

# **The Development of Women's Track and Field in England: The Role of the Athletic Club, 1920s-1950s<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Introduction**

The Sydney Olympic Games of 2000 highlighted the great progress that women athletes have made in recent years. The medals gained by Denise Lewis, Kelly Holmes and Katherine Merry, alongside the performances of other high profile performers such as Paula Radcliffe, meant that female athletes gained significant media attention and praise. However, the successes and coverage of some of elite performers is often in sharp contrast to the support that the grass roots side of the sport receives. Despite this situation, the importance of the clubs cannot be underestimated, especially in the years that women's athletics was developing. In contrast with some sports, clubs have always been at the centre of track and field in the UK and crucial to its survival. They have provided the vast majority of athletes with a base, competition, training advice, and social opportunities. Although, in a few districts, schools and universities gradually enlarged their athletic programmes, which opened up the sport to more young women, only a minority would have been able to take advantage of these opportunities. Clubs were the main provider of athletics for women, and if a local club did not exist, potential athletes had few chances to enjoy the sport and develop their talents.

This paper seeks to establish the central role of the women's athletic clubs from the time that the Women's Amateur Athletic Association (WAAA) was founded in 1922 until the 1950s. In particular it will discuss the importance of clubs in the growth of competition and the social, administrative, and competitive facilities they offered. The support provided by men will also be analysed within this work and it will be argued that, at the same time that the men's international governing bodies were engaged in an on-going struggle to gain control over women's athletics, male coaches and officials provided significant support at club level. Women's roles in sport have sometimes been seen as 'pale and pallid',<sup>2</sup> a view that is not reflected in the vibrant world of club athletics. Evidence suggests that at

a time when women were struggling to redefine femininity and the accepted levels of physicality, domestic athletics enabled women to occupy decision-making positions, experience the thrill of competition, enjoy freedom of movement and have a greater control over their own bodies.

While this paper concentrates solely on women's athletics, the themes identified will enable those interested in other sports to make comparisons. Perhaps more importantly it may stimulate further research into athletics itself. Both Mason and Polley<sup>3</sup> have previously reminded us that athletics has yet to be analysed sufficiently by sports historians. Despite the fact that athletics has been one of the most successful sports for women in the UK, there is still no text that adequately celebrates the triumphs or even tells the story. Like the men's side of the sport, most of what does exist takes the form of brief autobiographies and biographies of medal winners at the major championships alongside statistical information.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the lack of published material is characterised by the fact that a lot of the work on athletics allocates the vast majority of its space to male participation. For example, in Watman's *History of British Athletics*, women's involvement is limited to a single chapter.<sup>5</sup> While there are several texts published on the history of the Amateur Athletic Association,<sup>6</sup> there are as yet none on the WAAA.

There are a few books dedicated to women's athletics, however, and these provide valuable historical information. F.A.M. Webster's *Athletics of Today for Women: History, Development and Training* of 1930 was written only eight years after the founding of the WAAA.<sup>7</sup> This included a justification for women's participation, the history of their involvement, the leading performances for each event, and training advice. In 1955, Pallett, who was a coach for both the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) and WAAA, followed a similar format by providing a historical over-view, information on the organisational structure of the sport, and training advice.<sup>8</sup> In 1965, Pozzoli published *British Women's Athletics 1921-1964*. However, apart from a brief introduction, it consisted entirely of statistical information, tracing the development of each event by recording the best performances each year. Twenty years later, Cowe published *International Women's Athletics 1890-1940: A Statistical History*. As the name suggests, this was also a record of the improving standards in women's athletics.<sup>9</sup>

Further information has become available more recently with the publication of work evaluating women's sporting participation from both a sociological and historical perspective. However, international developments tend to receive far more coverage than the growth of the grass roots side of the sport. Leigh, for example, analyses women's involvement in the Olympics between 1900 and 1948 and includes information on the opposition to women's athletics from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF).<sup>10</sup> Two key texts on women's sports by Guttmann<sup>11</sup> and Hargreaves include athletics but, because this sport is not the focus of their books, a detailed history is lacking. Hargreaves draws on Leigh's work, alongside her own primary research, to provide a summary of the struggle that women's athletics faced during the inter-war years.<sup>12</sup> In addition, she provides evidence from athletics to support her argument that although women's sporting opportunities were increasing during this period, they did so against a backdrop of continued resistance to women's increasing physicality.<sup>13</sup> Hargreaves' text, one of the few written from a British perspective, highlights the importance of gender power relations in the development of women's physical opportunities and allows comparisons to be made between several different sports.

Clearly then, there is still a need to investigate the development of women's athletics, particularly grass roots participation, in far more depth. Due to their central role, clubs provide a natural starting place for research. However, as the early minutes of the Women's Amateur Athletic Association have been lost, it is not always easy to find out information about the first clubs.<sup>14</sup> Further difficulties arise because the amateur and voluntary nature of British athletics meant that few clubs had a permanent clubhouse or office where records of meetings could be kept. Most club secretaries kept the minutes in their own homes, and over time, with changes of personnel, club headquarters and indeed the merging and demise of many of the first clubs, little of the original documentation remains.

Nevertheless, some of the larger clubs and associations do still have material available. Much of the information for this paper is drawn from records of the WAAA. In addition, minutes from the Midland Counties WAAA (MCWAAA), which affiliated to the national governing body in 1925, have been used. Evidence will be included from London Olympiades Athletic Club (LOAC)<sup>15</sup> and Birchfield Harriers Ladies' Section (BHLS),

two of the prominent clubs in the period being discussed. In order to augment this, material has also been drawn from *Athletics Weekly*,<sup>16</sup> newspapers, and interviews carried out with former athletes, coaches, administrators and officials. Interviews, in particular, produced recollections about training and competition, how clubs functioned, and the kind of members that they attracted. They help to bring the sport alive and contribute to a better understanding of grass roots participation.

### **Establishing the importance of the women's athletic clubs**

The growth of sports sociology has provided a wealth of evidence that shows how the traditional constructs of femininity successfully constrained women's sporting opportunities. An increasingly important focus of this work has been the significance of the female body within the field of sport.<sup>17</sup> In addition to Hargreaves, the work of authors such as Birrell and Cole, Cahn, Costa and Guthrie, Fletcher, Hall, Theberge, and Vertinsky, to name only a few, have illustrated the strength of the male hegemony in sport and how the pseudo-medical arguments legitimised opposition to women's opposition.<sup>18</sup> This was clearly the case in athletics where, as has already been mentioned, the inter-war years were characterised by the struggle to gain control over women's participation by the IOC and IAAF. Once they had successfully persuaded the women's organisation to assimilate into the men's governing bodies, powerful voices continued to argue for the scaling down of women's participation in the Olympic Games until well into the 1950s.<sup>19</sup>

Madame Milliat founded the women's international governing body, the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI), in 1921. Her determination to get full recognition for women's athletics culminated in the FSFI being granted a place in the 1928 Olympic Games.<sup>20</sup> However, only five events were accepted in an illustration of the IOC and IAAF's resistance to the participation of women in many athletic events.<sup>21</sup> This was in sharp contrast to the FSFI's world championships, held from 1922 to 1934, which offered a full programme to female athletes and reflected the vibrant nature of the sport. The demise of both these championships and the women's governing body has been attributed to the assimilation of women into the men's athletic structures<sup>22</sup> and resulted in the loss of women's influence at international level. Despite promises to the contrary, women's existing records were not recognised by the IAAF and the Olympic programme was not increased after Amsterdam.

