"Health and Fun Shall Walk Hand in Hand":
The First 100 Years of Women's Athletics at
the University of Wisconsin-Madison

By Chris Hartman

Introduction................................................................................................................. 2
The Early Days ........................................................................................................... 2
Calisthenics & Drills: the Dawn of Regimented Exercise................................. 4
The Birth of the Women’s Athletic Association..................................................... 6
Facilities: Expansion in the 1910s ......................................................................... 9
Blanche Trilling and the Evils of Competition....................................................... 10
The Effects of “Play for Play’s Sake”................................................................. 14
From Culture to Education: The PE Department................................................. 15
Margaret H’Doubler and the Wisconsin Dance Idea........................................... 16
The Quiet Years: 1930s-1950s.............................................................................. 18
Epilogue: The Sea Change of Title IX................................................................. 19
Notes ..................................................................................................................... 22
Introduction

In January 2005, the University of Wisconsin-Madison honored the 30th anniversary of women's intercollegiate athletics with a gala celebration. But women's sports at Wisconsin enjoy a much older and richer history than this milestone suggests. The roots of today's vibrant program of intercollegiate and intramural sports can be traced back to the 19th Century—back to the first days of coeducation at Wisconsin.

The fact that women's intercollegiate sports took so long to develop is no indication of a lack of interest on the part of students. Rather, it is the result of pressure from faculty and administration who feared the effects of competition and who were anxious to establish a respectable role for women in collegiate athletics. Though it is now considered a natural component of the college experience, women's intercollegiate competition has been the subject of intense and prolonged debate; in fact, those who should have been advocating for female athletes were often the ones fiercely battling against the "evils" of inter-institutional play. Though this attitude was surely benevolent, it had the unfortunate effects of delaying the development of women's sports on the college level and severely limiting women's opportunities for decades to follow.

Women's athletics at Wisconsin sprang from the lives of early coeds and the exercise and play they participated in as a matter of course. Over the years, exercise became increasingly systematized and organized, and sports began to materialize. Only fairly recently have athletics been permitted to maintain a presence separate from that of the physical education department and intramural sports. For much of the time, entities such as the PE department, the Women's Athletic Association, the dance group Orchesis, and various sport-specific clubs worked together, co-sponsoring activities and competitions, sharing equipment and resources, and strategizing to meet common goals. These entities are so interrelated that the history of one is often the history of the others. This article, therefore, focuses not only on official teams, but the groups, organizations, and administration that comprise the spectrum of experience of women's athletics at Wisconsin.

The Early Days

Victorian women were often assumed to be in poor health—frailer both physically and mentally than their male counterparts. In the late 1800s, the increasing presence of women on college campuses raised particular concerns about the effect such a new
environment would have on women's health. Women who left the protective sphere of home to earn an education were thought to be particularly susceptible to the dangers of overexertion and strain.

Women had been officially admitted to the University of Wisconsin in 1863 (though relegated to the periphery of the Normal School), and immediately the issue of their physical health was addressed by the Board of Regents. In their report for that year, they declared, "A gymnasium will be fitted up in the South Building, where ladies will be trained in Lewis' new system of gymnastics." In their 1872 report, the Regents mentioned establishing a room in Ladies' Hall, for the practice of gymnastics accompanied by music. There is no evidence that either of these suggestions was ever acted upon.

The newly accepted coeds, for their part, very quickly indicated an interest in physical fitness. In 1874, the first year women were admitted to the university proper, they petitioned the faculty for use of the men's gymnasium; permission was granted, for two 60-minute sessions per week. University Press applauded the women for taking the initiative: "we glory in the heroism and pluck of our sister students and assure them that if they will persevere in spite of such trifles as broken ribs and smashed noses there is no reason why they cannot become celebrated athletes."  

By 1875, the Board of Visitors recommended daily use of the new "Health Lift," an exercise machine in Ladies' Hall. They must not have felt their recommendation was taken seriously, however, for the following year their report on the women's health was ominous indeed. Women suffered from a double burden, the Visitors explained—an inherently weaker constitution, coupled with terrible strain induced by working extra hard to keep up with the male students academically. These strains culminated in "bloodlessness, followed by a train of evils which it is not necessary here to enumerate." This condition, the report continued, showed itself in "the sallow features, the pearly whiteness of the eye, the lack of color, the want of physical developments in the majority, and an absolute expression of anaemia [sic] in very many of the women students."

President John Bascom, longtime advocate for women's education, came to the defense of Wisconsin's coeds, noting his frustration at the Visitors' unprogressive stance so soon after the debate had presumably been settled:
"We regret these opinions because they tend to open a controversy just closed, and to compel us to travel a second time over ground already painfully trodden. . . . To be pushed back into the water, when we have just reached shore, is trying. . . . Contrary to the opinions of the visitors, the young women do their work with less rather than with greater labor than the young men." Bascom goes on to describe an informal survey he conducted regarding absence from class due to illness. In an 8-week period, he noted 155 absences for men, and only 18 for women, who at that time comprised just over 25% of the student body.

The Visitors remained concerned for the health of the fairer sex, however, and continued to call for exercise accommodations throughout the 1870s. In particular, they recommended boats and a gymnasium. By this time, there were some "appliances" in Ladies' Hall, but no dedicated or extensive facilities.

During the early 1880s, women were involved in a number of activities that were loosely organized, if at all. President Bascom was suspicious of very strenuous physical activity but approved of low-key recreation, so during his tenure physical activity remained largely informal. In their spare time, women played croquet, tennis, and catch, took walks around Lake Mendota, and rode bicycles. By 1886, the Board of Visitors had changed their tune, praising the Wisconsin women for their good health.

