

Sunday Bullies

BETTY SPEARS

Amherst, Massachusetts

Women's field hockey has been overlooked as a major sport for adult women in the history of sport in the twentieth century. Using the technique of prosopography or collective biography, this study examined the sport and field hockey experiences of fourteen adult women, ranging in age from forty-four to seventy-one. Field hockey is a strenuous sport. During the period of this study it was played by teams of eleven players, each with a long curved stick for hitting the ball. The field was ninety by one hundred yards with goals in the center of each end of the field. The games was played in two thirty-five halves with no time outs or substitutions.

Constance M.K. Applebee and Harriet Ballintine are credited with promoting field hockey in the United States. In 1901 Applebee, a physical education teacher from England in this country attending Dr. Sargent's Harvard Summer School of Physical Education, discovered that Americans did not know field hockey and demonstrated the game. Ballintine liked the game and arranged for Applebee to remain after summer school and teach the game to women in various colleges. For the next two decades these two women nurtured field hockey. In 1922 the United States Field Hockey Association was formed and Applebee began her famous hockey camp in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania.

Since the 1920s hundreds of women have gathered on Sunday mornings, waiting for the start of a field hockey game with a "bully", – the two center forwards alternately touch their opponent's stick and then the ground three times, after which the ball is in play. The women compete on a regular basis, and vie for places on regional, national, and international teams. Most of the players are well beyond college age.

A questionnaire was distributed at the master's division of the 1986 national field hockey tournament. The fourteen woman who responded tended to be single, well educated, and held professional positions. They were active in many sports other than field hockey. They chose to participate in sport because they loved to be active and loved to compete. No one discouraged them from sport. Ten women reported that field hockey was included in their physical education classes. Several played field hockey in elementary school and most played in high school. They liked adult field hockey because of the sense of community in the games and the tournaments. Eight of the women had attended Applebee's camp and recognized her influence on the game and on themselves. Applebee's almost impossibly high standards of play and sportmanship, her lively sense of humor, her quiet wit, and her biting tongue were legend.

Field hockey should be added to the accounts of sports played by adult women in the twentieth century. Not only are there golf and tennis tournaments, industrial basketball leagues, and city softball leagues, but there are also field hockey games on Sunday mornings.