics by building on this amateur tradition. While college women were now to be offered training, facilities, and opportunities for high level competition comparable to those of males, the AIAW deliberately refused to take part in the recruiting game, insisted on treating student athletes as bone fide students, and encouraged maximum participation in tournaments organized for several skill levels.

In attempting to perpetuate the amateur ideal, the AIAW was espousing a philosophy which has never been accepted in American public life. While trying to establish this alternative model, the AIAW, to demonstrate the fact of women’s equality, had to accept the male definition of athletic success. These two tasks could not be done at once: the AIAW failed to topple the male athletic power structure.

Now that the NCAA has coopted the AIAW, male and female college athletes are professionals in all but one name. The amateur tradition, sustained by female college educators for more than eighty years, is a continuing tradition no longer.