**Calisthenics & Drills: the Dawn of Regimented Exercise**

Women's athletics had its biggest boost to date when Clara E.S. Ballard arrived from the Boston's Allen School of Gymnastics in 1889. She convinced the Board of Regents to allow her space in Ladies' Hall to conduct voluntary classes in physical culture, as it was then called. Because she was not affiliated with the university, Ballard was required to provide all of her own equipment and received no salary, but she did charge students a fee to participate.

Physical education at the time was synonymous with gymnastics and calisthenics; classes consisted of drills and exercises using equipment such as dumb-bells, Indian clubs (objects resembling bowling pins), wands, and various arrangements of bars, usually performed to live piano accompaniment. The setup in Ladies' Hall was less than desirable: the room was shared with music classes, so equipment and furniture had to be moved at the beginning and end of each session. Dressing rooms consisted of a curtailed 4'x6' space with a basin for sponge baths. Ballard's classes were popular enough that the next year the university purchased her equipment and hired her on at a salary of
$250. Gym class became a requirement for freshmen and the following year her salary doubled.

Interest in activities outside the gymnasium increased with the creation of a pedestrian club in 1892 and the popularity of seasonal activities such as sleigh riding and boating; female students also joined together to build a lawn tennis court. There were coed cycling and tennis clubs, and from 1896 to 1900, men and women presented a joint gymnastics exhibition.

By the end of the century, men's intercollegiate athletics were well established, in no small part due to the support of President Adams, as well as the increasing popularity of football, which Merle Curti and Vernon Carstensen dubbed the "common denominator of student interest." They were also becoming more organized, as evidenced by the formation of the precursor to the Big Ten Conference. Women, on the other hand, were still fighting for the physical space needed to perform their exercises.

For several years the Board of Visitors agitated for a women's gymnasium, particularly after the Armory (Red Gym) opened for the use of male students in 1894. Finally, Ladies' Hall was remodeled in 1895. The new arrangement included two floors dedicated to the physical culture department, complete with dressing rooms and bathing facilities.

Interest in the physical culture class seems to have dipped slightly during the short-lived tenures of the next two instructors. Then Abby S. Mayhew (sometimes spelled Abbie) from the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics was hired. She served as instructor in physical culture and as mistress of Ladies' Hall. The program grew rapidly under her tutelage and eventually she received permission to drop her duties as mistress in order to focus full-time on the rapidly expanding department.

The birth of women's athletics at Wisconsin is typically hailed as 1895, when Andrew O'Dea, the men's crew coach, agreed to coach the ladies as well. Seven years later, however, Abby Mayhew lamented that "crew rowing has not been developed at all, for two important reasons, the girls do not know how to swim and have no way of learning, and we have no boats at our disposal." A women's crew team is first depicted in the 1903 Badger yearbook, but equipment seems to have remained a problem; the department's 1916 biennial report suggests that the recent completion of a bath house might facilitate the purchase of boats "in order that the water activities for the women may be organized."

At the turn of the century, the focus of coursework began to shift away from gymnastic drills toward games and sports. By 1902, Abby Mayhew was arguing in the Daily
Cardinal for a program consisting only of sports, which "best draws out the body, and produces health and happiness." Around this time, two events occurred which altered the course, pace, and nature of women's athletics at Wisconsin and across the nation: the introduction of basketball, and the creation of the Women's Athletic Association (WAA).

The Birth of the Women’s Athletic Association

In December, 1902, an announcement appeared in the Daily Cardinal calling on interested students to attend a meeting to create an athletic association for women. The association would be modeled upon the men's association and would govern all athletic activity. The idea was obviously a popular one: at that first meeting, officers were elected for six different sports (basketball, bowling, hockey, tennis, golf, and rowing). Shortly thereafter, in the Christmas edition of the Daily Cardinal, Abby Mayhew articulated the purposes such an organization would serve and the reasons behind its creation. She complained that Wisconsin was lagging behind other schools in this respect, and that the Women's Athletic Association was necessary in the face of a significant increase in "athletic spirit." Besides, the WAA would usher in a "better era for women, when health and fun shall walk hand in hand."13

It would be difficult to overstate the influence of the WAA on women's athletics at Wisconsin. Over the course of more than half a century, it served as an umbrella organization, promoting and sponsoring women's athletics and physical activity across the board. Its scope extended beyond the realm of regulating sports, however. In addition to organizing competitions, the group hosted weekly teas and other social functions, orchestrated entertainment for the general student population, and was a very successful fund raising machine—using profits to fund its own operation, as well as the scholarships that it distributed.

