

## SPORT FOR YOUNG LADIES: THE VICTORIAN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS 1875-1925

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At the opening of the Ladies' College in Melbourne in February 1875, the first Australian school to offer a secondary education for girls equivalent to that being provided in the foremost boys' schools of the colony,<sup>2</sup> Charles Pearson, its first headmaster, delivered an inaugural lecture which gave prominent attention to the topic engaging the pioneers of female education - that the health and physical development of girls must be considered as important as their mental training.<sup>3</sup> In the pursuit of a first class education wholesome forms of recreation could not be neglected and, as Herbert Spencer had proposed some years previously, girls should be allowed to take part in 'physical culture'. If Pearson had a tendency to support his own views by drawing on the pronouncements of the 'great thinkers', he was astute enough to realise that his audience of two hundred, mostly women with Presbyterian allegiances, had to be carefully nurtured if he was to capture their empathy on matters of curriculum policy and design. Scottish character was not noted for its generous disposition towards frivolous activities, particularly in the serious business of education.

Pearson's beliefs on the physical welfare of girls and their needs of 'healthful exercise' had been formed as much by his own personal experiences in England as by any educational theory. As an ex-Rugby schoolboy, Pearson had first-hand knowledge of the physical and mental benefits that could be derived from organised games and sports. Perhaps more important to his current situation, he also knew how hard girls would work to achieve high success in academic studies. The former Oxford don had lectured to classes of women and older girls in the English Midlands, and examined the students of Queen's College,<sup>4</sup> which acquainted him with the zealous approach by many females to higher education and their often exaggerated application towards study and assignment

work. It was, therefore, not out of character for Pearson to dwell on the importance of maintaining health in proposing that women were capable of a 'higher culture'. But in addition, it had now become urgent to counter the latest line of attack taken up by the opponents of advanced education for women in 1874, of which Dr. Maudesley, a leading mental specialist in England, was the principal orchestrator. He contended that women who submitted themselves to higher education could only do so by destroying their bodily health, with the inevitable consequence that they would be ineffectual in the functions of a woman.<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Garrett Anderson, one of the champions of the Women's Movement, skilfully rejected this charge. She pointed out that it was a lack of physical development, not mental work, that hampered women's performance and efforts, a theme that was to be instrumental in initiating a greater demand for gymnastics and games in English girls' schools.<sup>6</sup> Pearson was well aware that his Melbourne audience had heard of Maudesley's charges, and chose to confront them,<sup>7</sup> knowing that parents in the colony did not want to see any diminution in the marriage prospects of their daughters. The headmaster's protracted discussion and argument that health, physical development and physical exercise would be an important consideration in the new school, was clearly as much an exercise in public relations to allay parental fears about the wisdom of allowing daughters to take up a demanding secondary education, as it was part of any entrenched educational philosophy.

Already much in the public eye of educational matters in the colony, Pearson's determination to provide 'physical culture' for girls at the Presbyterian Ladies' College was bound to have particular significance, not the least being that those who followed in the establishment of similar new institutions would be likely to follow his model. 'Physical culture', as a term and an ideal, certainly held out greater promise as a constructive program of physical activity than the narrow, and largely borrowed, drill teaching prevalent in government schools, including only to serve the cause of inculcating a general discipline throughout a rapidly expanding population. For their part, the private secondary boys' schools in Victoria had consciously striven to imitate the English Public Schools, and their development of a distinctive system of physical education based upon organised team

games and sports. Sport, in the playing field and the river, was as much an instrument of character building, and the means to mould a Christian gentleman, as it was a medium which allowed boys exercise and enjoyment. However, conventions, and clothing, made it impossible for girls to take part in boisterous games, yet middle class fee-paying parents expected something more than marching drills taken from military manuals, supplemented as they were in the state education system by a few elementary flexion and extension exercises. Pearson already had a reputation as a radical thinker on education, and as an enlightened advocate for applying an ever broader interpretation to the concept of a liberal education. It was not without good reason therefore, that his practical translation of physical culture for girls at the Ladies' College would be eagerly awaited and the composition of that subject's activities placed under some considerable scrutiny.

The initial buildings at the Presbyterian Ladies' College housed a gymnasium and lawn space was set aside for the game of 'croquet, the first recognised sport to be enjoyed by the girls, but Pearson's ideas on the adequate provision of 'healthful exercise' in the school day proved to be exceedingly cautious.<sup>8</sup> Plainly, his operation of the curriculum hardly matched the impression he had given at the commencement of his office, that the physical development of girls would play a principal role in the business of the school. Gustav Techow, Director of the National Gymnasium in East Melbourne, who had been responsible for the in-service training of the colony's teachers and pupil teachers in drill and German gymnastics since 1865, was engaged by the college as a visiting instructor of gymnastics.<sup>9</sup> However, these lessons were clearly extra-curricular, costing those girls who opted for the subject, an additional fee of one guinea each term. Importantly, this policy of classifying gymnastics as an 'extra', and the practice of engaging visiting staff to teach the subject, was to be adopted by the new girls' schools that became established in Melbourne in the wake of the immediate success of the Presbyterian Ladies' College.<sup>11</sup> In fairness to Pearson, nearly all of the girls' schools were obliged, because of the relative smallness of student numbers throughout the nineteenth century, to operate on an organisation that divided staff into permanent and visiting categories. Gymnastics, alongside several of the other subjects

