

Max J. Exner: Naismith's Roommate—Later Coach, Teacher and Public Health Physician

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Max J. Exner was a roommate of James Naismith's when he devised basketball at Springfield College. Exner, introduced and taught basketball and other physical activities and sports at Carleton College at the Kansas City YMCA and Shanghai, China YMCA. Upon returning from China he was director of sex education for the YMCA and later worked for the American Social Hygiene Association 1920–36 in the control of venereal disease.

Exner was born in the Sudetan in Austria and at the age of eleven immigrated with his family to Boone, Iowa in 1882. He soon joined the local German Turnverein and became an accomplished Turner. At age sixteen he went alone to the Pacific Northwest to work as a baker's assistant in Astoria, Oregon. He eventually got into the lumbering business. In his leisure time he participated in the local YMCA and was soon on their gymnastic exhibition team. He decided to dedicate his life to 'Y' work and went to the Springfield 'Y' College in 1890. He financed his own education working at various odd jobs.

Exner was in the group for whom the 'devise a game' assignment was given by Dr. Gulick. Exner played the game with Naismith and others. They studied together, played football together on the team captained by Amos Alonzo Stagg.

Max earned his degree in two years and was offered his choice of work in several city YMCA's. He eventually decided to be Physical Director, Teacher and Coach at Carleton College, Northfield. He organized the sport program and within a few years had winning teams in basketball, baseball and track. He also initiated women's basketball, gymnastics and fencing. He married a Carleton student, Elizabeth Wells, in 1900 and became physical director of the Kansas City 'Y' in 1900. While there he earned his medical degree, gave gymnastic exhibitions, and greatly expanded the YMCA program in sports. From 1908–1911 he was Physical Director of the Shanghai, China YMCA where he introduced sons of wealthy Mandarin Chinese to field sports, gymnastics and basketball. Due to dysentery and malaria he had to return to the United States after just three years. He recovered, continuing work with the YMCA, eventually distinguishing himself as a Public Health Physician for the American Social Hygiene Association and the Newark New Jersey Health Department. Through the years he participated in camping activities and occasionally dazzled his family and friends with gymnastic exhibitions featuring flaming Indian clubs. This paper was based on primary sources, interviews with Max V. Exner, Mrs. Max J. Exner's personal diary, Carleton and Springfield Colleges, Max's extensive writings, and *Time* Magazine and *New York Times* articles.