Although the WAA was influential, it was certainly not autonomous. By design, and in a very real way, the WAA and the physical education department were partners. The WAA student-run board was supervised by physical education faculty and the two entities collaborated so often that it is difficult to draw clean lines between them. Even the Physical Education Club, a WAA club for majors and faculty, "at all times . . . co-operates with the Physical Education department, and endeavors to be of service to the department and all its members."14

The WAA was originally conceived of as a "secretive" honorary group with elected members. It was reorganized on a more inclusive basis in 1913, with membership hinging on participation and interest, rather than on a private vote. A point system was instituted, in which points were earned by participating in sports, playing for a team in a final tournament, taking an elective third year in gym, or receiving honors in a particular
event. Pins, a "W" emblem, and a "W" sweater were the rewards for earning points. A final emblem, available for seniors, was awarded not for a point total but for "the broader basis of womanliness and service to athletics at Wisconsin." A piece in the Badger spoofed this much-touted notion of womanliness, as well as the enthusiasm displayed by the women of the WAA. The article claimed the group was founded "with the idea of instilling a more womanly womanliness in the women of Wisconsin. The general idea appears to be that if a woman runs three miles, hikes five, swims ten, and tennises fifteen in an afternoon she is a womanly woman, which is nothing if not an interesting theory." Over the years the WAA sponsored many clubs, including the Physical Education Club, for majors and faculty; the Dolphin Club, for swimming and diving; the Outing Club, a precursor to today's Hoofers; and Orchesis, the student dance group. The WAA controlled more than the rules of competition. In 1913, training rules were instituted, which outlawed pastry, tea, coffee, candy, or hot breads. Fruit was the only acceptable between-meal snack. Athletes were required to sleep at least 8 hours per night (except for one weekend night), and retire by 10:30 p.m.

Perhaps the biggest WAA event of the year was the May Fete. It began in 1903, when a lawn fete was held to raise money to construct a women's building. The event proved so popular that it was repeatedly annually, and the entirety of spring physical education classes were dedicated to its preparation. It showcased many of the talents of the Wisconsin women, originally including everything from dances and club swinging to singing and readings. In later years, the program was focused on a series of dances, often international in scope, with elaborate costumes for each dance number.

Although the events changed from year to year, the May Pole Dance was the cornerstone of the May Fete and was typically performed by the freshmen. In the established tradition of maypole dances, a tree or pole is decorated with flowers and long ribbons, which the dancers hold. Through the intricacies of their dance, the ribbons are woven around the pole. The pole itself, a tree salvaged from the clearing for Lathrop Hall, was used year after year. Upon the conclusion of the first May Pole Dance, the crowd pounced upon the pole and stripped it of its decorations. The following year, the women had a plan: they surrounded the pole and sang Varsity while police carried off the pole's decorations. As a countermeasure, the crowd threw the pole in Lake Mendota, where it was retrieved the next day by a brave coed. The last Fete was held in 1917. In the face of World War I, the event's elaborate costumes and decorations seemed rather indulgent.
The WAA also sponsored the popular Field Day events. Began in the late 1910s as an interclass track and field meet, Field Day soon became the championship forum for all interclass and intramural outdoor sports, including archery, tennis, and baseball. No admission was charged, and no bleachers were erected for the event, ensuring that participants and observers would co-mingle on the field. Dance Drama, which grew out of the May Fete, was another feature of Field Days; it was so popular that it later gained its own theatre venue. In the mid-1920s, Field Day became part of the Mother's (later Parent's) Weekend.

The WAA was an active fundraiser for its many clubs and activities. The first County Fair was held in 1912, in which the gymnasium was transformed via saw dust, booths, and tents into a fairground. Wiskits (originally Wisconsin Skits), a popular talent competition open to all university women, also had its start as a WAA fundraiser.

In one of its largest fundraising drives, the group raised $3,500 and secured a 99-year lease from the Board of Regents to build a cottage on Lake Mendota, on the Eagle Heights tract. It opened in 1925 and was a popular destination for many year-round outdoor activities and overnight ventures. Unfortunately, the cottage was used for less than fifteen years before falling prey to increasing vandalism and decreasing interest. It became the property of the Union and Black Hawk Lodge, as it was then known, became a "drop-in" shelter for all students engaging in outdoor activities. It eventually closed for good in 1948.

Not coincidentally, the WAA came into its own after the university hired Blanche Trilling to head the physical education department. Trilling, who had been the Director of Physical Education at Chicago Normal School (later Chicago Teacher's College), arrived at Wisconsin in 1912. She left an indelible mark on the school and on the direction and organization of women's sports nationwide. A colleague once remarked of Trilling that a list of her accomplishments "would mean enumeration of almost every important advance in Physical Education." Under her care, the department expanded, the fledgling professional course matured, and the number of activities multiplied.

Trilling's position on fitness and sports was expansively optimistic, braided through with notions of morality, good citizenship, and inclusiveness: "A sound constitution, a good understanding, a benevolent heart, an honest and upright personality, these are the characteristics which physical education, if wisely administered, may develop in an individual . . . . May we never fail to maintain them, while working always for an increased and more efficient activity which, if it come to perfection, can never perish, but will instead go on upbuilding the physical and moral fiber of a great people!" This
enthusiastic attitude was the foundation for women's athletics at Wisconsin for the next four decades.

**Facilities: Expansion in the 1910s**

While interest and participation in sports had increased greatly around the turn of the century, facilities for women's athletics had not kept pace. President Birge characterized the women's gymnasium as "ridiculously inadequate" in 1902. Additional and persistent lobbying by the students, faculty, and Board of Visitors eventually led to the construction of Lathrop Hall, which opened during the second semester of the 1909-1910 school year. At that time, the building was considered state of the art in nearly every respect. It housed a spacious, three-story gym with encircling overhead track, a pool, 4 bowling alleys, locker and shower rooms, and administrative and teaching space.

Perhaps the beautiful new facilities increased student interest in sports; perhaps the students' interest had been greatly underestimated. At any rate, when Blanche Trilling arrived a mere three years later, she immediately began angling for money for new lockers, showers, and dressing rooms. As she recollects, "When I came to Madison, the Board of Regents had just finished completing a building which was considered to be one of the most modern and best equipped women's buildings in the country. . . . Imagine [their] consternation when I pointed out that Lathrop Hall" required expansion.