deemed to be 'accomplishments', were served by the latter until the turn of the century. Yet it is perhaps disappointing to know that Pearson was familiar with at least one school that had a more innovative approach to the physical exercise needs of girls, and catered for the majority of them.<sup>12</sup> He possessed an intimate knowledge and understanding of the slow, but gradual, movement to provide and improve the education of middle and upper class girls in England during the 1850s and 1860s. Similarly, the pioneering efforts of Emily Davies, Frances Mary Buss and Dorothea Beale in this field were well known to him. Of these three, Frances Buss, headmistress and founder of the North London Collegiate School for Ladies, which she opened in 1850, had quickly established herself as the foremost advocate of regular physical exercise for girls. Called before the Schools' Inquiry Commission (Taunton Commission) in 1865, an extremely nervous Miss Buss had, nevertheless, strongly defended her scheme of compulsory callisthenics that girls over twelve took in her school.<sup>13</sup> Questioned by Lord Lyttelton, and asked if she 'attached great importance to bodily exercises', Miss Buss had been characteristically straight forward in her reply - 'Yes, I think it is essential in every girl's education that she should have some physical training.'<sup>14</sup>

These views would not have escaped Pearson's notice, nor the fact that the North London Collegiate School had begun to serve as a model for new girls' schools being set up in England after Parliament passed the Endowed Schools Act in 1869.<sup>15</sup> But a compulsory and universal system of gymnastics does not appear to have been contemplated at the Presbyterian Ladies' College. In a crowded timetable principally geared to proving that the intellectual abilities and capacities of girls could take them down the 'matriculation road',<sup>16</sup> any form of organised physical activity in the curriculum had a low status and priority in the minds of the school administration. At the birth of the college, few girls were likely to object to the strenuous academic program, since it was realised they were in the vanguard of an educational experiment. Yet there were small signs that girlish spirits and enthusiasms were seeking outlets beyond the classroom. Croquet had quickly established itself as the 'favourite pastime' among the girls and the first clubs were formed in the school by 1876 for the purpose of 'friendly contests'.<sup>17</sup> But the mild and gentle

exercise of croquet was not to the liking of all girls at the school. The boarders, already the butt of passers-by jokes during their brisk 'crocodile walks', obviously felt the need for more vigorous and challenging recreation. Late in 1876, they had persuaded the Principal of the school, Reverend George Tait, to agree to the use of the gymnasium at certain times for roller skating practice. Clearly, the boarders had the qualified support of at least one member of staff who was moved to comment in the school magazine:

Skating is a much more healthful amusement than croquet, and we wish to them great enjoyment in it, only warning them to beware of fractured limbs or skulls, and such facial disfigurements as broken noses and scarred cheeks. <sup>18</sup>

This initiative might have served as a reminder to Pearson and Tait that there was a need to provide an outlet in any school for youthful exuberance. At the end of the first year of operation the headmaster reported that there had been few discipline problems, 'mostly the overflow of high animal spirits', but he was able to withdraw this criticism by the end of the second year - the College tone was now one of a 'spirit of unremitting application'. <sup>19</sup> In the light of Pearson's concern for the health of girls, it could be considered regrettable that he also knew several students were 'working beyond their strength' at academic studies. <sup>20</sup> One girl, possessing either a keen sense of humour, or wanting to make a serious point to the senior administration, suggested in the school magazine that 'a football club be established at the Ladies' College'. <sup>21</sup> From her observations it was obvious that boys had a great deal of 'fun, enjoyment and excitement' from the game. <sup>22</sup>

As new girls' schools were founded in the colony, notably Tintern Ladies' College (1877), Ruyton Girls' School (1878), and the Methodist Ladies' College (1882), the pattern of 'physical culture' introduced at the Presbyterian Ladies' College acted as a basic model, and for those following there appeared no great reason to alter a design that apparently functioned effectively. Two separate and quite different stands of 'physical culture' gradually evolved in girls' schools during the remainder of the nineteenth century. One stand of physical exercise had its origins in gymnastics, a subject operated and controlled by visiting staff,

who were usually engaged from commercial gymnasiums in Melbourne. The second strand of the system had its roots in recreative games, condoned and aided by the schools, but very largely organised by the girls themselves on a club basis. It was not until the early part of the twentieth century that the Victorian girls' schools decided to rapidly and radically change this approach, and seek to control and supervise the physical training of their clientele. If gymnastic exercises were still seen as the principal activity to develop physical powers, the schools had come to realise that in games and sport they had a valuable medium to encourage a school 'esprit de corps', and a practical means to promote positive and desirable social and character values in their pupils.

