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Iowa Girls' Basketball or Iowa Girls Playing Boys' Basketball?: Examining Discourses on Femininity, Physicality, and Location

Recently Iowans began their sixth season of girls' basketball without the six-on-six game. Some Iowans still mourn the loss of six-on-six; some think it did not end soon enough. Janice Beran has documented the first one hundred years of Iowa girls' basketball, concluding with the controversial decision to end the half-court six-player game in 1993. I am interested in the discourses surrounding the game, both before and after this benchmark in its history. I examine a variety of sources including oral histories (my own among them), media images, *Iowa Girls' Basketball Yearbooks*, the Spalding *Official Basketball Guides*, and the secondary literature on women's basketball.

Discussions and constructions of femininity are a common element in all this material, yet attempts to rationalize these notions of femininity differ widely. For example, many women's physical educators (often under the auspices of national organizations) chose to preserve femininity by limiting girls' participation in competitive sport while the Iowa Girls' High School Athletic Union promoted and celebrated competition. The latter also emphasized the femininity of its players through publications like the *Iowa Girls' Basketball Yearbook* and with queen contests at the state tournament. Although conversations about femininity and girls' basketball vary along such axes as historical period, generation, geography, organizational versus individual, and local versus national, some themes echo across these divides, often unexpectedly. Similarly, Warren Goldstein discovered a certain circularity to, and repetition of, the conversations concerning baseball throughout the history of that sport. My method is similar to that of Goldstein (and Michael Oriard in *Reading Football*) in that I focus on the discourses surrounding my topic, rather than attempting to present a particular or specific version of events or persons.

For the purposes of this paper, I focus my reading on the discourses surrounding rule changes, specifically in the context of Iowa girls' basketball. Janice Beran has written extensively on the game prior to the end of six-on-six in 1993; here I begin to pursue the history of Iowa girls' basketball from that point.