By 1916, the department had expanded to offer gymnastics, apparatus work, swimming, social dancing, hockey, basketball, tennis, bowling, archery, baseball (indoor and outdoor), fencing, and track and field. Even with this remarkable array of activities, and new facilities to house them, the department was not given priority. It shared Lathrop Hall with other academic departments and many social activities, and gym classes were often "shushed" for disturbing meetings in the parlor above. Classes could not be held on Fridays, when the gym was decorated for dances and social functions. Year after year, departmental reports contain pleas for greater funding, space, and facilities, describing long lines for the changing rooms and tennis courts spread so far apart that it was impossible to teach class on them.

Outdoor activities were held primarily at Camp Randall, though this posed problems regarding decency. It was entirely inappropriate for the young women to walk the eight or so blocks from Lathrop Hall, where the dressing rooms were, to Camp Randall in their standard costume, consisting of dark blue bloomers, a loose white shirt, and stockings. The solution was for the women to change into their uniforms in Lathrop, put on skirts to cover their legs for the walk to Camp
Randall, and then remove their skirts in a tent erected on the field for that purpose. This was the situation until a field house was constructed in 1917.

All too often, women's facilities bore the brunt of larger crises. Lathrop was briefly closed during 1917-18 to conserve coal; when it reopened, it housed not coeds, but cadets in training. During the flu epidemic of 1918, the administration turned the building into a campus infirmary. Because women were not permitted to share the men's facilities during these times, sports and physical education classes were restricted to outdoor activities. Eventually, however, as new buildings arose on campus, other departments relocated, leaving physical education to expand into the space they left. To this day, Lathrop houses the Dance department and serves as a practice space for club sports.

**Blanche Trilling and the Evils of Competition**

A period of intense debate regarding competition marked the next few decades of women's athletics. The lightning rod for this controversy was basketball, one of the first true team sports for women and wildly popular from the beginning. The reaction of physical educators to basketball shaped not only the nation's understanding of women's athletic possibility, but determined the nature and tenor of college sports for decades to follow.

Just one year after basketball was invented in 1891 by James Naismith, Senda Berenson modified the rules for women and started a team at Smith College. Women's rules divided the court into two or more zones, with two players from each team limited to each zone. Dribbling more than three times was forbidden, as was blocking, stealing the ball from another player, or holding the ball for more than three seconds.

The phenomenon caught on with astonishing rapidity. In its initial incarnation, it seemed gentile enough: with the revised rules, the game was slow-moving and more stationary, and therefore did not tax a woman's delicate system. Neither did it offend entrenched notions of femininity—except, of course, for the bloomers and stockings, scandalous enough that male spectators were barred at Smith. But soon enough the specter of competition raised its ugly head.

Women's basketball was introduced to Wisconsin in 1897. The first team, coached by men and women, initially played games against Milwaukee Normal School and local high school teams. Within two years, however, what we would consider a varsity squad reverted entirely to intramural play. Although this is often attributed to a lack of student time and decent coaching, it is important to note that those in power were aligning themselves against the endeavor.

This was a common pattern across the country: women enthusiastically embraced basketball, and quickly moved to form teams and leagues which began competing against one another. But within a very short period of time, the backlash against intercollegiate
competition had gained sufficient momentum to shut down most of the established lines of competition.

The opposition to competition revolved around a few axes, none of which had very much to do with the reality of women competing athletically. First and most simply, what was seen as the inherently aggressive nature of competition clashed with notions of "ladylike" behavior, as defined by the upper-middle class. People engaged in competition often lost control in the heat of the moment, and such exertion by women was unseemly. Justifying such a position was the vague and unfounded but pervasive fear that physical activity could irreparably damage the female reproductive system.

Katherine Saunders describes the delicate balancing act that athletic women had to perform to stay under society's radar:

"They helped keep their deviations from the norm secret by devices such as insisting on proper appearance, constructing rules which minimized the risk to face and figure, avoiding the glare of publicity, and by taking inordinate care to preserve fertility and the reproductive system by prohibiting play during the menstrual cycle."24

The debate surrounding menstruation, in fact, centered less on whether women should be permitted to play sports and games during their cycle, than on how long they must abstain from such activity. The threat to women was not only physical, however. According to Blanche Trilling, Wisconsin's resident expert, exposure to the "evils of commercialization and exploitation of outstanding girl athletes often leads to the dander of nervous breakdowns."25

The other set of objections to competition were a reaction to the problems that plagued men's intercollegiate sports. Initially, control over athletics was largely left to the undergraduate students, and later the alumni, without the oversight of university administration. As the popularity of sports ballooned, however, issues multiplied. Football, in particular, was widely regarded as problematic, if not downright corrupt. Teams often (and sometimes, rightfully) accused rivals of hiring professionals to pose as student players. Gambling, cheating, and unsavory recruiting practices were common. Fans had become, literally, fanatical.

Reactions to these problems varied. President Roosevelt threatened to ban football altogether if on-field brutality was not curtailed. Frederick Jackson Turner articulated a more intellectual critique of the situation, leveling the accusation that athletics corrupted academic ideas. Perhaps the most common reading of
the situation, however, was that all the problems with athletics had one root cause: a focus on profits, in the form of gate receipts.

To fill a stadium, you need a winning team, which necessitates having the best players. The exploitation of young players, the use of professionals, and the commercialism and brutalization of the sport all stemmed from this point. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) was formed in 1906 to address all of these problems, and out of its work sprung systems of faculty and institutional control. The organization's control extended only to men's athletics, however; it did not become involved in women's athletics until 1980.