The Wimbledon tennis championships of 1877, and the Victorian championship titles two years later, created an enormous amount of interest in the game throughout the colony's middle class, and the new sport gained rapidly in popularity. Girls quickly transported tennis into their schools where it became acknowledged as the principal game for nearly a quarter of a century, until hockey challenged that position early in the 1900s. A tennis club was formed at the Presbyterian Ladies' College in 1879,<sup>23</sup> and though its membership fluctuated from year to year in the 1880s,<sup>24</sup> it could boast of the addition of a cement court to its lawn facilities in 1881. It was during the 1880s that the first inter-school matches were reported. Ruyton played Shipley House, a South Yarra school, and though the result was not officially recorded, tradition has it that Ruyton were the successful team.<sup>25</sup> The date of this match is unsure, but the Presbyterian Ladies' College sent a challenge to the Methodist Ladies' College in 1885 for the best tennis four in each school to compete in a match, an event which marked the start of regular fixtures between them. Though the official history of Tintern suggests that tennis was not introduced into the school 'until the 1890s',<sup>26</sup> advertisements for the school in the mid-1880s specifically draw on the fact that the 'tennis playground and paddocks afford plenty of room for healthy exercise'.<sup>27</sup> A significant feature of these first inter-school contests is the manner in which they are reported in the school magazines. The weather is described, the players named, and some of the games analysed, but the final result is often ignored, or recorded in the most modest language. Etiquette had

to be observed, and its rules late in the nineteenth century forbade girls to bask in the reflected glory.<sup>28</sup>

Tennis had overtaken croquet as the 'favourite pastime' of girls because it clearly offered a higher element of enjoyment and challenge, but its greater, potential for movement had obviously more appeal than the limited exercise available in the latter game. The general acceptance of tennis in the girls' schools by the early 1880s had a broader influence - playing games had acquired respectability and an approval that allowed sport to expand in them. At the Methodist Ladies' College the game of Hildegarde, a 'developed' version of rounders, was enthusiastically supported and keenly contested, Their school magazine, Bluebell, gives a lengthy account of a match played in June 1885 between two club sides bearing the imaginative names "Excelsiors" and "Nil Desperandums". By 1889, Hildegarde was having to face up to opposition from rounders, 'pure and simple', and the interest and enthusiasm of the girls had apparently swung towards the less complicated form of the game.<sup>29</sup>

Two other games were most likely started in the 1880s. Lacrosse appears to have been tried at Ruyton, but it had few recruits,<sup>30</sup> and the game faded from the scene until resurrected at the turn of the century. Cricket was also begun, but its highly structured skills were plainly a source of frustration to several of the participants. At the Methodist Ladies' College in 1889, the school magazine reported on a girls' cricket match in New Zealand, and commented on how it had been demonstrated in a sister colony that it was possible for girls to play cricket 'scientifically and heartily, thereby gaining health and muscle, without loss of a girl's greatest adornment - modesty'.<sup>31</sup> However, at least eleven girls at the school were finding the science of cricket a difficult proposition. In November 1891, in a match between two rival teams, the Kangaroos and the Possums, the contest was distinctly lop-sided. The Possums managed to accumulate three runs in their first innings. Nevertheless, the reference to this game is important because it reveals the use of a "sporting language" that was new to girls' schools, and which had previously been considered the traditional preserve of boys' schools at that time. The author comments:

Of the Kangaroos, L. Bird in a good all-round, 'plucky' player. At batting, A. Cole (whose score of 23 was the highest during the match) and F. Colclough are very good; their play is dashing and they evidently understand the art of keeping 'cool' . . . During the early part of the match a few players attempted to question the umpire's decision, but this action on their part was suppressed at once by the captains.<sup>32</sup>

Patently, the team game considered above all others as possessing the highest value to inculcate modes of acceptable behaviour was being employed to serve this purpose with girls before the end of the nineteenth century. Manliness and the gentlemanly tradition, the twin characteristics of a moral code encouraged and transmitted through sport, were no longer confined to the playing fields of boys' schools. Girls were being expected to display those admired and respected traits of a 'muscular Christianity' - courage, strength of character in adversity, leadership, cooperation for the good of the group and respect for fair play.<sup>33</sup>

In the 1890s, sport in the private girls' schools continued to be thought of as merely an extra-curricular activity, yet gently fostered by the Principals for the social interaction it generated within, and between, schools. But games still remained predominantly uncoached, and had a loose organisational style, being largely sustained by the efforts of the girls themselves. The classroom and the examination hall were the revered arenas of success and triumph, and had yet to be challenged by the happenings on the tennis court on the playing field.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, it was evident that some girls would have appreciated a more regular and coordinated approach to the provision of games in the curriculum, and the opportunity for additional physical exercise. As early as 1884, a girl at the Presbyterian Ladies' College observed that everyone 'even doctors', were agreed that good health depended on a certain amount of exercise, and though girls could take part in 'tennis, riding and perhaps rowing', they were expected to give up 'such puerile amusements and begin to get a little sense' after they were twelve.<sup>35</sup> Boys, on the other hand, had all the luck - they could play football and cricket for at least half a lifetime.<sup>36</sup>

