

From Clubs to Varsity: Women's Sports at the University of Florida

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Women's intercollegiate sport at the University of Florida began as club endeavors in the late 1960s. By the mid-1970s eight varsity sports teams were competing in state, regional and national competition, Basketball, golf, gymnastics, swimming and diving, softball, tennis, track and field, and volleyball athletes without the benefit of scholarships began making their marks in record books. With the advent of scholarships more athletes were attracted to the comprehensive university situated in north central Florida. Mild weather, outstanding academic programs and an athletic program with a promising future contributed greatly to the recruitment of athletes.

The most successful teams during the nearly 20 year history of the athletic program are golf, gymnastics, swimming and diving, and tennis. Slow pitch softball was on the brink of excellence when the University Athletic Association, Inc. decided not to switch to the fast pitch game following the NCAA control of women's sports. Softball was eliminated and reduced the number of women's sport to seven. More recently track and field and volleyball athletes are establishing national caliber reputations. Basketball has yet to surface as a power in conference or national competition.

Factors which have contributed to the achievements of the most outstanding teams include coaching longevity, early, rise to power in the state, leadership, and funding. Frequent coaching changes, season ending injuries and powerful Southeastern Conference competition have made the task of establishing outstanding basketball teams especially challenging. Conference and national championships and 24 Olympians attest to the overall success of the athletic program.