

# Florida's Distaff Side of Sport in the 1920s

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The purpose of the study was to determine the factors which contributed to the growth of women's sport in Florida during the 1920s. The economic condition of the state, institutions of higher education, transportation, resort developers, and the tourist industry were investigated in light of their role in the development of sport among women. Data was collected from newspapers, college yearbooks and catalogs, city directories, faculty minutes, and magazines.

The decade of the 1920s in Florida was marked by a boom in real estate development, population growth, disastrous hurricanes, and an economic down turn. An ambitious advertising campaign that focused on the state's temperate climate brought a steady stream of tourists. The coast line from Palm Beach southward developed rapidly in the 1920s. The fervor associated with expanding real estate opportunities caught along the west coast and engulfed Tampa, Sarasota and St. Petersburg. Names like George Merrick, Henry Flagler and D.P. Davis were synonymous with land and railroad development in the state.

Country club sport flourished in the 1920s. Country clubs offered female members many opportunities to participate in tennis and golf, the most widely played sports among those with money and unrestricted leisure time. Golf was especially popular at the resort cities of Palm Beach, Tampa and Miami. Special mixed tournaments for men and women, tournaments for women and ladies' golf days at the clubs kept women interested and active in the sport. Girls' interscholastic basketball flourished while college women engaged in limited intercollegiate sport. Intramural and interclass sports were emphasized at women's colleges. Exhibition swimming events and swimming meets were well received in the state. National and Olympic swimmers and divers toured Florida during the 1920s and drew as many as 3,000 spectators.

A combination of factors brought about the increase in sports participation by women in the 1920s. Developers who expanded transportation, offered housing accommodations, provided sports facilities and advertised an appealing life style in Florida brought skilled competitors to the state during the winter months. Press coverage of tournaments, exhibitions and club events highlighted sportswomen and kept their activities before the public. The disappearance of what appeared to be an endless and bountiful prosperity began when a devastating hurricane hit the Golf Coast on September 18, 1926. The disastrous hurricane precipitated real estate failures and bankruptcies.