As early as the 1897-98 academic year, Wisconsin's Board of Visitors had expressed relief that the women's physical culture department had escaped "the disturbing element of athletics" that plagued men's sports. Many concluded that women's athletics must be spared the horrors that had befallen the men's program, whatever the cost. Women's athletics, therefore, were from the beginning a reactionary measure, and strictly controlled; over time, they developed into a sports program different in kind from the male counterpart.

At the helm of Wisconsin women's athletics, Blanche Trilling was a proponent of girls' rules, and fervently believed that competition was an unnecessary and exclusionary evil. Like most physical educators of her day, she saw yet another danger in the competitive environment—the neglect of the majority of students in favor of catering to a few superstars. Wisconsin's Athletic Director George Little, whose jurisdiction included both the men's and the women's departments, began the Athletics for All campaign, designed to get as many students as possible, regardless of ability, involved in sports. Likewise, Trilling was a staunch supporter of club and intramural systems, and doubtless contributed to the WAA's great influence and longevity.

Meanwhile, Trilling began to play an increasing important role on the national stage. In 1917, in one of the first efforts to create a unified governing body for women's college athletics, Trilling hosted a meeting of WAA students and faculty from 23 universities across the Midwest. The following year, the meeting was national in scope, and a new regulatory agency for women's sports was born, the Athletic Conference of American College Women (ACACW).

In accordance with Trilling's principles, the ACACW emphasized collaboration between a university's physical education department and the campus WAA, fostered student participation in the organization and administration of activities, and officially discouraged intercollegiate play. In 1933, the group became the Athletic Federation of College Women (AFCW), the leading authority regarding women's sports for the next several decades.
Trilling was a persuasive speaker, and unflinchingly rallied for her cause at every opportunity—in professional correspondence, in speeches, in the press. She was a member of the Board of Governors of the National Amateur Athletics Federation (NAAF), and sat on the executive committee for that group’s Women’s Division. The latter was convened in 1923 by Mrs. Herbert Hoover, President of the Girl Scouts (her husband, future President Herbert Hoover, was then US Secretary of Commerce).

The NAAF committee drew up a list of recommendations that became prevailing wisdom for women’s collegiate athletics for at least the next thirty years. The report stressed enjoyment over winning, athletics for all versus training for few, and the role of educator as protector from exploitation. They recommended female coaches and directors to serve the specific needs of female athletes, defined the proper motivation for all competition as "play for play's sake," and discouraged valuable prizes, emphasis on individual achievement, and, most emphatically, inter-institutional play. The ethos of this movement is summed up tidily in the slogan: "A sport for every girl and every girl in a sport."

From today's vantage point, long after women's intercollegiate sports have become an accepted fact of life, it is startling and disconcerting to encounter some of the opinions offered by Trilling on the subject. "I am delighted to know that you have wiped out future state tournaments for girls' basketball in your state," she writes in a letter. "I feel that you have made a great stride forward." Perplexingly, she also at times claimed not to be an enemy of competition; in another letter, she claims (perhaps a trifle disingenuously), "Personally, I have found no interest displayed here in intercollegiates. There has been no formal disapproval on my part, so far as the girls are concerned and if I felt that there was strong interest, I am not at all sure but what I should have let them go ahead and try it out."

Trilling's judgment was certainly not flawless—she claimed that the general population was losing interest in intercollegiate sports and predicted that "colleges will, within a very short time, rue the day that they spent so much time and money on large stadia and field houses for a special group of super-athletes." She did have reason to be wary, however. The only extent example of an intercollegiate program was the men's version, which had been plagued by improprieties (and downright illegalities) from the very beginning.

To those who attributed these attendant "evils" to an emphasis on winning and financial gain, the solution was simple: eliminate dramatic competition and focus on a program of inclusion, geared toward the benefit and enjoyment of the masses, without the unhealthy focus on winning or the exploitation of young players. While their
motives were understandable, and perhaps even admirable, their lack of willingness to try other approaches seems stubborn and short-sighted. With the appropriate safeguards in place, there is no reason a democratic intramural program could not coexist alongside a more rigorous varsity program. Unfortunately, no such compromise ever seems to have been seriously considered. The option of competitive sports was merely eliminated, fostering an atmosphere of structural and institutional inequality, and virtually shackling the development of women's athletics for decades.

The Effects of “Play for Play’s Sake”

The most obvious result of the official endorsement of intramural over intercollegiate play was a severe developmental delay as regards competitive women's sports. Another significant result was the WAA's monopoly on campus athletics. The WAA embodied the democratic ideal many physical educators were striving for. In its impetus, structure, and activities, the organization represented diffusion of power, the elimination of superstars, and the active recruitment of as many members of the community as possible.

The WAA's goals, it seems, were nearly holistic, stretching into the arenas of social life, entertainment, and culture. That the WAA thrived in an environment where intercollegiate activity was banned is hardly a surprise, nor a coincidence. After all, the association was designed by, or in concert with, the very physical educators that had so effectively demonized intercollegiate competition.

The WAA sided with the administration in its resistance to intercollegiate sports. This united front presented both an understanding of how sports should be played and the appropriate outlet for doing so. The official critique of competition did not, however, seem to dampen Wisconsin women's thirst for it. Although they were barred from competing against other schools, students enthusiastically participated in more "acceptable" forms of competition—i.e., interclass, intramural, and inter-sorority matches and championships. Presumably these types of rivalries would remain more friendly and ladylike because they would attract less attention, fewer fans, and therefore avoid the financial pressures and moral pitfalls associated with "real" competition.

