

# Florida Sportswomen of the 1940s

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The decade of the 1940s was ushered in with optimism for residents of the state of Florida when sun seeking winter tourists arrived in record numbers. Tourists regularly contributed to the economy and the continual influx of people who had moved to the state in search of a new life added zest to the atmosphere of the cities that had attracted them. A content analysis of The *Miami Herald's* January through March sports sections during the 1940s revealed the sporting interests among women in south Florida as well as in other parts of the state. The ever popular golf and tennis events received the most media coverage and were present in diverse parts of the state. Basketball was played in rural and urban areas but remained obscured in recreational leagues until teams gathered for the annual state tournament. Newspaper coverage of basketball was increased during the state tournament.

Host cities and the cities represented by participating teams generally attracted the attention of sportswriters, Basketball, badminton and archery were primarily participant sports which attracted few spectators when compared to tennis and golf.

The war years brought shortages of sports equipment, patriotic themes in sporting events and a curtailment of sports participation. After the war people looked to the state as a vacation land where sport provided an opportunity to forget the gloom of war. Many service personnel who had been stationed in Florida returned to make their home in Florida.

Womens' sport in the 1940s was associated with business ventures and commercialism in that some events coincided with entertainment for tourists. Large crowds at tennis, golf and aquatic shows demonstrated interest in skilled athletes. The changing role of women was most distinctly shown in bowling as business women's bowling leagues were scheduled to accommodate working women. The Roller Derby and wrestling were looked upon as entertainment rather than participant sports. Skilled athletes in sports such as tennis, golf and swimming contributed to the acceptance of women as serious competitors. Intercollegiate competition occurred in some black institutions of higher education, however, some women in representing private colleges entered tennis and golf tournaments. Florida sportswomen had numerous opportunities, with the exception of intercollegiate competition, to engage in sport during the 1940s. Florida sportswomen of the 1940s helped women of the 1990s to take their sports involvement for granted.