

The Influence of Women's Athletic Associations on Collegiate Sports Competition in Kentucky: 1930-1970

Peggy Stanaland

Eastern Kentucky University

During the 1920's and early 1930's, many colleges and universities in Kentucky formed athletic associations for women students for the purpose of organizing and conducting sports and recreational activities for (women) students. The 1930's ushered in an era of intramurals—within the walls of competition, lowkeyed open for all, and basically student conducted. The Women's Athletic Associations (WAA's) became the means by which these programs were implemented.

These athletic associations ran the sports programs for women on almost every college campus in the state. Their intent was clearly outlined in their constitutions. The function of the organization was to give women students an opportunity to participate in sports outside the classroom, and to give them leadership experiences. Through duly elected officers and appointed committees, and a faculty advisor, these WAA's (sometimes called Women Recreation Associations or WRA's) literally took charge of competitive sports programs for the distaff population.

In the decade of the 1940's, the purpose of WAA's remained the same, but they also functioned as avenues for interschool competition. This seemed to increase in the mid-forties via the "playday." As innocent as it was in terms of playing down or deemphasizing the intense competition, school newspapers were quick to report the winning efforts of its co-eds in the various sports. The mainstays of any WAA Playday Team or the high scorers were, almost without exception, officers and leaders in the school's WAA.

Another aspect of the WAA influence that cannot be ignored is the role played by the faculty advisor. As a rule, she was a member on the physical education faculty who was far more concerned with what was happening to the girl who played than with keeping records of wins and losses with other schools and colleges and publicizing results. Generally, her posture was one of friendly competition and a wholesome socializing experience. Her influencing presence was reflected in the behaviors of the students who participated.

The student-led organizations on Kentucky college campuses during these four decades had a profound philosophic impact on sports competition for women. The 1960's and early 1970's saw virtually the last of women's athletic associations on Kentucky campuses. By 1970, the role of WAA's and WRA's in Kentucky colleges and universities seems like the dinosaur, to have served its time.