It is interesting to note exactly where the thin line between "healthy" and "evil" competition was drawn. The official stance was that competition was not inherently evil, but became evil when winning was emphasized over enjoyment—which was inevitable when school spirit entered the picture. Apparently, this rabid loyalty applied only to the university itself, and not to, say, a sorority.

It should be noted that intramural sports rapidly gained in popularity with university men as well as women. This is perhaps linked to Athletic Director George Little's Athletics for
All program, as well as the decision in 1927 to grant gym credit for participation in certain team sports, as long as they were properly supervised.\textsuperscript{33}

The success of the WAA can be seen within the measure of a three-year span. Basketball was the first official intramural sport, co-sponsored by the WAA and the physical education department in 1925; there were 215 participants. The following year, 848 students took part in seven sports; interest was greater than facilities would allow, and the gym at Luther Memorial Church was rented for overflow. By the 1927-28 school year, 1,694 women and 52 organizations (roughly 50\% of the female student body) were participating in WAA-sponsored activities.\textsuperscript{34} Intramural tournaments were held in basketball, bowling, hockey, horse shoes, softball, swimming, tennis, track, and volleyball. At the Winter Carnival, teams competed in tobogganing, sledding, skiing, speed/figure skating, and ice hockey.

Swimming enjoyed a steep rise in popularity and the Dolphin Club was formed in 1920. Blanche Trilling attributed the increase in swimmers to the invention of the hair dryer. Perhaps the modernization of swimwear also had some effect. Previous incarnations of swimsuits were similar to full dresses, complete with stockings that were removed after entering the water. The sight of all that excess material had prompted Trilling to quip, "swim if you can, but sink if you must."\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{From Culture to Education: The PE Department}

Meanwhile, the physical education department had become increasingly sophisticated and was rapidly growing in popularity. Gym class was required for freshman and sophomores, and students were welcome to continue their participation after that. The department employed a physician to examine the students three times during the two years. The primary purpose of these examinations was to weed out those with weaknesses or disorders. A medical presence certainly lent credence to the department, but it also probably helped to inoculate it in a real way from those who believed physical activity was harmful to women. If certain conditions were caught early, they could not later be blamed on gym class.

Students were assigned to regular, light, or corrective work, or rest class. Corrective work was prescribed for those with a temporary or permanent disability, ranging from cardiac conditions and chronic appendicitis to constipation and varicose veins. "Menstrual disorders" were a common complaint, and as a matter of course women were given at least three days off, which they spent in rest period. The rest period was described approvingly by the department as instilling the "habit of rest, and of sleeping in the day time."\textsuperscript{36} The \textit{Daily Cardinal} mocked the concept, calling it "the only place in the university where for 'not
thinking', praise is given—and credit.” By 1914, however, Trilling claimed that "hordes no longer petition for rest gym, but, instead, a girl feels rather aggrieved when commanded to take it." Probably not coincidentally, this change in attitude occurred as the focus of gym class shifted from wand-swinging drills to games and play.

The program for majors, one of the first of its kind in the country, was geared toward producing teachers of physical education. In 1912, there were ten majors; by 1920, there were 134 majors and 28 minors. The first class, three in number, graduated in 1913. The intensive program required a heavy load in the hard sciences (biology, chemistry, physiology, and anatomy), 10 hours of practice per week (uncredited until 1932), student teaching, and a week of field work, during which the students were sent into the community to live and teach. Scholarship, teaching ability, professionalism, personality, physical appearance, and carriage were all considered when the faculty met as a group to decide which students were up to the rigors of the program and which should be encouraged to try another track.

In 1927, the first Master's students in physical education graduated; in 1933 the first Ph.D. was granted. Graduates of the program appear to have been in high demand: a pamphlet produced by the department in the 1930s bragged that no graduate who wanted to teach was unplaced in the field.

Administrative control of Wisconsin athletics was in dispute during the 1930s. Historically, the directors of the men's and women's physical education departments reported to the same supervisor. In June of 1930, the women's department gained its independence, and the professional curriculum was folded into the school of education.

**Margaret H’Doubler and the Wisconsin Dance Idea**

No discussion of Wisconsin's physical education department would be complete without mentioning the dance program and Margaret H'Doubler. Along with a few other progressive thinkers, H'Doubler helped to reinvent our understanding of dance and movement. A Wisconsin student and WAA president, H'Doubler was hired by the physical education department after graduation, despite having no teaching background, to coach basketball.

After several years H'Doubler left to pursue graduate work at Columbia University. She was urged by Blanche Trilling to spend her time in New York looking for a form of dance that could be taught at Wisconsin. According to Trilling, H'Doubler, horrified at the suggestion, exclaimed "What, and give up basketball?" She accepted the challenge, but was largely discouraged. Toward the end of the 1916, she wrote to Trilling, "Sorry, it's no use. There's nothing you'd have, or I'd teach. The dance world is all pride and petty rivalry, the techniques mostly defy the human structure and function and the presentation is anti-educational in every way."
Shortly thereafter, however, H'Doubler was struck by inspiration in a music class, and what eventually came to be known as the Wisconsin Dance Idea was born:

"We'll begin on the floor, relieve the body of the pull of gravity and explore movement in a basic way. We'll rediscover the body's structural limitations and possibilities, we'll attend to movement sensation. We'll create movement out of our knowledge of body structure, no imitation. We'll study movement as movement first. We may never arrive at dance, but we'll make an honest beginning."\(^{42}\)

In 1917, H'Doubler taught the first dance class at Wisconsin. She rarely performed demonstrations, relying instead upon a skeleton to illustrate anatomy, and her students' understanding of their own individual bodies. After students were instructed in the fundamentals of movement, they tapped into their own creativity to invent dances. They even made their own tunic-like garments for performances. The emphasis was always on dance as a means of personal expression rather than as an art form.

