

# City of Champions: Pasadena, California

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How does it happen that a relatively small city nurtured so many nationally and internationally known athletes? What conditions were necessary for Pasadena, California, to develop such a large number of champions? This paper was an attempt to answer these questions.

Founded in 1874, Pasadena, the “Crown of the Valley”, soon became synonymous with beauty, superb climate and a potential for wealth. Advertised as a winter paradise, the town soon attracted those wishing to improve their health or become wealthy growing citrus or wine grapes. Also selecting Pasadena were many wealthy Midwestern and Easterners who built mansions and lived the winter months in the sun and warmth.

Baseball, cycling, roller skating and small-game hunting were diversions for early Pasadenans. A mutual interest in hunting led to the founding of the Valley Hunt Club in 1888. Two years later, club members decided to enliven New Year’s Day by holding games which included horse races, polo, riding at the rings, and casting the javelin from horseback. To capture the spirit of the festivities, many attending decorated their carriages with roses and thus was born the Tournament of Roses. The popularity of the games was such that by 1900 they had expanded and included the 1890 events plus a horseback quadrille, a 100 yard foot race, and a greased pig catch among others.

Perhaps it was their concern with health which prompted early citizens to institute school calisthenic classes followed quickly by sports competition. Football, baseball, girls’ basketball, and co-ed tennis were available to Pasadena High School students in the early 1900’s. The era also saw the first of Pasadena’s internationally recognized athletes, May Sutton, who won Wimbledon in 1905 and 1907.

Listed chronologically within each sport are many of Pasadena’s champions including fourteen Olympians.

*Badminton:* David Freeman, Chris Kinard

*Baseball:* Jackie Robinson Irv Noren, Bob Lillis, Dick Williams

*Basketball:* Jerry Tarkanian, Michael Cooper

*Cycling:* Jack Disney

*Diving:* Aileen Allen, Carol Fletcher, Dorothy Poynton

*Football:* Edwin Horrell, Mario Clark, Charlie Phillips, Michael Dennis,

Kim Anderson, Jimmy Willis, Johnny Lynn

*Ice Skating:* Jack Disney (speed skating), Peggy Fleming (figure skating)

*Rowing:* Victor Jacomini

*Tennis:* the Sutton sisters: Ethel, Violet, Florence and May; Ellsworth Vines, Stan Smith

*Track and Field:* Charles Paddock, Lillian Copeland, MayBelle Reichardt, Anne Vrana, Rayma Wilson, Simone Schaller, Mack Robinson, Alice Brown

That Pasadena developed so many famous athletes is due to a combination of factors including climate, opportunities for competition, wealth of the early settlers, support of sports by the educational system and prominent citizens, the Pasadena Athletic Club, and the city's mixed racial composition. There may also be other factors but whatever the reasons, Pasadena has produced a plethora of outstanding athletes and is truly a city of champions.