The gap that existed between the beliefs of the men who controlled the Olympic Games and the people who were responsible for domestic and smaller international competitions is glaringly obvious. The domestic competitive scene became increasingly important, especially for those women who wanted to compete in longer distances and the full range of field events. While the longest event was 100 metres after the 1928 Amsterdam Games and 200 metres from the 1948 London Games until Rome in 1960, the WAAA organised regular domestic and small international meetings that included both the 800 metres and 1500 metres or the mile. It is clear that the WAAA and affiliated clubs were responsible for the growth of women's athletics in England and this meant that, despite the opposition that existed at international level, the number of competitive opportunities grew and women's athletics quickly became established.

Bearing in mind the strength of the male hegemony within international athletics, it is perhaps surprising to note that the domestic club scene allowed women to wield significant influence over their own sport. This can be explained by the fact that women's athletics was organised separately from the time the WAAA was founded. In 1922, the AAA rejected a proposal that women's athletics should be part of the existing (male) organisation, resulting in the establishment of the separate governing body, the WAAA.<sup>23</sup> It is hard to believe that the reservations of the international governing bodies did not influence the AAA's decision. With hindsight, this was probably the best thing that could have happened. It is fair to say that separate administrations allowed women to gain positions of leadership and the WAAA to introduce a wider range of events as pioneered by their own international governing body, the FSFI.

The competitive structures for domestic women's athletics were all controlled by the WAAA, reflecting the power that the national executive had over the sport's development. Although area associations and county associations increasingly co-ordinated athletics at a local level, the WAAA had ultimate authority and oversaw athletics, whether it was offered by an athletics club, business house, school, or university. Any organisation wanting to include athletic events for women had to affiliate to the WAAA and abide by their rules of competition. In turn, the WAAA affiliated to the FSFI. In this way, women's athletics reflected the men's organisational structures, something that Hargreaves highlights as a common feature of the emerging women's sports in the inter-war years.<sup>24</sup>

While it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss in detail the expansion of competition outside of the club environment, it is important to acknowledge that the clubs were not the only providers of competition. In the period covered by this paper, business houses organised meetings and had annual championships. For example, at the 1921 Heathfield Sports Association and Kensington Argyll Harriers meeting,<sup>25</sup> a relay race was available where six women ran 75 yards each to make up a relay distance of 450 yards. The women participating all represented business houses from the West End and West London districts. A healthy number of business houses appear to have had women's athletic sections, with ten teams represented on this occasion.<sup>26</sup>

Several organisations, such as the Civil Service, offered races in their annual sports days. This was undoubtedly how many women had their first taste of competitive athletics, and such meetings remained a vital source of competition during the inter-war years and after 1945. In 1923, for example, the Building Trade Sports included a 220 yards handicap for women. In the same year the British Legion Sports, which was the first sports meeting to be held at Wembley, had a women's 880-yards handicap and high jump. Such meetings were not restricted to London. In Birmingham there were regular Charity Sports, as well as meetings organised by the local Post Office, Dunlop and Tram Company. All of these meetings offered women competition, as did the popular Lilywhite Sports in Coventry and numerous meetings organised by police forces across the country. The Dunlop sports, which attracted a crowd of 10,000, incorporated an inter-departmental relay for women as well as a '100 yards flat handicap for employees and their daughters'.<sup>27</sup> Lyons Athletic Club held regular meetings, as did many insurance companies, and Selfridges. The latter was described as having a 'wonderful sports ground'.<sup>28</sup> In 1929, the programme for the Lyons meeting surprisingly included a tug-of-war competition for women; an event certainly not approved of by the WAAA.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to organising matches, companies benefited clubs in their local area by allowing them to use their sports grounds. For example, in 1949 Morris gave permission for West Bromwich Harriers to use their facilities, a deal extended to Coventry Godiva Harriers in the mid-1950s.<sup>30</sup> Other major companies that had regular open meetings after the Second World War were the General Electrical Company and the National Coal Board. Nevertheless, it was crucial that people joined a local club if they wished

to continue to participate and improve, as many business houses did not arrange training between the annual championships. Fortunately, there was sometimes an overlap between the membership of clubs and companies in any one area. This was the case at Lewis', where Norma Blaine worked in the bakery. The sports secretary of the firm was Rita Penn, who was a member of Birchfield Harriers. She persuaded Norma to go down to Birchfield after the inter-departmental sports and subsequently she joined, competing primarily as a walker.<sup>31</sup>

Schools and universities also gradually enlarged their athletic programmes, but opposition remained more evident in the school environment. Although athletics secured a place in physical education, it was only in a limited form.<sup>32</sup> Athletics, which was deemed a very physically demanding sport, was unlikely to be fully accepted by a teaching profession dominated by the belief that physical activity was acceptable only if it did not challenge accepted images of femininity. Even after 1944, when the Butler Education Act established secondary education for all, facilities and the quality of coaching within schools limited the effect the Act had on track and field. This was an era when women's domestic roles were emphasised, not least by the Beveridge Report in 1942. As Scraton has pointed out, concern over the falling birth rate intensified the sense of urgency that girls needed to 'relearn the graces, which so many have forgotten in the last thirty years'.<sup>33</sup> The 'natural' differences between men and women were emphasised rather than a similarity of roles. For example, as late as 1951, the Schools' Athletic Association (SAA) was still not recommending races over 150 metres for girls. The long jump was rejected in 1951 as unsuitable for girls and women,<sup>34</sup> due to fears about impact injuries and possible displacement of internal organs. Two years later, in 1953, the women's 150 yards was finally replaced by a 220 yards, to bring it in line with the standard distance in club competition. Athletic correspondents felt that this was a 'step in the right direction' especially as it strengthened links with the WAAA. A closer relationship was felt to be necessary, to ensure that competition distances and the weight of throwing implements was consistent. This was important if girls were to continue their athletics after they left school and begin to participate in competition under the auspices of the WAAA.<sup>35</sup> The shot putt, however, remained off the programme until 1962 in a reflection of repeated opposition to the event by IOC officials.<sup>36</sup> One cannot criticise the SAA for their concern about

girls' health, but their reluctance to expand their programme created obstacles for promising youngsters and denied those who were suited to longer distances a competitive opportunity.<sup>37</sup>

Both the Inter-Varsity Sports and individual university sports days introduced athletics to some women in higher education. Manchester University invited teams to compete against them in 1921, and this institution has been credited with initiating women's inter-varsity competition.<sup>38</sup> Birmingham University hosted the first Inter-Varsity Athletic Board Women's Championships in 1922. The meeting was an undoubted success, a fact that helped to undermine anxiety about female involvement.<sup>39</sup> It is important, however, not to over-emphasise the number of women who were affected by the establishment of women's athletics in the universities. In 1938, only two percent of male and female nineteen-year-olds were in full-time education.<sup>40</sup> It is clear that while other organisations may have provided some athletic experiences, clubs were the main organisational focus of women's track and field. In particular, the availability of a local club was undoubtedly crucial if many young women were to enjoy the full range of athletic disciplines, and regular training and competition.

