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Broad, Wholesome and Lasting:
**The Effects of Physical Education Philosophy
on North Carolina Women's Basketball,
1934-1959**

This paper traces the rise of physical education philosophy in North Carolina, examining the goals and strategies of the state's most prominent physical educators and analysing the reasons behind the gradual spread of physical education ideals into the state's high schools. Drawing on both archival material and oral history interviews, and concentrating on the sport of basketball, it presents a closely focused case study of a process that occurred in many parts of North America and offers additional insights into debates over women's athletics in the first half of the twentieth century.

The paper begins with Mary Channing Coleman who headed the physical education department at North Carolina's largest women's college (now U.N.C. Greensboro) and who also became a prominent figure in the national physical education movement. Coleman's ideas about women's athletics sprang from a comprehensive vision of twentieth-century society, influenced by her deeply held faith in Progressive ideals of order and advancement. Like many of her fellow educators, Coleman worried that the emotions sparked by the growing popularity of large-scale athletic events did little to prepare students to build a "permanent civilization," focusing them instead on questionable goals such as a drive for individual dominance, a longing for the ephemeral satisfaction of publicity and crowd approval, and an eye towards material gain. The more sedate forms of athletics found in physical education classes and non-competitive "play days," offered, in her opinion "athletics of a broad, wholesome and lasting type," as opposed to "a sports system that concentrates on a few students and that turns our athletic contests into hysteria and bally-hoo."

In the 1920s and 1930s physical education priorities held considerable sway in North Carolina's urban, middle class institutions, which often had close cultural ties to both women's colleges and Progressive ideals. But although Mary Coleman and her colleagues sought to promote their vision through publications, speeches, radio programs, and state organizations, many of the state's rural, small-town and African-American schools disregarded their recommendations, instead using alternative visions of both womanhood and society to develop an increasingly elaborate system of tournaments and championships.

By the 1950s, however, a broader process of economic and social change had strengthened the hands of physical educators, by drawing growing numbers of North Carolinians into the orbit of middle-class ideals, and also exposing them to a nationally spreading popular culture that often disparaged top-level female athletes. In 1953, when state school officials wrote North Carolina's first high school athletic code, Mary Coleman's successors persuaded them to strictly limit women's basketball competition, despite strenuous objections from the sport's supporters. The elimination of competitive opportunities, along with the growing conservatism of the 1950s, led to a significant decline in women's competition in numerous arenas. The paper concludes by suggesting some of the long-term effects of this change and assessing the extent to which it allowed physical educators to achieve their wider goals for women's education and development.