Although she initially expressed doubt, Blanche Trilling was won over by the group's first public performance, Dance Drama, at the 1918 Field Day. Trilling provided support and institutional encouragement, and along with Dean Sellery helped H'Doubler create a curriculum for the first dance major in the United States. They held meetings with engineers, physicists, biologists, and philosophers to create an interdisciplinary approach to the study of dance and movement. The program began in 1926.

A weekly workshop was convened, organized as a WAA club, for students who wanted to study dance above and beyond university coursework. The group's name, Orchesis, came from the Greek word for the universal nature of movement, which incorporated H'Doubler's ideas about synthesizing the physical with the spiritual and the intellectual. A traveling demonstration group helped spread the word, to wide acclaim, until President Birge instructed them to stop: "After all, we can't have the University known as a dancing school," he protested.\(^{43}\) From then on, interested parties came to Madison to observe H'Doubler's approach. The club was opened to men in 1933.

H'Doubler helped free dance from the rigidity of ballet and the "five steps," and worked toward a greater understanding of the body and our relationship to it—helping to create the foundation of modern dance. H'Doubler's innovative approach received international acclaim, and has gradually become the standard method for teaching dance. She taught at Wisconsin until her retirement in 1954.
The Quiet Years: 1930s-1950s

Even though certain elements of athletics were restricted to them, the women of Wisconsin, like women all across the country, played around the rules as best they could. Play Days, for instance, are a perfect example of both women's desire to compete athletically and the oddity of the system in place. Though technically intercollegiate, the wildly popular events (participated in by 80% of schools, according to one estimate) were an acceptable form of competition because all the players from various schools were jumbled together and divided into color teams. The absence of school affiliation was thought to eliminate the emphasis on winning. Additionally, teams were unable to train in advance and could not be accused of catering to superstar athletes. The events were, for a time, mutually satisfying: students could try their best against large numbers of competitors, and faculty could rest assured that no one would be morally deformed by an overabundance of team spirit.

There were other loopholes in the ban on intercollegiate competition. Some sports, such as archery, bowling, and swimming, conducted telegraphic meets with distant schools. This popular technique (over half the schools polled in one study participated) employed telegraphs to transmit updates and scores to the competitor. The 1933 Badger reported that "intercollegiate competition is the chief attraction of the Archery Club." The team competed against Smith, Sweet Briar, and Mount Holyoke, and participated in national intercollegiate tournaments. It appears that only face-to-face, team competition was the true danger.

The 1930s presented Wisconsin students with a number of coed opportunities, from mixed baseball, volleyball, tennis, and golf clubs and tournaments to the newly founded Hoofers Club. More recreational activities such as horseshoes and ping pong were instituted. In addition, a gradual shift in participation is evident, from inter-class to intramural competition. Taken together, all of these trends point toward a less serious, less competitive attitude toward sports—an attitude which was accompanied by a decrease in the visibility of women's athletics, as well as a dramatic drop in the number of participants.

In the 1940s, women's athletics went underground at Wisconsin. Most written accounts of the subject skip from the 1920s or 1930s directly to the 1960s—because nearly all information, images, and reports regarding the topic disappear. Insofar as yearbooks are a reliable indicator of student interest, it appears that women's sports dipped in popularity from the 1930s through the 1950s.
In the 1920s, women's athletics had commanded their own section of the Badger yearbook with narrative summaries for each sport, highlights from championship games, lists of scores, rosters for every squad, and individual treatment of stand-out athletes—up to a high of 22 pages in 1924. By the late 1930s, women's sports consisted of, typically, a 2-page spread (compare that to the roughly 45 pages devoted to men's sports). Throughout the next two decades, only the WAA and the Physical Education Club were pictured, usually sharing a single page; the existence of other clubs and activities are mentioned in passing, if at all.

Vibrant images of women engaged in physical activity, so common in the 1920s yearbooks, are nowhere to be found during this time period. What coverage the WAA and its clubs received during this time period consists of group shots of formally posed women with ankles firmly crossed. In the 1942 Badger, for example, the sum total of evidence that women engaged in physical activity consists of the following: one posed photograph of ten members of the WAA, one nervous-looking woman holding a golf bag on the steps of Langdon Hall, and the Carnival Queen on skis. Obviously, women did not stop playing sports altogether during these decades, but it appears that their activities became more recreational and less organized. Social constraints may have again been an influence; it is true that during these decades, the Badger Beauties received far more press than women athletes.

Previously established sports continued in intramural form, but few developments arose during these decades. One of the only new sports for women developed in the 1950s was cheerleading. Previously a male-only activity, women were admitted for a three-year "trial period." When the trial period was over in 1954, women were again banned from the sport, sparking a short-lived controversy on campus. Women rejoined the squad in 1956.

Epilogue: The Sea Change of Title IX

By the 1960s, the women's liberation movement was on the rise, sports were on the rebound, and the call for intercollegiate activity became louder. The growing size of most women's sports programs rendered the structure of the WAAs ineffective, and across the nation such organizations were being disbanded in favor of a more centralized and authoritative administrative model.