### **The growth of women's clubs and the expansion of competition**

Although there are examples of English women taking part in athletics long before the 1920s,<sup>41</sup> the growth of organised athletics is reflected in the fact that far more regular notices about women's events began to appear from the summer months of 1921. Like charity events held during the 1914-1918 war,<sup>42</sup> several men's meetings incorporated women's sprint races into their programmes.<sup>43</sup> However, in 1921, women's athletics started to become more organised with Milliat responsible for initiating competitive opportunities internationally.<sup>44</sup> Later the same year, London Olympiades Athletic Club (LOAC) was formed by several of the Regent Street Polytechnic students who had attended the first women's Monte Carlo international the previous Easter. Joe Palmer, who had trained the team and who had accompanied the women to France, suggested while the athletes were on the return train journey to England that a club should be formed. London Olympiades initially had ten members, the name chosen aptly describing the women's home location and recent experience in what was described as a women's Olympic Games.<sup>45</sup>

LOAC was well organised and very successful. It is also one of the few

women's clubs that has available committee minutes although these, unfortunately, date from 1924 rather than the inaugural year of 1921. The early years of the club's history reveal that it was undoubtedly the pioneering club, making several trips to compete in Europe. A week after the first Women's Olympic Games had been held in August 1922, London Olympiades travelled to Brussels where they competed against Femina Sports Club of Brussels and the Paris Club Femina AC. The eight-event match, which was held at the Stade du Parc, Duden, was totally dominated by LOAC members. The performances of Misses Birchenough, Callebout, Hatt and Lowman were particularly significant, for between them they gained seven victories and placed second in four events. The English women also established three Belgian records, which at this time described the best performances set in that country.<sup>46</sup>

The importance of London Olympiades within the history of British women's athletics cannot be underestimated. Not only were several members responsible for the forming of the WAAA in 1922, but they also established well-organised female competition in their local area. The club did not restrict their influence to overseas or elite events and on 18 July 1922 held its first evening meeting at Paddington Recreation Ground.<sup>47</sup> The event was deemed a success and they were held regularly throughout the inter-war years. A full-range of track and field events was included in the two or three meetings organised each season. Standing long jump and high jump were organised alongside running take-off versions of these events. Longer track events were offered from the first meeting so that the range of events included in contemporary women's championships was available. The inaugural programme included the 'Championship of England 440 yards', a race that was headed by LOAC member Mary Lines, 'Olympic Champion'.<sup>48</sup> The aim of these matches was to try to improve the standard of women's athletics in the area. The club continued to pioneer women's competition and in 1932 they held the first women's mile handicap at their Battersea Park Sports. The race was sanctioned by the WAAA and marked a change in attitude towards the longer event despite the opposition of the IOC to races longer than 100 metres.<sup>49</sup>

The majority of interested women simply joined their local club because it was the nearest and the only one they had heard of. Only the biggest and most successful clubs would have attracted athletes from outside their own area. Clubs generally represented their local district. London Olympiades

was unique in women's athletics in that it had several training bases. This probably dated from the time when there were few clubs in the area catering for women. Rather than setting up a separate club, a branch of LOAC was organised instead.<sup>50</sup>

In contrast to the clubs that catered for women only, several well-established men's athletic clubs developed 'ladies' sections'. The first of these is thought to be Kensington LAC.<sup>51</sup> This type of club had the advantage that the female members were able to use the facilities already available to the men. It is interesting to note that in many cases it does not appear that women had to struggle to gain access, unlike in the newly developed ladies' sections of swimming clubs.<sup>52</sup> In contrast to London Olympiades, BHLS members did not have to worry about finding a track and changing facilities each year. In practice, most of the men's and women's sections were run entirely separately. Nevertheless, male members were often involved in helping to found the women's clubs, coach their members and officiate at their meetings. This was the case at Birchfield Harriers Ladies Section, which was the biggest and most influential club in Midland women's athletics.

Several of the early clubs were created from members of those already established. Middlesex LAC mainly consisted of former members of Kensington and, in 1923, six members of Eastern LAC approached a local athletic supporter, Mr Rainbow, asking him to form a new club for them. This club was known as Manor Park Ladies until November 1934, when it was decided at the Annual General Meeting to rename it Essex Ladies.<sup>53</sup> The practice of athletes moving to other clubs, which they thought would suit them better, became more common as the choice in a local area increased. For example, although Mary French remained a member of Birchfield Harriers Ladies Section, she was unhappy with their version of cross country runs that consisted of laps around the perimeter of their training ground. Her desire for runs over real cross country courses motivated her, together with a close friend, to establish a ladies' section of the men's West Bromwich Harriers, helped by several male members.<sup>54</sup>

The major event of the year was the WAAA English Championships, first held at the Oxo Grounds at Bromley on 18 August 1923. It was not scheduled to start until three in the afternoon, reflecting the fact that the number of entries was much smaller than in later years, when it was held first over two days, and then three. Nevertheless, in 1923 there were over

eighty individual entries, with five teams in the medley relay race. A full track and field programme was offered, including the 440 yards and 880 yards, both of which were frowned upon by the international governing bodies until long after the Second World War. To encourage athletes to attend from outside the local area, the WAAA arranged for competitors to be able to purchase cheap rail tickets.

As the number of clubs expanded, several inter-club competitions developed. The *Daily Mirror* Inter-Club match was introduced in 1925, in which clubs competed for the Atlanta Trophy. This was the first inter-club competition organised for women and was recognised as being one of the most important fixtures in the women's programme. The meeting was organised under the auspices of Middlesex LAC and provided a full track and field programme, with the exception of a walk. The competition was open to all clubs affiliated to the WAAA, but as it was held in the South, most participants were based in that area. Nevertheless, bigger clubs outside the South were also attracted by the good quality competition. As a result, the match provided the only opportunity, apart from the WAAA championships, for many of the best athletes to compete against each other.

The inaugural meeting attracted significant crowds, with 5,000 people estimated to be present at Stamford Bridge. The most prominent southern clubs competed, with London Olympiades winning from Middlesex LAC, Manor Park LAC, and the Polytechnic team. LOAC won six out of the ten events, reflecting just how superior they were within women's athletics in England. The premier Midland club Birchfield Harriers Ladies Section was fifth, beating Goldsmith's Institute and North London Harriers. The remaining teams were Selfridges, which was the sole business house club, and Banbury Harriers.<sup>55</sup> The women's inter-club competition was modelled on the men's equivalent 'Kinnaird Trophy' meeting. It provides a clear example of how, in the case of competition as well as organisation, the women's association followed the pattern already established in men's athletics. Open events were included in the match to provide competition for those athletes not selected to represent their club, or whose club had not entered.

The dominance of London Olympiades continued throughout the 1920s. They won the first four Atlanta trophy meetings, losing for the first time in 1929 to Middlesex LAC. This should not be interpreted as meaning that the competition was weak. Newspaper coverage of inter-club matches

reveal that a high standard of athletics was witnessed, and the meeting was viewed as a positive example of women's sport. The public was urged to watch in 1929, and was told that 'given fine weather they will have a delightful and exciting experience'.<sup>56</sup> The score in this year provided another illustration of how good the competition was between the clubs. The trophy was not decided until the last event of what was an all-southern affair.<sup>57</sup> Around 170 competitors were involved in the championship events, with over 300 in the open and handicap events. This 'was easily a record for the meeting' and suggests that women's athletics went from strength to strength during this period.

With the exception of the *Daily Mirror* Trophy, women's club meetings were usually between two or three local clubs. Some of the matches were mixed, with both men and women's events being offered. Mitcham held some of their club championship events alongside men's events in 1929, at a meeting that was organised to support hospital funds. Other examples were the established men's trophy meetings, in which teams were invited by the host club. Two clubs that regularly invited women's teams to compete in a separate competition alongside the men were Coventry Godiva Harriers and Birchfield. The female athletes appeared to welcome this. Men's meetings received better sponsorship and more coverage by the media. In addition, crowds were bigger at events where men competed. Some women's clubs, such as London Olympiades, put on open events alongside their club competitions but struggled to make a profit and indeed often made a loss. Host clubs had to hire the ground, buy prizes for the winners and provide teas after the meeting, increasing the financial strain these events placed on the security of the club.

