

# The Negative Decade of Sports for Kentucky Women

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Just as the fads and glitter of the 1920s decade made an indelible impression on history, so did the gloom and depression of the 1930s decade make its impression. No state in the union escaped the impact of the depression years, and almost every area of human endeavor was caught in a web of frugality and unemployment. Education suffered, family life changed, industry reduced output, and technology slowed down during the 1929-1939 period. Sport was also a victim of change and reduction during these years.

This study examined the competitive sport opportunities of Kentucky women during the 1930 to 1940 period. The ebullience of the passage of the nineteenth amendment and the freedom achieved by flappers and radicals during the roaring twenties were all but forgotten with the onset of the depression years of the 1930s. Women of Kentucky were out of work, stood in breadlines, and experienced a shortage of money, the same as women and men everywhere. In a sense, women were doubly deprived, in that economic circumstances forced them to stay at home more, tend the home fires and give way to employment for men. This was a reversal of the trend of the twenties in which women moved out of the home, and away from the hearth, with new found boldness and increased opportunities to work and to play and to gain an identity for themselves. Their male counterparts, however, were forced out of the home toward the workplace to secure employment wherever it could be found. For example, Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps for men all over the state offered not only work, but opportunity for recreation, using swimming pools, golf courses, tennis courts and baseball diamonds already located at many CCC camp sites. No such opportunities were available for women of Kentucky.

Directors and administrators of women's physical education in colleges and universities were, in general, conservative and opposed to intense athletic competition. Their sanctioning of the play day/sports day idea further diminished opportunities for Kentucky women to pursue in-depth experiences in sports competition. This attitude had a trickle-down effect on already established athletic programs in high schools. Succumbing to the influence of college leaders, the KHSAA in 1932 voted to abandon the popular state high school girls basketball tournament.

Competitive sport for girls and women in Kentucky in the decade of the 1930s was filled with disappointments, obstacles and diminished opportunity. Although there were some bright spots with the inception of play days and sports days, and the beginnings of the co-recreation concept, there was little acknowledgement of high levels of achievement for girls and women in schools and colleges. The depression years for the nation at large were also depression years for Kentucky women in sport.