Within the second strand of physical culture functioning in

the schools, dancing was the most popular of the 'extra' accomplishments, since it was a major form of social activity in the community and Melbourne was considered to be the 'Dancing Capital of Australia' in the nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup> Gymnastics, mainly as callisthenic exercises using rods, Indian clubs and light dumb-bells, had also settled into a routine pattern as an 'extra' subject, and it continued to be taught by 'visiting' staff. During the 1880s, Ruyton and the Methodist Ladies' College shared the teaching services of the Misses Dick and Moon,<sup>38</sup> owners of a commercial gymnasium in Melbourne, and if it is not possible to be precise about the strength of interest among the girls for gymnastics, the two instructors probably taught a small but regular clientele. In a period when there was growing concern and extensive publicity given to the dangers of an inadequate physique, many anxious middle class parents seemed happy to put their daughters into the hands of 'physical culture experts' to ensure a 'good posture'. Long hours spent over books had to be counteracted, either by callisthenics, or shoulder, harnesses and chest expanders, instruments fashionable in their day for correcting what were seen as postural defects. Fencing had intermittent support and a small following; cycling experienced a boom in the 1890s; but the spectacular development of the decade was the opening of the indoor 'swimming bath' at the Methodist Ladies' College, where it would be proclaimed as 'the largest and finest possessed by any educational institution in Australia'.<sup>39</sup>

What was strikingly obvious in the final decade of the nineteenth century was the persistently weak position of physical training in girls' schools and its very limited acceptance as a part of serious education. In the acrimonious debate on the establishment of a Church of England girls' school in Melbourne in 1895, Judge Molesworth, the fierce opponent of such a development, considered it wholly inappropriate for the Church to be associated 'with the ordinary branches of a ladies' education, including dancing and gymnastics'.<sup>40</sup> Bishop Moorhouse, a keen advocate of a new school, was just as forthright in replying that 'dancing and callisthenics are no more incongruous with religious principles than football and cricket'.<sup>41</sup> Some schools were at last recognising that what they did in the way of physical exercise was

neither sufficient nor systematic. Miss Bromby, headmistress at Ruyton, was carefully preaching for advancement in physical training in 1894, perhaps stimulated by what she had seen in English schools during her visit to that country in the previous year. At her annual speech day she commented:

We have a large dancing class, but I do not consider this sufficient for physical training. I should like to see drill established throughout the school, and the gymnastic and fencing classes revived, for I think it much to be desired that the systematic development of the bodily powers should not be neglected.<sup>42</sup>

The turn of the century was to produce headmistresses with the desire and the will to see a comprehensive system of sport and physical training incorporated into girls' education.

Late in the 1890s, Australian education was being slowly made aware that it had not come to grips with several fundamental problems that were already the subject of reform in other countries. In Victoria, Alfred Deakin had made specific criticisms of government schools in 1898, and Theodore Fink's Royal Commission on Technical Education had expanded this original brief, such that its reports between 1899 and 1901 were highly critical of 'old' education dominated as it was by excessive 'book learning'. As an educational reform movement got under way in the state during the first years of the twentieth century, it paid specific attention to a more liberal interpretation of the school curriculum and a philosophy that placed children at the centre of learning processes and experiences. Mary Morris, co-principal at Merton Hall since 1898, joined in the call for changes and modifications to the traditional curriculum by drawing attention in her Speech Day report of 1901 to the neglect of sport in girls' schools. She commented:

The great importance of sport in schoolgirl life should at once be recognised. Our girls need open air exercise just as boys do, especially if they are doing good mental work. More especially they need the discipline of the playground which boys get, and which enables them to understand the values of cooperative efforts in later life.<sup>43</sup>

This forthright stance on the physical and moral values of sport, and their relevance to girls clearly appealed to other Principals in the private education system. In the first quarter of the

twentieth century, sport in girls' schools was to undergo a period of tremendous growth, urged on by the interest and enthusiasm of the girls, and specialist teaching of the game themselves from a new member of the school staff - the 'games and gym mistress'.

Margaret Irving, who founded Lauriston Girls' High School in 1901 with her sister Lilian, was actually inspecting girls' schools in England when the first twelve girls arrived for their initial day of education at the Malvern villa, the original school site. During her overseas visit, Margaret had been impressed by hockey in the English schools, thought it 'a very good game', and introduced it as the winter sport at Lauriston on her return to Australia.<sup>44</sup> She urged other schools to follow her lead and by 1903 the first inter-school match between Lauriston and Ruyton had taken place on a level piece of ground at the corner of Malvern and Mercer Roads in Melbourne.<sup>45</sup> Girls from the Melbourne Church of England Girls' Grammar School (Merton Hall) were keen spectators at the contest, and in 1904, friendly matches were being arranged between the three schools. In the following year Mary Morris took the initiative and held a meeting at Merton Hall between the three competing schools, and Tintern, at which the Girls' Schools Hockey Association was formed. Oberwyl and Toorak College joined the Association in 1906, by which time certain rules had been decided. Some of the rules carry a humorous tone today, particularly

1. Skirts must be eight inches off the ground
2. No white petticoats to be worn
3. Hard-rimmed hats and hatpins must not be worn during play.<sup>46</sup>

Though some school teams fared badly in the early matches,<sup>47</sup> and there was a certain skill and tactical crudity about the play, hockey prospered in all of the schools, probably due to its team organisation and goal scoring potential. Increasingly, the game became the practical nursery for the idea of loyalty to school and the spirit of comradeship among fellow players, developments that had occurred in the private boys' schools in the nineteenth century.

