

# Sweetheart Sport: Barbara Ann Scott and the Post World War Two Image of the Female Athlete in Canada

DON MORROW

The University of Western Ontario

This paper attempts to slice into the complex phenomena of image-making of female athletes by examining one Canadian athlete, Barbara Ann Scott. It is contended that the image established, promulgated and perpetuated for Scott set a strong precedent in Canada for an emphasis upon an ideal, woman-first-and-foremost concept of the female athlete. Scott was literally and figuratively embraced as Canada's darling of sport-the sweetheart image was paramount.

Scott, a native of Canada's capital city, Ottawa, was taken out of formal education at the age of nine to hone her skating skills. She ascended the ranks of Canadian, North American and European supremacy to become World figure skating champion in 1947 and Olympic gold medallist in 1948. More a perfectionist of traditional skating style than an innovator, Scott devoted herself to skating year round. Her significance in Canadian sport and cultural history is that she became much more than a renowned athlete. She became a symbol of femaleness for an entire generation of Canadian girls and women. Blonde, petite, trim, courteous and constantly smiling, Barbara Ann was photogenic in the extreme. The

dominant media images of her were, in essence, those of a national beauty queen on skates. Her athleticism was a distant second to her portrayal as a perfect doll-like young lady.

Engineered by the media and reinforced by the nature of her sport, Scott's image re-established the stereotyped role and idealism of the female athlete that had been at least partially changed during the 1920s and early 1930s. Several social forces worked to erode the true significance of the female athlete. The image contrived for Barbara Ann was superficial, idealistic and nationally adopted by the media and the public. Scott, therefore, represents a significant solidification of the traditional ideal of the female athlete.