

Athletic Club Olympians: Southern California Women in Track and Field

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Highly competitive track and field for women in Southern California began in late 1924 when the Pasadena Athletic Club (PAC) formed a team coached by former Olympic diver, Aileen Allen. Despite confused medical evidence about strenuous sports for women, the team attracted many participants and dominated women's track and field throughout the 1920s. Filling the void left by educational institutions during the move from varsity programs to interclass competition and play days, the PAC team was composed of local high school and college athletes. During its existence, PAC women won the Amateur Athletic Union women's national track and field championship twice (1925 and 1926), placed second in 1927 and 1928, and had four athletes selected to represent the United States at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games. Lillian Copeland, MayBelle Reichardt, Anne Vrana and Rayma Wilson were the four Southern Californians on the first American women's track and field squad.

In 1931 the team moved to the Los Angeles Athletic Club (LAAC) where Copeland won a gold medal in the discus at the Los Angeles Olympic Games. Evelyn Furtsch, gold medal relay runner, and hurdler Simone Schaller also represented the LAAC in 1932. In the Berlin Olympics of 1936, the LAAC had two members on the United States team, hurdlers Simone Schaller and Anne Vrana O'Brien. The Pasadena and Los Angeles athletic clubs were responsible for providing high level competition for women in track and field and for keeping athletics alive in Southern California during the 1920s and 1930s.