As well as open events, many of which were handicaps, the establishment of women's league matches provided some additional competition between local clubs. The inaugural league was organised by Surrey County WAAA, along the lines established by existing male competition of this kind. Two divisions were established and clubs competed against each other several times during the summer season. Both track and field events were included, although in 1936, the first year of the competition, throwing events were not included as scoring events.<sup>58</sup> Middlesex County also established a league in 1938, but an attempt to reintroduce it in 1949 failed, due to the lack of support of some clubs. In 1947, Surrey re-organised their league, stressing the 'team spirit' of such competition. They introduced an

additional five meetings for athletes between fifteen and eighteen years of age. Anxiety about the lack of competition for younger athletes had often been expressed in the immediate post-war years. It was felt to be vital that the younger generation was encouraged to become involved if the sport was to have a healthy future.<sup>59</sup>

The number and range of competitions continued to expand, although throughout the period from the 1920s until the 1960s, sprinters had more opportunities than distance runners and throwers. In 1925, Sophie Elliott-Lynn appealed for field events to be included in more meetings:

If only sports promoting bodies would put on these field events a little oftener, though there might not be the immediate response there is to the "Open Hundred," they would find that soon their entries would greatly enlarge and they would be doing a tremendous service both to the athletes of our country, and, what is more important, to those hundreds of strong, beautifully built girls who are not, and never can be, first-class runners of any distance.<sup>60</sup>

It was not only the smaller number of competitions that affected the progress of field specialists in English clubs. While both the lack of running tracks and poor facilities for field athletes had been noted in the 1930s, it was the throwing and jumping disciplines that were clearly worst off.<sup>61</sup> Athletes at LOAC in the 1930s had to contend with javelins that were not the correct weight, and this continued to be a problem in all the throwing events at many clubs after the war.<sup>62</sup> In 1955, Coventry Godiva ladies' section reported to their General Committee that they urgently required field event equipment, and asked permission to buy both a shot and javelin. Further complaints were made in 1958 that the jumping facilities were 'of a very poor standard and needed attention'.<sup>63</sup>

It was perhaps the lack of opportunities to compete over longer distances in international competition that resulted in far more demand for the sprinting events than any other discipline. After all, there was less incentive to train for an event that did not offer a place in the Olympic Games. Another contributory factor is likely to have been the existing ideals of femininity, which contained clear messages about the female body. The sprinting events were seen by the international governing bodies as being more feminine appropriate, and it would seem that this view was reflected in the numbers of women competing in the longer events and throws in Britain.

As Hargreaves has noted, if greater opportunities for sportswomen were to occur, internalized ideologies about women's bodies, which had become 'common-sense' to both men and women, had to be challenged. Athletics provides a clear example of how women's sport reflected both continuity of and challenge to traditional views. In this way, it provides support for Hargreaves' view that women's participation 'effected a change in public opinion about their physical image and the meanings associated with it'.<sup>64</sup> On the one hand, concerns of some WAAA and club members reflected the international concerns that some of the better female athletes were not 'real' women and supported the introduction of the gender verification test.<sup>65</sup> In addition, competitors were reassured that could remain feminine and urged to dress appropriately when not competing, so that accusations could not be made that the sport led to greater masculinity. Sylvia Cheeseman, who was a member of Spartan LAC, argued that it was the duty of female athletes to look feminine and that she always made an effort to dress appropriately after finishing competing.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, female athletes, by their very participation, challenged traditional opposition to women's involvement. As performances got better, as they did continually through the period in question and women were provided with a range of events in domestic and small international competitions, they undermined opposition.

Nevertheless, the facts remain that sprinting events were more popular. Several clubs such as Leicester and Nottingham were solely 'summer clubs' and had no cross country or walking section. Initially, walking and cross country seasons overlapped and many athletes combined the two. By the fifties, however, the seasons were clearly defined, with cross country from December until March, road walking and road relays in April, during the 'short season,' and then track from April to September. Athletes continued to do both cross country and walking during the winter, because there were so few cross country competitions. The training for each event complemented each other and allowed athletes to remain involved in the club during the winter. The strange situation existed that women could run up to three miles over cross country but no more than a mile on the track. The explanation for this anomaly appears to be that track races were considered more stressful, and that athletes would put in far more effort than they would in cross country. Cross country was considered to suit slower female athletes, who had 'little hope of individual honours'. Like

relays and inter-club track matches, cross country was seen to be character building, 'to build team spirit and result in a really happy spirit [at] clubs'.<sup>67</sup> Women athletes were not spared 'real' courses, but ran in all weathers, negotiating muddy fields, stiles and fences.

### **Establishing the role and support of men**

One the main arguments of this paper is that, throughout the period in question, there was far more opposition to women's participation from within the IOC and IAAF than the local clubs, where many of the positive developments were implemented. It is interesting to note that while the male hegemony was clearly working to deny women opportunities at an international level, men were involved in the development of women's athletics in England. Wherever a club was based and regardless of whether it catered solely for women or not, the influence of men in the development of women's grass roots athletics cannot be denied. Despite the fact that the AAA chose not to govern women's athletics, some of their members provided significant support. Male officials and coaches passed on advice to the newly-formed WAAA and to their affiliated clubs. For example, Mr E.H. Knowles, who was closely involved in the formation of the national WAAA, encouraged the formation of Kensington Ladies' Section. Knowles was quickly established as a well-known and respected official and coach within women's athletics. The influence of 'Teddy' Knowles was not restricted to Kensington Athletic Club. He was also credited with setting up Middlesex Ladies Athletic Club, and, after a disagreement with officials there in 1930, he formed Spartan Ladies Athletic Club.<sup>68</sup>

Drawing attention to the role of men is not to underestimate the fact that athletics provided women with an opportunity to occupy decision-making positions and have significant influence over their sport. It is important not to forget the central role played by women such as Dorette Nelson Neil, Marea Hartman, and Vera Searle, to name only the best known. However, it remains true that club athletics has always been a sport dominated by male coaches, administrators, and officials. Men, who were usually ex-athletes themselves, trained the first women's international and domestic teams. This was the case at both exclusively female clubs and those that had a section for both men and women. Both the national and area women's associations also used male officials in the roles of handicappers, judges, and starters. Although some men continued to express their dislike of women's athletics, as indeed did some women, the support and knowledge

they provided were crucial to the development of the sport.<sup>69</sup> Most of the men were previously involved with men's athletics, either as athletes or AAA officials. At London Olympiades Athletic Club, one male name stands out above all others as being the single most influential person. Joe Palmer was not only a founder member, but was also responsible for helping to run the club on a day-to-day basis for many subsequent years. He held the position of secretary and treasurer at various times and, in addition to his committee work, he gave financial donations to the club, offered prizes for club championships, and provided medals. In 1925, the committee put on record 'the valuable support Mr Palmer gave to the Club. He was down at the training ground every night, except when business took him to the other side of England and was always ready with advice and practical help.'<sup>70</sup>

The minutes contain references to several male coaches, particularly a Mr Turner, who was recognised as playing a central role in the club's success during the mid-twenties. In 1935, LOAC had three male coaches compared to one woman. It was not only in coaching that men played important roles. In addition to Palmer, several men sat on the committee while others were patrons and provided vital financial help. The number of men involved should not be exaggerated; they were in the minority. Nevertheless, several of them held more than one position within a club's administration. Palmer was a prime example of this, as was Dr Harris. The latter was not only a coach but also an LOAC delegate to the Southern Counties Women's Amateur Athletic Association (SCWAAA) and the WAAA, as well as Chairman of the club during the early 1930s.<sup>71</sup>

