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They Shoot Hoops, Don't They?: Kentucky Girls' High School Basketball in Black and White

In the early 1970s, Title IX opened doors for women in the once male-dominated American sports domain. In 1975, the Kentucky High School Athletic Association (KHSAA) accordingly reinstated the girl's state basketball tournament after a forty-three-year hiatus. In 1932, that organization had eliminated the girl's tournament after a successful twelve-year series, leaving Kentucky female hoopsters without an opportunity to compete on the state level. The KHSAA's 1932 minutes did not identify the reasoning for the discontinuation of the tournament. The possible justifications for this action include any of the following: that the 1932 tournament winner was coached by Audrey Peterson, the only female high school basketball coach; that the girls played by five-player "boys' rules"; that male coaches routinely coached both girl's and boy's teams; that authorities persistently feared the health consequences of sports for girls; that education institutions battled Depression-era finances; and that influential female physical educators desired to control female athletics. In spite of the fact that the KHSAA no longer sanctioned women's basketball, some women, however, continued to play competitively in some Eastern Kentucky and Louisville schools.

Through the analysis of the culture of Kentucky girls' high school basketball, this essay explores how African American and white women exerted agency within the confines of Kentucky's predominantly white male sports milieu in the first half of the twentieth century. Via player interviews, newspaper articles, yearbook accounts, and photographs, this research will illuminate a heretofore hidden aspect of women's high school basketball history, contributing to the history of women and sports and showing how it can serve as a cultural mirror of the social values of its place and time.