Miss Hatchell-Brown, of the Priory Ladies' School in St, Kilda, was the originator of the plan to organise tennis on a regular competitive basis by forming the Kia-Ora club in 1902.<sup>48</sup> Six schools, Fairlight, Priory, Toorak College, Ruyton, Oberwyl

and Tintern,<sup>49</sup> banded together as the founder members of the club to compete for a pennant and a silver cup, symbols that appeared to motivate the girls and create an upsurge of interest in the membership of the tennis clubs in the schools.<sup>50</sup> One fresh aspect of inter-school competition appeared on the sport scene when Ruyton was coached to a winner's pennant in 1903 by Mr. Patterson, a keen local player living close to the school, and whose son Gerald was to win at Wimbledon in 1927.<sup>51</sup> The detailed reporting of inter-school cricket matches in the various school magazines suggests that this game had also been caught up in the general movement for more regular and organised competition that was symptomatic of the early years of the century. Keener rivalry also brought with it some of the attendant problems. At a cricket match between Melbourne Girls' Grammar and the Presbyterian Ladies' College in 1906, played at the Scotch College ground, a large number of spectators watched the contest, but this did not prevent a sharp rebuke from one of the Melbourne players. She remarked that although the team was 'doing the very best for the school', it was not being fully supported by the rest of the girls.<sup>52</sup> A more serious charge lay around the corner, however. The exaggerated accent placed on winning in sports had clearly raised its ugly head in some matches around this time. A writer in the Melbourne Girls' Grammar school magazine, signing herself "Kingsfield", produced a short but pointed article on 'The Spirit of the Game', in which the ethics of fair play was seen as the premier virtue in playing and competing. The author was to conclude:

The greatest element of evil which may creep into our view of athletics is the idea that one must win at all costs - that defeat is an unspeakable disgrace ... we must need to cultivate the spirit for which fair play comes first - defeat or victory afterwards.<sup>53</sup>

This rising tide of enthusiasm within the girls schools for sport, and winning, was a new phenomenon that was throwing up its own brand of difficulties, and the exalted importance of games was not to the liking of every school administration. The Reverend S.G. McLaren, Principal at the Presbyterian Ladies' College, was obviously perturbed as early as 1904 about the increased attention being given to the pursuit of sports, and the risk of interference

with the academic side of school life. So much so, that in his annual report of that year McLaren issued a warning 'against elevating what ought to be a pastime into the serious business of the school'.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, within two years his own school was to take a leading part in raising sport to a new eminence.

In spite of these early doubts, tennis, hockey, cricket and rounders flourished in the girls' schools during the first decade of the twentieth century, mainly due to the combined enthusiasm of the girls and staff for these activities. Greater freedom of movement had raised the level of enjoyment in playing for girls, and competition on the playing field had opened up another avenue for the exploration of personal values. The school administrations had suddenly realised that in games they had a means whereby they could cultivate the character of girls, in particular the supreme traits of 'selfless devotion' and 'service', as well as promote 'school spirit'. Furthermore, in the competition for clients, a heightened 'esprit de corps' and a close knit feeling 'for school', were matters that could no longer be ignored. As these developments became recognised and increasingly important to those in charge of the girls' schools, additional steps were taken to raise the status and image of games, and gymnastics, in them. Prominent among the moves was the appointment of Gwynneth Morris, the youngest of the Morris sisters, to take sole charge of games and physical training at Melbourne Girls' Grammar School in 1906. Formerly its games captain, Gwynneth had left the school at eighteen to go to England in 1904 where she enrolled for the two-year course at Madame Bergman-Osterberg's Physical Training College.<sup>55</sup> Upon her return to Melbourne, the influence of the new diploma holder was to be considerable, not only in her old school where she taught until her marriage in 1913, but upon the overall sport scene throughout the girls' private schools. The strength of commitment by the Morris sisters to the value of games was amply demonstrated in 1909 when the school prospectus announced that 'all girls must take at least one game in School', a bold policy of compulsion declared against the opposition of some girls and parents who considered team games too rough and damaging to a ladylike image.<sup>56</sup> The appointment of Gwynneth Morris as a permanent and specialist member of the teaching staff at Melbourne Girls' Grammar was a trend that other schools would

follow before the Great War. However, at the Presbyterian Ladies' College, the coaching of games was probably elevated to its highest status so far by the action of James Bee, headmaster at the school between 1906 and 1913. He took an active part in the teaching of games and the coaching of teams, inculcating a philosophy of 'hit hard and play to win',<sup>57</sup> an attitude that may have been responsible for the call by Gwynneth Morris (Kingsfield) in 1907 for a renewal of faith in 'fair play'.