London Olympiades was not unique in this, although Joe Palmer does seem to have been involved longer than most. W.W. Alexander was BHLS' first coach and 'steered them through the stormy days when women's athletics were frowned upon'.<sup>72</sup> A similar situation existed at Westbury Harriers, where the founder of the men's section, Gilbert Walker, was also credited with being vital to the success of the female athletes.<sup>73</sup> There was a strong male influence at Birmingham Atlanta, which had an exclusively female membership until 1951. Gordon Baragwanath and Charlie Lewis founded the club, with Baragwanath an active committee member and president. It was Lewis, however, who was behind the success of the club. Potential members were recruited from local races, a common practice according to one of his athletes, Beryl

Randle. She recalled that there was a lot of open meetings years ago, a lot of handicap events, track events, and the coach would go along with his girls, but if he spotted somebody who was not in a club colour [club kit], a lot of coaches would do it, you know go along like he did, 'Are you interested? Come and join us' and that is where they picked up a lot of their athletes.<sup>74</sup>

The problem with having one person so influential was that clubs often collapsed if they left. When Charlie Lewis moved to Blackpool in the early fifties, the heart was removed from Birmingham Atlanta. Several of his athletes moved clubs to find other coaches, officials began to leave and, as Charlie had been 'the one with all the drive and enthusiasm ... it just fell apart'.<sup>75</sup> The number of clubs that closed, or merged after the first few years of enthusiasm, also reflected the lack of depth in women's athletics. In 1938, the MCWAAA reported that 'Katcee LAC' had lost their trainer in a car accident and 'could not keep together without him'.<sup>76</sup> The development of the sport clearly depended on a small number of dedicated individuals.

In clubs with few female members, a coach was much rarer. During the 1930s, at Coventry Godiva, male athletes gave the women advice about training.<sup>77</sup> When the women's section was re-established in 1948, attitudes had changed, and although still small, it was better organised. As at the majority of clubs, sprinting was the most popular discipline for women and by the fifties Norman Walker had become a sprint coach. He was to become a stalwart of Coventry Godiva women's section and Warwickshire County WAAA. A middle-distance runner himself, he turned to women's athletics largely because his efforts to become involved in the men's section were continually frustrated. As they already had an established group as committee members and coaches it was hard for a younger man to be accepted. Instead, he became the coach of the growing female section and, in later years, was made Chairman, a position he retained until his retirement in the 1990s.<sup>78</sup>

The influence of men did not always remain as strong, and many clubs provided an environment where women could gain positions of influence. Marea Hartmann progressed through to eventually leading the WAAA from honorary secretary and treasurer of Spartan Ladies Athletic Club. In later years, the good standard of facilities at BHLS attracted athletes but this was not the reason why the club has such a history of consistent

success. Former members explained that it was the presence of Dorette Nelson-Neal (known as Nelson), who was remembered by one of her athletes, Beryl Randle, as not only a 'good coach' but also 'as a god-like figure'.<sup>79</sup> While Birchfield's men and women shared facilities and the women's section was discussed at the men's annual general meeting, the influence of men declined as the years went on. By 1947, BHLS had an all female committee.<sup>80</sup> They also led the way in encouraging former members to become officials and coaches once they stopped competing. By 1952, Birchfield had more female coaches than male in the women's section.<sup>81</sup>

### **The Financial Cost of Competing in Athletics**

As we have seen, athletics emerged in the inter-war years and was therefore similar to several other sports that offered women increasing opportunities in a period that was characterised by economic hardship.<sup>82</sup> Although the first women who competed internationally and founded the WAAA were middle class, the sport was soon open to women from different social backgrounds.<sup>83</sup> Domestic athletics provided women with the opportunity to compete even when an international career was not possible, due to the financial costs. The vast majority of employers would not pay athletes when they were away representing their country and, in a period when travelling to a major championship could mean spending six weeks on a boat each way, it is easy to see why some people would have been unable to take up their places.

Most clubs operated on a limited budget, a situation that did not change after the war. It was often the case that rather than the number of active clubs increasing, new clubs replaced those that could no longer survive. The small number of clubs operating in some areas can be seen via available meeting programmes. While we cannot say for certain how many clubs there were operating at any one time, it does appear that the biggest number were in the South, followed by the Midlands and then the North for most of the period in question. All clubs existed on subscriptions and donations from patrons or members. Obviously, the smaller the number of members, the less money the club would have. Dances and other fund raising exercises, including the usual raffles, jumble sales and, at Christmas, carol singing, helped to keep clubs solvent. LOAC were helped in the forties by the mother of one of their members, Doris Batter. She made vests and shorts which members could purchase, the profits going to the club.

Not only did this help funds, but it also resulted in all team members wearing the same style of racing kit. In the years after the Second World War, funds could be supplemented by broadcasting fees when members were featured in commentaries. Though the athletes did not receive any financial fee for appearing, their club could.<sup>84</sup>

The cost of travelling, as well as entering races, increased as the amount of competition expanded. There appears to have been an effort by some clubs, at least, to keep costs as low as possible in order to allow individuals to join, whatever their income.<sup>85</sup> Committee members were aware of the financial hardship that some of their members experienced. Subsequently they often helped with entry fees and travel expenses, particularly in the inter-war years.

Athletes did struggle, however, when the WAAA Championships was organised over two days, from 1952. The number of entries had continued to increase, necessitating more heats. In addition to paying for their travel and entry, if athletes lived outside London they had to secure Friday off work (usually unpaid) and pay accommodation costs. Several clubs paid the entry fees of their members for championships, although this declined as costs increased. In 1952 the BHLS committee decided that 'every member must pay a quarter of their fare to any Championships or inter-club match outside the radius of thirty miles, and that under that distance no expense shall fall upon the Section.' The aim was that the club could then 'build up [their] finances to ensure representation at all important fixtures'. That season it had been forced to decline invitations to several inter-club meetings, in order to keep the club financially sound. Had they accepted every invitation the balance would have been halved. In another effort to raise money, subscriptions were increased to five shillings for seniors, and two and six for juniors.<sup>86</sup>

The sport had other attractions for less well-off sportsmen and women. Most open races offered prizes, and the handicapping method meant that athletes of all abilities had a chance to win. Many prizes were useful, especially for those trying to set up a home. In the fifties there were even events called 'furniture meetings'. Athletes won items such as a fireside chair, wardrobe and dressing table. Cutlery had long been a regular prize, as were silver rose bowls, various items of cut glass, carriage clocks, scent bottles, and dressing table sets. Although regular competitors might find themselves with more than one of the same item and often gave them away

to relatives, some of the companies who donated prizes allowed athletes to exchange them for something else of the same value. Not only open meetings offered prizes: for example, they were also awarded in handicap events held during the WAAA Championships. In times of economic hardship, the possibility of winning useful prizes must have been an incentive.<sup>87</sup>

Athletes would pay annual subscriptions to join a club and often a small sum to use the track. The cost of entering a race was low and, as we have seen, many clubs contributed towards championship costs. Open races cost a shilling to enter, and for athletes who competed only in their local area the cost of travel remained low. Many people cycled or walked to and from training, regarding it as part of their fitness schedule. Mary Bartleet regularly walked between three and four miles from her house to the Birchfield Harriers' ground. She thought of it as part of her training, but the real reason was that if she caught the bus both ways it would have used all her available money.<sup>88</sup> Walking and cycling added to the fitness of the athletes, and should be taken into consideration when assessing how light the average schedule was.

