

The History Of Women's Collegiate Ice Hockey In The Eastern United States

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This paper traces the development of collegiate women's ice hockey. As early as 1895 women were playing ice hockey at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts and there is evidence that as late as 1931 Smith College women were playing intramural games. From 1931 to 1963 there is a hiatus, when ice hockey disappears from the college scene. This is in part due to the 1923 decision by the Women's Division of the National Athletic Federation to ban intercollegiate sports competition for women and to encourage play days. Competitive teams sports of all types virtually disappeared until the 1960s. The 1970s saw a transformation in women's sports. Ice hockey became an established sport for women on many traditionally male campuses.

What made the 1970s ripe for social change? Philosophically, it was the Women's Movement of the 1960s that changed people's attitudes about women's roles. Legislatively, it was the enactment of Title IX which stated that no person could be denied participation in any education program or activity that received federal funds. These changes coupled with the fact that many traditional men's schools such as Yale and Harvard became coeducational set the stage for women to push for equal opportunities in sports. While basketball was the major winter sport for most colleges, for the Ivy League it was ice hockey. This explains why ice hockey caught the women's fancy at these schools. It also explains why other wed universities with historically strong men's ice hockey teams such as Northeastern and University of New Hampshire formed women's teams. Today there are fifteen college and university women's varsity ice hockey teams and approximately twenty-five club teams.