Alongside the games revolution taking place in the girls' schools, there was the parallel reform of the gymnastic strand of the nineteenth century 'physical culture', and it was to be organised to a large extent around compulsory Swedish drill. The 'science' of Lingian gymnastic exercises was highly valued for its systematic and 'harmonious' development of the human frame, and every school seemed to urge their girls to take advantage of this vital physical activity in the cause of improved health, posture and vigour. Daily drill, 'greatly appreciated by the scholars', was taught at the Presbyterian Ladies' College in 1903, but there was a mild complaint about the inadequate supply of clubs and dumb-bells, and the lawns were no good for marching drills - 'grass so deadens the sound of footfalls that accurate and simultaneous marching, without music, is very difficult if not altogether impossible'.<sup>58</sup> By 1904, the custom of the 'Big School' at Melbourne Girls' Grammar being drilled in the gymnasium, 'class by class', was introduced,<sup>59</sup> and in the same year Tintern was advertising the teaching of 'Physical Culture' without any extra fees.<sup>60</sup> Additional mention was made in the Tintern school magazine that their visiting teacher, Miss Turnbull, had recently sailed for Europe 'to study the latest developments in her special subjects'.<sup>61</sup> When Miss Turnbull returned to Tintern, she, and Gwynneth Morris at Melbourne Girls' Grammar, became the leading exponents of the immensely popular school gymnastic displays that were performed in front of packed audiences, and enthusiastically described in school magazines and the local press. Complete unison in mass movement and precision rhythmic swinging were the methods held in high regard, and in her Speech Day demonstration of 1907, Gwynneth Morris publicly endorsed the Swedish system, recommending it to parents because it was 'inspiring confidence in those educationalists who have the fullest opportunities of

examining all systems', and it had widespread acceptance in England.<sup>62</sup> However, not all girls were fully enamoured by the system and some probably suffered in silence, or with occasional flashes of humor. Ruyton engaged visiting staff from the Bjelke-Petersen School of Physical Culture to run their gymnastics, and some of the 1910 girls were quick to make fun of the 'stentorian tones' of the instructor who came to 'hold forth on the subject of fiscal cultshur'.<sup>63</sup> To enliven their marching activities the girls became the 'proud possessors' of a chorus, sung to the tune of "John Brown's Body". The lyrics ran -

See the bonny Ruyton girls striving to excel  
See their dainty sandshoed feet marching  
straight and well  
The thoughts behind their dancing eyes  
I wonder who can tell  
As their feet go marching on.<sup>64</sup>

But the rapid ground gained by gymnastics and Ling's ideas can be gauged to some extent by the remarks of Dr. Fitchett at the Methodist Ladies' College. Giving his annual report of 1912, the Principal wanted it to be known that the 'wise education of the body was a specific objective of the school', and to help gymnastics achieve its aims, (which included remedial work and the treatment of physical defects) a new gymnasium was to be erected, with the imposing dimensions of 55 feet by 25 feet?<sup>65</sup>

The introduction of new team games to the small core of sports experiencing popular growth strengthened the 'games cult' in the girls schools. More games aided the spread of pupil involvement and increased the chances of inter-school competition. Precise dates on the introduction of the new games are difficult to determine, but basketball was being played in some schools by 1907, lacrosse on a regular basis by 1908, and baseball by 1909.<sup>66</sup> It is in this first two decades of the twentieth century that the girls' schools show their strongest signs of imitating the trends and symbolic features adopted in boys' schools to sustain an enthusiasm for sport, and glorify those who played and led. School magazines give distinct attention on their front pages to the captains of the games teams and the 'Sport Committee', while the inside pages pay considerable attention to the sporting elite. If the class notes within the magazines can be seen as something of a fair reflection of the attitudes of the "ordinary girl"

towards games, they tend to reveal evidence of a wide and strong enthusiasm for them and the fun they contained. The comments of a Form VB girl at Tintern in 1912 are an interesting example in surveying this evidence. She remarks, 'Last drill day Miss Thompson gave us a lesson in basketball, instead of our usual work; we enjoyed it very much ... and we had a good game.'<sup>67</sup> Inter-form sport is debated at length, 'colours' create a fresh round of enthusiasm, and the widespread introduction of 'houses' in the 1920s produced intensified allegiances and even keener rivalry. Indeed, one historian commenting about a particular school, yet reflecting a practice common in most others, points to the school magazine of the 1920s being 'depressingly full of sport' and 'tedious' in its details and descriptions of numerous matches,<sup>68</sup> Songs and poems extolling the 'love of the game', the sacrifices expected on the field for house or school, and the various reasons for 'playing up' were constantly written about throughout the 1910s and 1920s. A Lauriston girl of 1923 sums up something of these intense feelings for games, and shows the remarkable way in which the gentle exercise of croquet of less than half a century previously, taken as relaxing recreational break from "real" education, had progressed to the point of being an integral part of education - in its broadest sense. Peggy Thompson had reached her conclusions about "Sport -