Nevertheless, one would not want to exaggerate how cheap the sport was. When competition necessitated longer journeys, some athletes struggled to cover the cost. For Betty Loakes, this often meant loss of wages which was something she could ill afford. She was paid hourly and also lost money when she competed in weekday meetings. For invitational and international races, the promoter would often send a train ticket for the athlete. However, any additional costs, such as buses to and from the station, were not reimbursed. This caused financial hardship, as Betty Loakes recalled,

when I went to a floodlit invitational race [in the mid-fifties], the train was late and from there I had to take a taxi, and I when I went to claim for the taxi, twelve and sixpence, it was if I'd asked for ... 'oh no you can't have that! You won't be an amateur any longer.' Well that was quite as much as I earned in a week ... I mean to pay twelve and sixpence for a taxi, well it left me in queer street for the week!<sup>89</sup>

On some occasions, fellow athletes alleviated the cost of competing away from one's local area. Club members would provide accommodation in their own homes for other competitors. In this way, the network of female

athletes around the country was able to reduce the costs of competing and enable teams to travel. As has already been indicated, most athletes were working, but for those on low incomes, the cost of competition could put them off continuing in the sport. Track athletes had to purchase spikes and all competitors needed race kit. It was not necessary, however, to have anything special to wear when not competing. Before the tracksuit became popular in the fifties, most people wore casual trousers and jumpers.

### **Social Activities**

A club's social activities were also an important part of its attraction. London Olympiades and BHLS held regular dances, and in later years single-sex clubs, such as London Olympiades, held their dances with mixed or men's clubs. Winnie Haywood worked for the same company as Jack Bartleet during the 1930s. She had always been interested in running but did not know how to become involved. Jack encouraged Winnie to go to a Birchfield dance and after that she decided to join.<sup>90</sup> Smaller clubs, which did not have the money or were not so well organised, often lacked committee members willing to arrange social activities and failed to hold regular social events. This has been held partly responsible for the small female membership at some clubs, such as Coventry Godiva Harriers, where the number of women involved during the thirties remained between about eight and twelve.<sup>91</sup>

The competitive side of races cannot be doubted and all the female athletes interviewed, who competed both before and after the Second World War, emphasised that they were serious about their performances. However, they argued that this was combined within a healthier and more relaxed atmosphere than has subsequently developed. For instance, in 1956, the SCWAAA Inter-County Championships was described as having a 'garden party atmosphere'.<sup>92</sup> Beryl Randle, who competed in the walks from 1946, remembered that 'there used to be great rivalry between the clubs, Birmingham Atlanta versus Birchfield at one stage. I mean there was other clubs but there was good wholesome competition, and ... yet when you got back in the dressing rooms you were all friends.'<sup>93</sup>

Clubs would often travel by coach to inter-club or trophy meetings and team spirit was built up during journeys as much as it was during competition. Marea Hartman, who competed and officiated for Spartan LAC, fondly remembered how her club used to have singsongs on the bus

and how on long journeys they would stop for fish and chips on the way home.<sup>94</sup> In addition to the aforementioned leagues where men and women competed at the same venue, open handicap meetings gave the opportunity for male and female athletes to mix and this was seen as 'part of the fun'.<sup>95</sup> Clubs used trains before they travelled by coaches, and again this created the chance for getting to know other local athletes and have a good time. In later years, area associations hired a coach, and this enabled athletes from one area to travel together to an event out of their locality. This not only helped to share costs but was also welcomed from a social perspective. As the number of clubs increased, it was not unusual for more than one to use the same training base. This also provided an opportunity to mix with other athletes and develop friendships. Birmingham Atlanta trained at the same venue as Birmingham Walking Club and Lozell Harriers. In an illustration in the way athletes were beginning to challenge perceptions about women's physical abilities, Beryl Randle took this opportunity to train with the male members of the walking club and thus improve her performances.<sup>96</sup>

There were also opportunities to socialise after meetings. Athletes recalled how caterers provided teas after Birchfield Harriers' 'Waddilove Trophy' meetings, and they were usually available following inter-club matches as well. The MCWAAA frequently organised teas after races and on some occasions buffets were provided.<sup>97</sup> During the thirties, in addition to regular dances, Birchfield Harriers enjoyed a social atmosphere after training on a Sunday. Club members were responsible for looking after the track and grass areas, and former athletes recalled this time with pleasure:

Birchfield was rather nice because they always had these training mornings on Sunday mornings, a lot of people in those days lived in back-to-back houses and things like that where they had no fresh air facilities and that was what I always liked about Birchfield; that Sunday morning was always very much of a social time.

I don't know if all Birchfield Harriers would agree with me, but I always thought that was a side of it that they valued most, going down to the Alexander Ground, and they were fairly keen to win their events and trained much harder than I did, but there weren't the incentives that there are nowadays you see really. So on the whole you went for the social side of it as much as for anything else.<sup>98</sup>

Similar occasions were experienced after the war at some clubs. Training was a serious business for Betty and Dave Smith, but a relaxed atmosphere pervaded the track on

many Saturday afternoons at Wicksteed Park when the sun was shining. We would start training at say two, and there would still be people doing something at five, and I don't mean by that we were running round the track all that time but we used to stop and have sandwiches. You know make a day of actually training ... both men and women and children in the centre in prams.<sup>99</sup>

Social occasions were often organised by a club in order to raise much-needed funds. Dances remained a chief source of income, along with sweepstakes after the war.<sup>100</sup> LOAC dances were organised by the Misses Parsons, two sisters who not only took responsibility for this aspect of club life, but also sat on the committee and were particularly involved in cross country and walking. On occasion, clubs were helped by members offering to host social evenings in their homes at their own expense.

Many track races were incorporated into village fetes, carnivals and festivals and these naturally had a more relaxed atmosphere. The very fact that there were fewer competitions meant that participants were less pressured. Some women, rather than complaining about the fewer competitions, saw this as a blessing, and felt that they would not have been able to cope with the expectations of modern athletes. The amount of training they did, which was usually limited to two or three times a week, also suited them. As more women began to work or went into higher education, they could successfully combine their sport, domestic lives and careers. Athletes who confined their racing to the track and field season rarely trained throughout the winter months, and often returned to the club only in March or April. Others did 'keep fit', and played netball, squash or hockey, thus having a complete break from athletics.<sup>101</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Previous work on women in sport has highlighted the constraints that women's sport was working within and, in particular, how perceptions about femininity and women's bodies helped to determine both competitive and leadership opportunities. While athletics was no different in this respect, the evidence presented in this paper has highlighted how the

domestic side of the sport provided women with an opportunity to be actively involved in the process of change. They did not respond passively to the restrictions that were placed on them after the demise of the FSFI and their world championships but created their own competitive opportunities. Concerns about the femininity of women athletes remained a constant concern in this period, not just within the international governing bodies but also for the WAAA and the women's clubs. However, athletics by its very nature challenged some of the accepted ideals of respectable womanhood. As more and more women participated, opposition was undermined, a fact that was reported by the WAAA in 1947.<sup>102</sup> The WAAA pioneered the half-mile and mile and consistently included a full programme of throwing disciplines, events that were frowned upon by the international governing bodies. Their efforts were crucial in gaining international recognition for more events from the 1950s when, together with the USSR in particular, the WAAA presented evidence from previous competitions that undermined claims of medical dangers.<sup>103</sup>

Bearing in mind that athletes were competing in public, often in a mixed arena and with relatively few clothes on, it is interesting to note that many of the first women competitors were from middle class backgrounds. However, it has been shown that club athletics provided an opportunity for women of different social classes to mix, a factor that was emphasised in all the interviews carried out. While international careers were cut short or were prevented altogether by the fact that most employers would not pay athletes while they travelled abroad to compete, it was relatively inexpensive to participate in domestic club competitions. Indeed, the prizes available were deemed by some to be very useful additions to their income, especially when setting up home.

