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Ivy League Women Establish Athletic Traditions, 1973-1983

During the early 1970s extraordinary changes emerged in women's intercollegiate sports programs. Energized by the passage of Title IX in 1972, women faculty and students lauded the legislation that enabled women to participate in fledgling intercollegiate athletic programs. Although five of the eight Ivy League institutions can trace sport experiences for women to early twentieth-century events, this study focuses on the modern era of women's athletics, 1973-1983. Dedicated coaches, enthusiastic competitors, committed administrators, and successful teams soon became hallmarks of the emerging athletic programs on all the Ivy League campuses. While their male counterparts participated in athletic programs established as much as 121 years earlier, Ivy League women embarked on their own modern intercollegiate sport traditions. The renowned institutions comprising the Ivy League are Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University, and Yale University. All Ivy institutions offer education that is enhanced by athletic experience. With an emphasis on education first followed by comprehensive athletic programs, sport is maintained in a proper perspective.

Of these institutions, three originally established coordinate colleges for women that were separate from but affiliated with older colleges founded for men. Harvard's coordinate, Radcliffe, was founded in 1873; Barnard at Columbia opened in 1889; and, Pembroke at Brown was established in 1891. Faculty members at these coordinate institutions contributed to pioneering sport endeavors for women. The first field hockey match in the United States involved Radcliffe women on the Harvard campus. Three years later, Barnard's first field day featured tennis, track and field events, basketball and softball throws. Varying degrees of sport competition from intramurals to more competitive "extramural" sports occurred on all three coordinate campuses for much of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, women on other campuses which admitted women from their inception such as Cornell founded in 1871, also included sport opportunities for women.

The modern version of highly organized Ivy League women's athletic competition commenced in 1973 when Princeton's tennis team defeated Pennsylvania's women 5-1, in the first Ivy League sponsored event. The following year the Eastern Association of Women's Rowing Colleges held its inaugural regatta, the "Eastern Sprints," in Middleton,

Connecticut. Radcliffe's crew won the varsity eights, the first Ivy League women's championship event. During the 1975-1976 academic year, the Ivy League formed the first women's ice hockey league and in 1978 the University of Pennsylvania's fencing team represented the Ivy League in the first Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) Fencing Championships. By the 1982-1983 academic year women were vying for Ivy League championships in sixteen varsity sports.

Central to this study are the following questions: What factors led to organized athletic competition for women in Ivy League institutions and then to the growth and development of Ivy League sports during the first "modern" decade? What role did the coordinate college play in the establishment of Ivy League athletic programs? How did the institutions that became coeducational earlier in this century influence the Ivy League? What contributions did leaders in the development of the Ivy League make? What impact did the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, Eastern Colleges Athletic Conference (ECAC), and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (CNCAA) have on the Ivy League and vice-versa?

Archives at the eight Ivy League campuses and other primary source materials such as newspapers, journals, record books, yearbooks, media guides, minutes of meetings, pictures, and additional documentary sources form the bulk of primary source material for the paper. Oral histories involving the focused interview have offered further insights and thereby minimize deficiencies of a single approach to data collection. The study assists in revealing the strategies which women have used to shape their sport traditions in the Ivy League, heretofore forgotten contributors, and ways that Ivy League women led the way in modern intercollegiate sport programs. The Council of Ivy Group Presidents funded this study.