

WOMEN EMERGE IN THE FIELD OF ATHLETICS

When New Hampshire College came to Durham in 1893, women's participation in athletics was restricted to private women's colleges. Athletic departments for women developed later at coeducational colleges. In 1916, the College hired Elizabeth A. Rollins to start the athletic department for women.

Two years later, Helen Bartlett Wassall became the director of athletics and physical education for women, and eventually an assistant professor. Following the national trend, new programs and opportunities were offered to women in the 1920s. As well as building up her own department, Ms. Wassall involved herself in promoting other beneficial programs for women at the College. She was the driving force behind the founding of the Girl's Dramatic Club, the forerunner of the Mask and Dagger Society. The May Day Pageant was another of her ideas.

By the end of the 1920s, women's programs suffered some setbacks. The public had grown fearful that competitive athletics fostered "masculine" women, and across the nation, inter-collegiate sports for women were dropped in favor of "play days." The college, (now the University of New Hampshire-1923), followed that trend, and eliminated varsity-level sports for women. University men continued to participate in both class teams and varsity programs.



Helen Bartlett Wassall
The 1923 "Granite" paid tribute to her, saying: "Under her guidance the Girls' Athletic Association has risen to a place of influence in directing sports for the women of this institution."



In 1915, New Hampshire College granted the Woman's League's request that women be permitted to use the gymnasium on the top floor of Thompson Hall each week.



Miss Mayme MacDonald became director of athletics in 1923. She is pictured here with the Baseball Team.



Spectators line the shores to watch the women competing in canoe races in the 1920s.



Despite the loss of varsity sports in the 1920s, women continued to participate in non-varsity activities/sports such as hockey, soccer, bowling, basketball, baseball, tennis, track, riflery, archery, horseback riding, lacrosse, swimming, hiking and skating. This is the 1950 Rifle Team.



Prof. Marion "Manny" Beckwith, Athletic Director, Department Chair and first faculty representative to the Board of Trustees was an influential presence in the University's women's athletic department for 43 years. For the last 24 years she served as the department chair, and a full professor. Evelyn Browne was an outstanding member of the UNH team for 38 years. She and Marion Beckwith donated part of the land on which UNH's internationally known training center, the Browne Center, sits. Prof. Browne donated the original five acres to be used as an outdoor training area.



During World War II, Marion Beckwith instituted the nation's first athletic training program to prepare women for possible military service. The program included calisthenics and drill. In later years, she introduced several novel programs, such as sex education and yoga classes.

Women's collegiate athletics benefited from the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Title IX, a federal law passed in 1972, forbade gender discrimination in schools receiving federal funds. Before Title IX, there were no women's collegiate championships, but by 1984, there were 30 such national championships.

When women athletes joined men at the Field House, inconveniences for the women ranged from inadequate locker rooms, to inconvenient practice times, such as 9 p.m.. Several of the women's teams had to practice simultaneously in the gymnasium.

Title IX came directly to UNH in the 1990s. When Dr. Judith Ray became the director of women's athletics in 1990, she found the quality of the coaches and the student athletes was excellent, but: "women and men were not treated equitably." When the University made a budgetary decision in 1992 to cut both men's and women's teams, Dr. Ray backed a Title IX action that eventually was settled out of court. The process of equalization began. One important result was an equal share of athletic scholarships for women. To honor women athletes, Dr. Ray founded the Hall of Honor, because as she said: "Men had the Hall of Fame where they recognized outstanding accomplishments of male athletics and their coaches or contributors, and there was nothing for women."

When the University combined the men's and women's athletics departments 1996, Dr. Ray became the first department chair of intercollegiate athletics. The transition was difficult at times, and Dr. Ray experienced some resentment. After four years of leading the department into the new millennium, Dr. Ray decided to retire in 2000. Of her years at the University she said: "It's just been a great experience. It's the women that are coaches and athletes who are just exceptional."



Director of Women's Athletics, Judith Ray, Department Chair, 1996-2000, instituted the Hall of Honor to recognize the outstanding contributions of women athletics, coaches and contributors.



Lacrosse Team won the NCAA National Championship-1985



1997-1998 Champions-The UNH Women's Ice Hockey Team won the first National Championship in Women's Ice Hockey.