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Alexandrine Gibb: **In ‘No Man’s Land of Sport’**

Alexandrine Gibb distinguished herself as an athlete, pioneering leader and administrator of women’s sport, manager of several international athletic teams, and as Canada’s most pre-eminent woman sports journalist of the 1920s and 1930s. Yet, she has been almost forgotten by today’s sports world, and certainly by the newspaper, the *Toronto Star*, where she worked for thirty years. Although this is her story, it is also an account of the early days of organising women’s sport in Canada, when Gibb and her contemporaries were major players. She fervently believed in “girls’ sports run by girls”, and in 1925 founded the Women’s Amateur Athletic Federation of Canada, an organisation she helped nurture until its demise in 1953. As manager, she took several Canadian women’s track teams into international competition including the highly successful “Matchless Six” at the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam. As a sportswriter and editor at the *Toronto Daily Star*, she wrote a lively and influential column called “No Man’s Land of Sport” until the Second World War, when she was reassigned to edit a section on women’s war work. In 1935, Gibb was sent by her newspaper on a trip to the Soviet Union and through several Mediterranean countries to write a special series about women, sport, and daily life far away. After the war, she wrote mainly features at the *Star*, although she never lost her interest in women’s sport. In 1951, she was part of the press corps who accompanied Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh on a royal tour throughout Canada. Gibb was primarily responsible for persuading sixteen-year-old schoolgirl Marilyn Bell, who at the time was comparatively unknown, to challenge the American Florence Chadwick in her attempt to swim Lake Ontario in 1954. Gibb never married, and in 1958 died at the age of sixty-six.

Alex Gibb was one of the strongest advocates for women's sport Canada has ever seen. This paper tells her story, but it is also an account of Canadian women's early resistance to masculine hegemony in sport. I explain how their efforts were opposed, and yet sometimes supported, by the very structures (such as the sports media) they helped to create. Gibb's "In No Man's Land of Sport," appeared between 1928 and 1940. I estimate that she published between 3,300 and 3,400 columns (over 600 of which I have read and analysed), in addition to the occasional article she wrote for the *Toronto Star Weekly* or national magazines like *MaLean's*. Like other sportswriters of the day, Gibb was actively involved as a sports administrator and advocate, and she wrote extensively about her work in the various organisations and events of which she was a part. Her column was a powerful platform from which to express her views and to affect change. I examine her influence on Canadian sport, primarily during the 1920s and 1930s, and argue that her legacy has been far more lasting than most historians and commentators have recognised.