There is something in the spirit and the  
meanings of that word  
That not a single person can explain  
And yet it sets a throbbing and enthusiastic  
heart  
And makes the young blood leap through every  
vein.  
'Tis sport that builds a nation in character  
and strength,  
And there's a life long help in every rule;  
Is there a finer feeling than to play a  
splendid game,  
To be playing for the honour of the school;  
To take a glorious beating and to have a  
glorious win;  
To have a nature broad and clear and keen?  
And sport? Well, it's just sport - though  
it's more than just a word,  
And it takes a sport to realise what I mean.<sup>69</sup>

The extraordinary zeal displayed by the private girls' schools

for competitive games and Swedish gymnastics at the turn of the century is a revealing dividing mark in the half-century account of physical education in the schools. The rapid adoption of systematic physical activity, controlled and co-ordinated by the school authorities, can be explained, in part, by the desire to imitate - that physical exercise prescribed for the middle-class English schoolgirl was likely to be 'eminently suited' to her Australian counterpart. However, the variety and strength of local influences upon girls' sport in the Victorian schools should not be discounted or considered unimportant. Over a quarter of a century Pearson's initial plea for physical culture for girls had finally taken root and was to blossom in the Edwardian era, sustained by an educational creed in girls' secondary schools that placed high value on moral ideals - justice, loyalty, honour and decency. Games, and the playing field, allowed the most practical encouragement and enforcement of these favoured qualities. Furthermore, team games nurtured 'manliness' and its sponsorship of physical and moral courage, attributes which would reduce the pronounced emotionalism and sentimental affection that seemed to weaken the female personality. And, in an emergent mood of nationalism and patriotism within the country, girls could practise, through team games, their sense of honour and duty by allegiance to the school.

By their creation of a more dynamic and meaningful role for sport in schoolgirl life, the private schools gave a fresh lead to all schools to rethink the goals of education. It was not coincidence which determined the actions of some women teachers in the state education system to seek the revision of military and class drill for the mass of schoolchildren. Clearly, the upsurge of interest in girls' sport accelerated and widened sporting opportunities for women in the community. If the claims made on behalf of the playing field were sometimes exaggerated by some of the girls' schools it was to their credit that the 'games cult' in them never appeared to cultivate a deviant athleticism, or produce a distinctly observable anti-intellectualism, which periodically threatened the educational fabric of boys' public schools. Sport in girls' private schools developed in the early years of the twentieth century to become an important and vital feature of an

educational ideology: it was also a development which apparently made strong efforts to avoid perverse imprinting of the clientele.

NOTES:

1. In writing this paper the author acknowledges the liberty he has taken with the term and the concept of "sport", since some of the contents refer to the developments of a broader based physical culture. I wish to express my thanks to the Principals of the following Melbourne schools for allowing me access to school records and archival material - Presbyterian Ladies' College, Tintern Church of England Girls Grammar School, Ruyton Girls' School, Methodist Ladies' College, Melbourne Church of England Girls' Grammar School and Lauriston Girls' School. It is recognised, however, that by considering "sport" in these six schools only, certain noteworthy initiatives and developments may be excluded.
2. J. Tregenza *Professor of Democracy*, Melbourne University Press, 1968, p. 75.
3. C.H. Pearson, *The Higher Culture of Women*, S. Mullen, Melbourne 1875, p. 10.
4. Tregenza *op.cit.*, p. 76.
5. Ray Strachey, *The Cause*, Virago, London, 1978, p. 251.
- 6.
7. See Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
8. Pearson's caution was evident later in the decade. He conducted the Royal Commission of 1877-78 which inquired into the state and condition of the government schools in Victoria. He had very little to say in this report on physical training in the colony's schools, merely reinforcing a commitment to instruction in drill and gymnastics. There was no mention of the possibility of introducing games, at least for boys, something an ex-Public Schoolboy might have considered worthwhile. See *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 3, 1877-78, Report on the State of Public Education in Victoria, p. 81.

9. M.O. Reid, The Ladies Came To Stay, Melbourne, 1961, p. 62.
10. Ibid.
11. The schools that came to be established, and discussed within this paper, are Tintern Ladies' College (1877), Ruyton Girls' School (1878), Methodist Ladies' College (1882), Merton Hall (1893), and Lauriston Girls' School (1901). (Author's note.)
12. The number of girls who opted to pay the extra fees for gymnastics appears to have been a small percentage of the total school population. As an example, the roll book at the Presbyterian Ladies' College for 1889 shows the registration of 97 girls, of which 6 decided to pay for gymnastics. (PLC Archives).
13. Miss Buss is reported to have been 'almost speechless with nervousness, but managed to give good answers to questions'. (Strachey, op.cit., p. 137)
14. British Parliamentary Papers, vol. XXVIII (Pt. iv), 1867-68, Report of the Schools' Inquiry Commission (Taunton Commission), vol. 5, p. 265.
15. The influence of Frances Buss had stretched to New Zealand well before the founding of the Presbyterian Ladies' College. In 1868, writing to a teaching colleague in that country, Miss Buss was describing the value of her musical gymnastics, an 'American idea', but the system was 'easy, graceful and not too fatiguing'. Cited in A.E. Ridley, Frances Mary Buss, Longman, Green & Co., London, 1895, pp. 201-203. The 'American idea' was the system of Dr. Dio Lewis, from Boston. His musical gymnastics had been brought to England by Moses Coit Tyler. See report, Taunton Commission, op.cit., pp. 578-588.
16. The attitudes of the girls to their education at PLC were not universal in accepting that it should lead to higher education or a career. One contributor to Patchwork, (the school magazine) in 1876 is opposed to following boys down the 'matriculation road'. A month later, another girl is clearly seeking her 'women's rights' and demands equal treatment in

