

# It Was No Slam Dunk, But Loads of Fun: Women's Basketball in Southern California 1900-1920

D. MARGARET TOOHEY-COSTA

California State University, Long Beach

The first decade of the new century was an exciting one for southern Californians. With help from *The Los Angeles Times*, San Pedro had defeated San Diego and San Francisco for the honor of becoming California's premier port; the Pacific Electric system, dedicated to linking all of southern California towns to each other, continued laying down track; automobiles were quickly stealing hearts after they had experienced a brief flirtation with the bicycle; the first Los Angeles Board of Education had been selected; the art of boosterism was being perfected with the formation of the Chamber of Commerce; movies were being shown on a regular basis; and the Rose Parade was whetting the appetites of outsiders from colder climates with its vivid pictures of flower-covered floats parading down sun drenched streets in the middle of winter.

It was against this background that women's basketball developed in the schools, colleges, and playgrounds of southern California. It was fun, it was exciting and it had a large following. A following large enough to warrant hundreds of articles in the *Los Angeles Times* over the first decade. In fact women's basketball became such a part of southern California life that its image was used for product identification of the area's most vital industry, oranges and lemons.

Pasadena High School was the early leader in the sport, followed by the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, and Long Beach High Schools. Long Beach High School prevailed as the state champions in three successive years, 1907, 1908 and 1909. They repeated in 1911 and 1912, the last state championship years. The grammar school and playground leagues who competed for *Los Angeles Times*' trophies continued competition through 1920.

The inability to build a steady following along with inconsistency in fielding of teams, were two factors contributing to the demise of intercollegiate basketball for women at the end of the decade. Newspaper reports which declared basketball for both men and women more dangerous than football did not help matters. Other factors may have been that women's basketball was too successful, too athletic, too much fun and that women's basketball received too much publicity to fit in with the image of the college women of childbearing years. Predictably in 1910-1912, some colleges began noting in their year-books that the women had adopted a different form of competition, interclass play. In southern California this interclass play was to prevail well into the sixties and it was not until the passage of Title IX in 1972 and its implementation in 1974, that a return to a pure form of intercollegiate competition was realized. Unfortunately, the interschool competition for girls at the grammar school level, which took much longer to change to intramural competition, in the second decade of the century has never returned.