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Playing the Game:
**Representations of Female Athletes in
U.S. Women's Sport Fiction, 1930-1940**

Fiction written by women about women's competitive athletics opens a window on contemporary representations of sportswomen. Sport fiction published in the U.S. has been mostly written by men following a "masculinist" tradition, in which women generally appear as temptation, or as failed females (or males). But there is another story, one told most often by women, which represents sportswomen as powerful human beings who sometimes achieve heights worth struggling for. Unfortunately, little of this interesting literature—the first piece of which appeared in print during the 1890s—is known today.

Short stories and novels written by women about women's sport and published between the years 1930-1940 employ a variety of representations of sportswomen. The star of Alona Friend's novel *Mixed Doubles* (1940), arguably the best female tennis player of her time, is an egoist whose tennis ambitions have ruined her as a person and whose grasping attachment to other women carries distinct undertones of an unacceptable (to Friend) same sex relationship. The other fiction considered, however—popular writer Fannie Hurst's novella "Candy Butcher" (in *We Are Ten*, 1937), and Jessie Rehder's North Carolina basketball short story "Atalanta in Cape Fair" (*Harper's Magazine*, May 1939)—present sportswomen much more positively. The athletes here, as in *Mixed Doubles*, are extraordinarily gifted. But instead of being damaged by sport itself, they find that it is the cultural attitudes surrounding achieving women which affect them. In "Candy Butcher," in fact, public adulation—not approbation—following from her outstanding athletic feats provides the central tension, although this adulation traps the athlete just as surely as Rehder's high school star is caught by having, after graduation, no place to play.

The authors examined were unable, in these pieces, to envision smooth integration of the athletic and predominant social "competencies" of the day in relation to sportswomen. But the positive meanings Hurst and Rehder attach to women's participation in competitive sport are an example of that other tradition in U.S. sport fiction, and of the riches women's sport fiction can offer in every era to those interested in contemporary representations of women athletes.