By way of conclusion, it is worth emphasising what club athletics meant to those involved. Athletes spoke of the pride they felt in representing their local club, which in turn represented the area they lived in. Some women stated that athletics enabled them to increase their self-confidence, and develop their physical health and well-being. Friendships were made, a great deal of fun was had and, on occasion, husbands were met. Women were able to travel all over England to represent their club, and in this way experienced more freedom than many other women in the period. The desire for competition and training was of course the main reason that

people joined a club, but the fun and social side of domestic athletics was just as important in maintaining their interest.

Women were also provided with the opportunity to occupy decision-making positions in their club. Women's athletics was therefore quite unusual, even when compared to today's sporting organisations. As officials, coaches, and judges, they were able to influence the development of the sport in their local areas, and at national level as well. They were not passive by-standers, but actively encouraged other women to participate in athletics, and subsequently helped to establish training and competition. Women's athletics in England therefore provides an example of women being involved at all levels of a sport, and of them influencing the direction of their own participation.

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Notes

1 This article is an expanded version of the paper 'The Emergence of Women's Track and Field: The growth of club life and domestic competition 1920s-1950s', presented to the British Society of Sports History conference at the University of Liverpool in April 2000. The material is drawn from my PhD research, Robinson, 1997. This is currently being developed in order for a book to be published by Frank Cass. As a result, it forms part of ongoing research.

2 Holt, 1990, p.8.

3 Mason, 1995, cited in Polley, 2000, p. 85

4 The following are just a small sample of the available autobiographies and bibliographies of British female athletes: Blue, 1992; Emery, 1971; Gunnell and Priest, 1994; Hyman, 1964; Peters, (with Wooldridge), 1974; Rand, 1969; Sanderson, (with Hickman), 1986; Whitbread and Blue, 1988.

5 Watman, 1968.

6 Abrahams, 1961; AAA, 1930; Lovesey, 1979.

7 Webster, 1930.

8 Pallett, 1955.

9 Cowe, 1985.

10 Leigh, 1974.

11 Guttmann, 1991.

12 Hargreaves, 1994, pp. 211-15.

13 Hargreaves, 1994, pp. 131-4.

14 It is safe to say that these minutes of the WAAA could have been expected to include details of the first clubs that affiliated, together with the dates they did so, but all that remains of the years 1922-1926 are summary notes.

15 Athletic Club is abbreviated to AC and Ladies Athletic Club to LAC throughout this paper.

16 This was the foremost magazine for club level and international athletes in the UK in the period being discussed and, indeed, remains so today.

17 A good introduction to the academic work on the female body in sport is Hall, 1996.

18 Hargreaves, 1994; Birrell and Cole, 1994; Cahn, 1994; Costa and Guthrie, 1994; Fletcher, 1984; Hall, 1996; Theberge, 1994; Vertinsky, 1990. For a good overview of Theberge and Vertinsky's arguments see their various chapters in Costa and Guthrie (eds), 1994. Theberge has several chapters in this text, co-authored with Susan Birrell.

19 For more information on this, see *World Sports*, April 1953, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 5-7, May 1953, Vol. 19, No. 5, pp. 5-7, June 1953, Vol. 19, No. 6, p.5, December 1956, Vol. 22, No. 12, pp. 18-19.

20 For more detail on the role of Madame Milliat see Leigh, 1974, 1977.

21 The five events were the 100 metres, high jump, 800 metres, discus and 4 x 100 metres relay. The 800 metres was banned after this Games until 1960.

22 Robinson, 1997, pp. 176-7.

23 AAA *General Committee minutes*, 14 October 1922. These are available in the University of Birmingham's Special Collections Department.

24 Hargreaves, 1994, chapter 6.

25 *Sporting Life*, 2 June 1921. The meeting was held at Paddington on 2 May 1921.

26 *Sporting Life*, 18 August 1922.

27 *The Times*, 6 August 1923, 16 July 1923. *Sport and Play*, 31 May 1924, pp. 14, 28 June 1924, p. 15, 12 July 1924, p. 14, and 9 June 1924, p. 9.

28 Interview with Vera Searle (née Palmer).

29 *Sporting Life*, 3 August 1925, 12 July 1926, and *Daily Mirror*, 17 June 1929.

30 Coventry Godiva General Committee minutes, 10 November 1954. Information was also drawn from an interview with Beryl Randle.

31 Interview with Norma Blaine, 12 May 1993. Norma has continued her involvement with Birchfield Harriers Ladies Section as a coach, team manager and administrator. She is also one of the few women who has secured a place in national athletics administration after the merger of the men and women's associations in 1991.

32 In addition, cross country was not organised for either boys or girls in the state section, although it was part of the curriculum in many grammar schools.

33 Quoted in Scraton, 1992, p. 41

34 *Athletics Weekly*, 13 January 1951, Vol. 5, No. 45, p. 13.

35 Letter from Mr A. Sanderson, *Athletics Weekly*, 20 October 1951, Vol. 5, No. 42, p. 4.

36 This was after a proposal was turned down by the SAA in 1953. For more information on the IOC's opposition see Guttman, 1991, pp. 141-2 and Hargreaves, 1994, p. 216.

37 880 yards was not included for senior girls (15-17 years old) until 1955.

38 In the same way as a women's association was formed separately from the AAA, the Women's Inter-Varsity Athletic Board (WIVAB) was set up on the advice of the men's university governing body, which felt that the women should have their own organisation. In 1922, a sub-committee was formed by the IVAB to consider whether women's sports should be included in their jurisdiction. Subsequently, in 1923 this committee became the WIVAB.

38 For more information, see R. F. Kerslake, 'University Sport. Sport among Women Students', *World Sports*, Vol. 6, No. 5, Mar. 1939, p. 163.

39 Phyllis Hall ran over both the mile and half-mile for Birmingham because 'there was nobody else prepared to run' and she 'was pretty nippy in netball'. *Birmingham Mail*, 6 May 1922, and interview with Phyllis Hall.

40 Stevenson, 1984, p. 252.

41 For more information, see Guttman, 1991, pp. 71-3.

42 For example, The Aircraft Workers' Sports, July 1917, was organised in order to raise funds for the 'YMCA disabled soldiers' and sailors' Hostels and Trade Colonies'. It was sponsored by the *News of the World* and included a short sprint for female employees. Sports days were often organised for the benefit of wounded soldiers, as in the case of the Australian Auxiliary Sports held at Harefield in the summer of 1917. Many

of the meetings held during the war years were under the auspices of the AAA and the men's governing body was therefore sanctioning women's races before their official recognition of women's athletics in the 1920s. See *Sporting Life* 23 July 1917, *Flight* 26 July 1917, *Red Triangle* 27 July 1917. These and additional cuttings are held at Birmingham University in the Special Collections Department.

43 For example, the West End Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) meeting of 1921 included a 75 yards scratch race for women. In 'scratch races' all athletes started together as in races today. This meeting was held at Paddington on 12 May 1921.

44 For more information on the development of international competition, see Robinson, 1997; Webster, 1930; Leigh, 1974, 1977.

