

GENDER AND WOMEN

100 Years of Girls Basketball, Why in Iowa?

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Many have asked over the years, “Why is it only in Iowa that girls basketball has been played continuously with a state tournament since 1920? Why was it so different from surrounding states which were settled the same time, had essentially the same immigrant groups, the same agrarian based economy and the same religions?”

As opinions were sought from ‘experts’ interviews were held with several hundred former and present players and coaches, relevant literature. was reviewed, ideas, theories emerged. These were considered, discarded and reconstructed. There are not just one or two major factors that make basketball a permanent fixture on the Iowa scene. There were and are several interacting factors - individuals, groups, traditions and circumstances - that can help to answer the question, “Why in Iowa?”

Ten factors all contribute to girls’ basketball survival in Iowa. Taken individually, none of them are significant enough to be the sole reason, but the mix of these factors answers the question, “Why only in Iowa?” The factors are; Male advocacy for girls basketball was a principal factor in the preservation of girls basketball in the 1920’s; In the early 1920’s there was not single dominant female physical educator in Iowa as there was in surrounding states; In the rural and small town schools where basketball was most prominent between 1920-60 there was less demand on gym space than in large city schools; Basketball was not viewed as too physical taxing for the girls who lived in rural communities; Basketball for girls filled an entertainment void in rural communities; Early immigrant groups in Iowa had a tradition of physical activity from the ‘old’ country; Basketball was a factor in community pride and success on the court brought recognition around the state and sometimes the nation; With each successive generation of basketball girls traditions developed; Over the hundred years Iowans did not think that female attractiveness was jeopardized by participation in athletics; And, the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union under the leadership of E. Wayne Cooley deserves much of the credit for developing and promoting an exemplary program of athletics for girls. Basketball is central to the organization’s success.