

# The History of Women's Intercollegiate Basketball with Emphasis on the Growth and Development of the Game

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Before James Naismith invented the game of basketball in 1891, intercollegiate competition for women was practically nonexistent. The game was quickly adopted by women's colleges and spread like wildfire throughout the country. Soon women's basketball teams were playing other schools at both the high school and college level. No other sport for girls and women has been received with such enthusiasm, grown to such proportions, created so many problems, been involved in such controversy, and influenced the course of history of women's athletics as has this one. In other words, if the history of men's intercollegiate athletics revolves around football, the story of intercollegiate competition for women revolves around basketball.

It is the purpose of this paper to trace the evolution of the game as played by women in the colleges and universities and to show how its growth in popularity has affected the whole course of women's athletics in the domain of regulatory bodies, rules, and standards. An examination of the evolution of rules will demonstrate the changes in attitudes and play that necessitated changes in regulations of the game. The interrelation between the two is undeniable: different play and attitudes influence changes in rules, and conversely, changes in rules have a great effect on the way the game is played.

As the game was adopted by more and more schools, many leaders adjusted the original rules to make it more appropriate, they believed, for women to play. And contrary to popular belief, women played three-court basketball, not because they were not strong enough to play full court, but because a woman misinterpreted Naismith's markings of a court and published her interpretation of his diagram. Nevertheless, there was a lack of continuity about the rules as the activity spread from area to area. To compound the problem, many materials were published by different schools and soon many sets of rules appeared in print all over the country. As a result, many problems arose when women's institutions competed against each other. It soon became apparent that an attempt should be made to standardize the game. Thus, in 1899 the American Association for the Advancement of Physical Education, our present-day Alliance, appointed a committee to study the women's basketball situation throughout America. This committee was the forerunner of the present day NAGWS, which before AIAW was the regulatory body for all women's sports.

As basketball developed, the sport proved to be full of controversy and brought negative publicity to the schools. Consequently, by the 1920s the abuses became so flagrant that the pendulum swung the other way and physical educators and administrators discontinued almost all intercollegiate competition. This diminishing of competitive opportunities came paradoxically at the same time men's sports were expanding so on the collegiate level that many authorities call it the "Golden Age of Sports." As a substitute the women inaugurated the famous play day where the emphasis was social rather than competitive.

In the 70's the pendulum swung again and we are in the midst of an explosion of expanded sports programs for women. Basketball rules for women are now almost identical to men's and the most talented players have opportunities after college to be in a new women's professional league.

Few sports in history have had as colorful a development as women's basketball. The most interesting aspect of the game's growth has been the change in attitude from one extreme to another. When intercollegiate contests became prevalent with all their attendant evils, steps were taken to eliminate the events. Over the years the situation has changed and is best reflected in the announcement that a pre-Olympic doubleheader will be held on July 9 in Indianapolis for both men and women. It is expected that 64,000 will attend these games, the largest crowd in American basketball history. What a dramatic change from the play day era where often spectators were not even allowed.