45 Audsley, 'Athletics Clubs of Britain', *Athletics Weekly*, 21 October 1950, Vol. 4, No. 42, p. 14.

46 Nora Callebout gained two of these on the track, in the 80 metres (10.6 seconds) and 300 metres (45.4 seconds). In the field events, Florence Birchenough increased the shot-putt record to 29 foot 9½ inches. The club's trips abroad were unique in British women's athletics at this time. In August of 1923 London Olympiades visited Brussels and Antwerp, winning on both occasions. The dominance of the team was significantly aided by the talented Mary Lines who gained five victories in both matches. In the Antwerp meeting, she also created a new world record for the 250 metres with a time of 35 3/5 seconds. This was not to last long as the future WAAA honorary secretary, Vera Searle (née Palmer), bettered it by a further 1/5 of a second later in 1923. The following year saw London Olympiades competing again in Brussels. They retained their over-all supremacy, winning seven out of the nine events and gaining four second and three third places. *Sporting Life*, 18 August 1922. Pallett, 1955, p. 115 and Webster, 1930, pp. 43, p. 52 also gives details of both these matches.

47 *Sporting Life*, 18 August 1922.

48 As an illustration of Lyons support of women's athletics, the company directors presented 'The Lyons Perpetual Cup' for this championship two years later in 1924. Vera Searle (née Palmer) won this for the first three years.

49 *The Times*, 22 August 1932.

50 The club appears to have had several bases to suit the needs of their members at a particular time and to try and recruit new members. LOAC minutes state that they had training bases in Battersea and Paddington in the inter-war years (LOAC committee minutes, December 12, 1925, May 19 1931), and Tooting, Edmonton, Alperton, Hammersmith, and Shep-

herds Bush during the 1950s (LOAC committee minutes, 20 February, 1950, March 21 1950, March 20, 1951, and November 13 1954).

51 Pallett, 1955, p. 114.

52 For information on swimming and water polo, see Hargreaves, 1994, p. 127. Interviews carried out for this research did not indicate any significant problems with gaining access to facilities.

53 Audsley, 'Athletic Clubs of Britain', *Athletics Weekly*, 24 March 1951, Vol. 6, No. 12, p. 5.

54 Personal correspondence from Mary Bartleet (née French), received 29 January 1993.

55 *Sporting Life*, 8 June 1925, *Daily Sketch*, 8 June 1925.

56 *Daily Mirror*, 15 June 1929.

57 *Daily Mirror*, 17 June 1929, says Middlesex won by one point, scoring 30 to LOAC's 29. However, *The Times*, 17 June 1929 says there was a 5 point difference.

58 *World Sports*, June 1936, Vol. 1, No. 2. pp. 75-7.

59 LOAC committee minutes, 19 February 1938, 6 December 1949 and 31 March 1950.

60 Elliot-Lynn, 1925, p. 17.

61 *National Fitness The First Steps* 1937, p. 7

62 LOAC committee minutes, 18 May 1934.

63 Coventry Godiva Harriers, General Committee, 15 June 1955, and 9 July 1958.

64 Hargreaves, 1994, p. 111.

65 *Daily Mirror*, 10 August, 1936. See also Robinson, 1997, chapter 5. Interviews for this research indicated significant support from female athletes for the 'sex test' due to concerns about 'masculine' fellow competitors.

66 Interview with Sylvia Cheeseman. See also *Athletics Weekly*, March 17, 1951, Vol. 5 (11), p. 15. George Pallett's article in this magazine reassures readers that athletics will not result in "Amazonian" women and that training will improve their aesthetic appearance. Throughout the period in question, articles written by both men and women in this magazine include similar comments.

67 C. Mary Bickley, 'There Are Definite Benefits in Cross Country Running', *Modern Athletics*, January 1958, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 20-21. Bickley was the honorary secretary of the Women's Cross Country and Road Walking Association.

68 Interview with Sylvia Disley (née Cheeseman). See also Pallett, 1955, pp. 114-115, p. 122.

69 Men also influenced women's athletics in their role of father, brother, and boyfriend. The necessary approval of one's father was a common theme expressed by several women, particularly those who competed before the Second World War.

70 LOAC committee minutes, 2 December, 1925.

71 LOAC committee minutes, 14 January 1928. Major Hilary Taylor was reported to be very interested in the club and willing to help with donations. He was voted a vice-president at this meeting. See also, 2 December 1925, 12 January 1927, 16 October 1935, 17 October 1933 and 16 December 1932. The president of the club during the 1930s was also a man, but this was only after the female incumbent died and her husband, Dr. Skaife, agreed to take over her position. See also, LOAC committee minutes, 13 December 1929.

72 *Athletics*, May 1947, Vol. 3, No. 18, pp. 18-19.

73 Griffin, 1984, p. 16.

74 Interview with Beryl Randle.

75 Interview with Beryl Randle.

76 MCWAAA committee minutes, May 1938.

77 Interview with Mary Markey.

78 Interview with Norman Walker.

79 Interview with Beryl Randle.

80 *Athletics Weekly*, May 1947, Vol. 3, No. 18, p. 19.

81 Ex-athletes at Birchfield who had taken coaching awards by 1952 were Misses A. Fenn, A. Poet, M. Chadwick and Nelson-Neal who had a WAAA senior coaching badge. BHLS AGM minutes, 1952.

82 Hargreaves, 1994, chapter 6.

83 See Elliot-Lynn, 1925. Additional information was drawn from interviews with Mary Bartleet, Audrey Court, Phyllis Hall, Mary Markey and Vera Searle.

84 In addition, BHLS AGM minutes, 25 February 1956, reported that the London Club's Association sent £13.5s as a token for Diane Leather's appearance at their London versus Moscow match in 1954.

85 At Coventry Godiva Harriers in the 1930s, subscriptions were purposively kept low as it was recognised that many people were struggling financially. Interview with Roma White (née Ashby).

86 BHLS AGM minutes, 1952.

87 Interview with Dave Smith. According to Smith, the value of women's prizes had always been five guineas, but by the fifties had increased to seven guineas, compared to a maximum of ten guineas for men.

88 Interview with Mary Bartleet.

89 Interview with Betty Loakes.

90 Interview with Winnie Haywood.

91 Drake, 1995/6. Researching Coventry Godiva Harriers Ladies Section provided an example of how the lack of club archives can mislead club officials over when women began competing in their area. Present-day club officials were adamant that the women's section was not formed until after the Second World War. Evidence to the contrary was found in contemporary race results, which listed a Coventry Godiva women's team on several occasions. Mary Markey, who was listed in race results under her maiden name of Rossi, was interviewed and was also remembered by one of her rivals, Mary Bartleet.

92 *Athletics Weekly*, 14 July 1956, Vol. 10, No. 28, p. 11.

93 Interview with Beryl Randle.

94 Interview with Marea Hartman.

95 Interview with Betty Loakes.

96 Interview with Beryl Randle.

97 MCWAAA committee minutes, March 1940.

98 Interview with Audrey Court.

99 Interview with David Smith.

100 *Modern Athletics*, November 1957, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 3.

101 For example, LOAC had a netball club in the winter to encourage members who did not compete in cross country to stay involved. See LOAC AGM minutes, October 16, 1935 and *Athletics Weekly*, October 21, Vol. 4, (42) 1950, p. 15. Keep fit was organised at Essex Ladies due to a similar reason, *Athletics Weekly*, March 24, 1951, p. 13. Shirley Hampton, who was an international athlete profiled in *Athletics Weekly*, stated that part of her training consisted on squash. See *Athletics Weekly*, October 30, 1954, Vol. 8, (44), pp. 10-11.

102 *Athletics*, March 1947, Vol. 3, (1), pp. 16-17.

103 Interview with Marea Hartman. In addition, see Robinson, 1997, pp. 224-5.