- education. See Patchwork, September 1876, p. 53, and Patchwork, October 1876, pp. 75-77.
17. Patchwork, August 1876, p. 45.
  18. Patchwork, September 1876, p. 50.
  19. Tregenza, op. cit., pp. 82-83.
  20. Ibid., p. 83.
  21. Patchwork, October 1876, p. 78.
  22. Ibid.
  23. Patchwork, December 1880, p. 61. In reviving the tennis club in September 1880, the comment is made that 'there is more interest in the Club this year than last'.
  24. As an example of the fluctuating membership in the PLC tennis club, it had 48 players in 1881 (Patchwork, September 1881, p. 41.), but in 1883 concern is expressed about the future of the club. (Patchwork, September 1883, p. 172.)
  25. H.Y. Daniell, History of Ruyton 1878-1956, p. 65.
  26. Lyndsay Gardner, Tintern School and Anglican Girls' Education 1887-1977, Tintern C.E.G.G.S., East Ringwood, 1977, p. 5.
  27. See Australasian Schoolmaster and Literary Review, September 1886, p. 12.
  28. See Australian Etiquette, or the Rules and Usages of the Best Society in the Australian Colonies, People's Publishing Company, Melbourne 1885.
  29. Bluebell, December 1889, p. 30.
  30. Daniell, loc.cit.
  31. Bluebell, September 1889, p. 300.
  32. Ibid.
  33. See Sport in Schools: The Participation of Girls, Ministry of Education, New South Wales, 1980, p. 12. The assumption is made here that the potential for the development of such traits was restricted to men. 'Women, by definition, could not become either gentlemanly or manly'. (Ibid.)

34. The paramount importance of academic success is clear in perusing the school magazines of the era. (Author's notes)
35. Patchwork, October 1884, p. 266.
36. Ibid.
37. Kerry Scott, Social Dance in Victoria During the Nineteenth Century, Pelops, no. 1, January 1980, pp. 13-14.
38. See Theobald, op. cit., p. 35. In the annual report of the Methodist Ladies' College for 1885, it is reported that the gymnastic classes at the school had been interrupted for some time, due to the injuries of Miss Dick and Miss Moon 'in the unfortunate railway accident at Werribee, in April last'. (Report and Prospectus, 1884-5, p. 8. M.L.C. Archives)
39. Seventy-Five Years at Methodist Ladies' College Hawthorn 1882-1957, M.L.C., Spectator Publishing Company, Melbourne, 1957, p. 32. The depth of the pool ran from three to five feet.
40. Cited in Jubilee History, The Melbourne Church of England Girls' Grammar School, Melbourne, 1953, p. 16.
41. Ibid.
42. Church of England Messenger, 11 January 1895, p, 10,
43. Cited in Jubilee History, pp. 68-69.
44. M.E.L. Irving, Hockey - Its Development in our Girls' Schools, Ruytonian, April 1928, pp. 19-20.
45. Ibid., p. 20.
46. Ibid.
47. In August 1904, the second team at Melbourne Girls' Grammar defeated Tintern 9-0. However, this was Tintern's first match. (Brook, September 1904, p. 4.)
48. Theobald, op. cit., p. 58.
49. Brook, June 1902, p. 3. This membership comes from the Tintern school magazine, but there seems to be some differences of opinion on the original membership of the club.
50. See Brook, September 1905, p. 6.
51. Theobald, loc. cit.

52. School Notes, December 1906, p. 15.
53. School Notes, April, 1907, p. 21.
54. Reid, op. cit., p. 63.
55. School Notes, December 1913, p. 363. This information is taken from 'Farewell to Miss Gwynneth'.
56. Jubilee History, p. 72.
57. Reid, op. cit. p. 18. See also Patchwork, October 1906, p. 4.
58. Patchwork, October 1903, p. 8.
59. School Notes, December 1906, p. 9.
60. Brook, December 1904, p. 1.
61. Ibid.
62. Jubilee History, p. 69.
63. Ruytonian, Midwinter 1910, p. 10.
64. Ibid.
65. 75 Years at Methodist Ladies' College, p. 80.
66. The author makes no claim that the dates set against the games accurately reflect their origins in the schools. In a survey of school magazines these are the dates when the games first appear in discussion. The dates shown come from School Notes, the magazine produced by Melbourne Girls' Grammar School. (Author's note)
67. Brook, April 1912, n.p.n.
68. Gardiner, op. cit., p. 78.
69. Lauristonian, May 1923, pp. 28-29.