Locally, the Wisconsin Athletic Recreation Federation of College Women (WARFCW), founded in 1958, led to the creation of the Wisconsin Women's Athletic Conference (WWIAC) in 1971. On a national level, the Commission for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (CIAW) was
formed in 1967, followed by the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) in 1971. The AIAW was dismantled in 1982, and schools migrated their affiliation to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Today, the University of Wisconsin-Madison is affiliated with the NCAA.

The increasing size and complexity of Wisconsin's sports program, coupled with the responsibilities of supporting intramurals through the Women's Recreation Association (the WAA's successor), proved too much for the physical education department to bear. To relieve pressure on the department, a club sport program was developed in 1970, headed by Katherine (Kit) Saunders. Continued financial strain, however, made it apparent that the club sports solution would be a temporary one.

As all this was coming to a head, Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 was passed. Essentially comparable to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it disallowed discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs. Athletics is only one element of this picture, but it quickly became the most visible and controversial aspect of Title IX.

Title IX was hardly the end of the struggle for the acceptance of women's athletics. It sparked debate and hostility from many corners, particularly from that of revenue sports, which saw themselves as being unfairly forced to shoulder the financial burden for non-revenue producing women's sports. At Wisconsin, the matter was far from settled. Chancellor Edwin Young appointed a committee headed by Athletic Director Elroy Hirsch to study the situation.

Nine months later, Hirsch's committee had met only once, and no plan of action had been constructed. On April 3, 1973, a complaint was filed against the University of Wisconsin with the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare for "flagrant violation" of Title IX. Two weeks later, Chancellor Young appointed a new committee; most of their recommendations were eventually adopted.

The Women's Intercollegiate Athletic program was officially created in May 1974, and began administration with the 1974-75 academic year. Kit Saunders was appointed the first director of the program, to oversee eleven sports with a $118,000 budget. This is the milestone we use to celebrate as the birth of women's intercollegiate sports at the University of Wisconsin.

The following year, the first women's booster club in the Big Ten was founded at Wisconsin (WIS Club), and female athletes became eligible to win the famed "W" letter. In fact, every year since Title IX passed, great strides have been made. After being firmly
established, the women's athletics program has produced many spectacular world-class athletes. The previous 100 years, for better and for worse, helped to shape the existing program. Women have been active and participating in sports and games since their first days on the Madison campus. They deserve credit for every catch, jump, and hit.

For more information on the history and legacy of Title IX at Wisconsin:

- View a video celebrating the 30th Anniversary of women's sports at UW-Madison: [http://www.uwbadgers.com/audio_video/stream/?id=108](http://www.uwbadgers.com/audio_video/stream/?id=108)
- Schedule an appointment with the Oral History Project to hear oral histories from key players, including Kit Saunders-Nordeen: [http://archives.library.wisc.edu/ORAL/oral.htm](http://archives.library.wisc.edu/ORAL/oral.htm)
Notes

1. 1863 Report of the Regents of the University of the State of Wisconsin, 36.
3. 1876 Report of the Regents of the University of the State of Wisconsin, 36.
4. 1877 Report of the Regents of the University of the State of Wisconsin, 45.
5. Ibid., 45.
6. Ibid., 37.
8. 1886 Report of the Regents of the University of the State of Wisconsin, 55.
9. Ibid., 572.
11. Physical Education and Dance Department records, University of Wisconsin-Madison archives, 82-50 Box 9.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. The Badger 1923, Volume XXXVII, 221.
16. The Badger 1928, Volume XLII, 566.
23. Although Badger yearbooks throughout the 1910s and 1920s refer to varsity teams, they were different from varsity athletics of today. Limitations placed on competition rendered varsity sports an impossibility, and placement on such a team was honorary. According to Physical Education and Dance department records, varsity basketball teams were chosen at the end of the season, presumably based upon performance, and played only one game, against the alumni squad.
27. Ibid., 2.
28. Ibid., 10.
Oddly enough, acceptable match-ups often closely resembled intercollegiate play, attendant with the high emotions and desire to win that were so terrifying to educators. In basketball, for instance, several teams and squads were assembled from each class, from which "first" and "second" teams were selected. A series of interclass games culminated in a tournament, a fiercely competitive event dubbed the "Goat Game." Around 1913, the freshman class brought a live baby goat to the championship game to taunt their opponents. The goat re-emerged several years later, in the form of a stuffed likeness, along with a sign that read, "If you win the game you will get our goat." Though the junior class won the coveted goat, it was stolen before the next year's game, setting off an intense and constantly escalating game of steal, hide and seek. Trilling describes "day long rides with the goat in taxis when pursuers were hot on the trail; scrambles and hair pulling matches when no holds were barred." Trilling, History of Physical Education for Women at the University of Wisconsin, 1898-1946, 124. The rivalry became so fierce that faculty officially limited the antics to Lathrop Hall, but their attempts to intervene were ignored. The tradition lasted at least 33 years.


Trilling, History 1898-1946, 110.

Physical Education and Dance Department records, University of Wisconsin-Madison archives, 82/50 Box 11.

"Restful Slumber for Gym Credit," Daily Cardinal, March 17, 1911.

Trilling, History 1889-1915, 10.

Physical Education and Dance Department records, University of Wisconsin-Madison archives, 82/50 Box 9.

Trilling, History 1898-1946, 96.

Ibid., 97.

Ibid., 98.

Ibid.


Ibid.

1938 Badger, p. 188.

Saunders, 10.

Ibid., 53.

Ibid., 58.