

WOMEN IN SPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Since the early days of modern, organized sports, women have fought for equity in sports, from equal wages among male and female athletes to simply the right to take the field. From modern day superstars like Serena Williams, Simone Biles, and Megan Rapinoe, to the early advocates for women's place in sports, female athletes have been making their mark on athletics for centuries. Recently women are coming forward in almost all sports. In many countries of the world, sports are given special importance. They have been given special preference in employment also.

OBJECTIVE

Analysing women's participation in sports from ancient period to modern period, this is the main objective of this paper.

Ancient Women in Sports :-

In Ancient Greece, women were able to participate in foot races at some festivals, and could win Olympic victories through equestrian events, though were forbidden from all other Olympic events. Spartan women participated in sports as men did; wrestling, javelin throwing, foot racing, and discus were all standard for women to compete in.

Additionally, certain tribes in Africa were known for allowing women to compete in wrestling arts. Women could participate in Lamb, a Senegalese wrestling style, up until the 20th century, when it became institutionalized and women were banned.

Native American and indigenous women were also believed to have participated in the same sports that men did, many of which were ceremonial, religious, or ritual events, and many ran foot races, and participated in ball sports.

Victorian Age Women in Sport :-

The ideal Victorian woman was gentle and frail and any form of strenuous activity was strongly discouraged. Myths surrounding women included those that

women could harm their reproductive organs if they participated in sports, which would

make them unattractive to men, and that they only had a finite amount of energy in their bodies, and wasting that energy on sports or higher education would lead to weak offspring.

In 1922, the first Women's Olympic Games took place in Paris, where women competed in more physically demanding events such as shot put and the 1000 meter dash.

The 1940s and WWII saw the introduction of the first women's professional sports league, with the all American Girls Professional Baseball League. Although holding strict standards for how women had to dress and act, it was seen as radical at the time.

Title IX and Fight for Equality :-

While the 1950s and 60s saw some advancements for women in sports, particularly at the Olympic level, where the United States sought to respond to the powerful, athletic women that the Soviet Union had put forth to compete, it wouldn't be until the passage of Title IX of the Education Act in 1972 that women were allowed equal opportunity in education and in sport.

While equal access to opportunity in sports is guaranteed under law, the fight for true equality continues to this day. At the Olympic level, women who performed well were often subject to gender confirmation exams from the 1968 Olympics until the late 90s, when the practice was officially abolished in 1999. Even so, the International Association of Athletics Federations required mandatory tests for high testosterone for female athletes in 2011, while no equivalent testing has been demanded for male athletes. Pay inequity in sports for female athletes has also been a point of contention in recent years. Despite barriers, women have fought and continue to fight to be seen as equal in their athletic capabilities.

Modern Sportswoman - Maya Wei-Haas and Jackie Mansky :-

During the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, more women than ever before ran, jumped, swam, shot, flipped, hit and pedalled their way to glory. Of the more than 11,000 athletes who came to compete in Rio, 45 percent were women. Many of them Serena Williams, Simone Biles and Katie Ledecky to name a few have become household names.

In the words of the founder of the Olympic movement, French aristocrat Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the Games were created for "the solemn and periodic exaltation of male athleticism" with "female applause as reward." That women shouldn't compete in the Games was self-explanatory, said Coubertin: "as no women participated in the Ancient Games, there obviously was to be no place for them in the modern ones."

WEAKNESS OF SPORTS WOMEN

The ideal Victorian woman was gentle, passive and frail, at least in part, inspired by bodies riddled with tuberculosis. These pale, wasting bodies became linked with feminine beauty. Exercise and sport worked in opposition to this ideal by causing muscles to grow and skin to tan

To stop off these concerns, female anatomy and reproduction baffled scientists of the day. A woman's ovaries and uterus were believed to control her mental and physical health. Women were also thought to hold only a finite amount of vital energy.

Of particular concern at the time was energy expenditure during menstruation. During the late 1800s, many experts cautioned against participating in any physical activity while bleeding. The "rest cure" was a common prescription, in which women surfed out the crimson wave from the confines of their beds an unrealistic expectation for all but the most wealthy.

It was upper-class women, however, who helped push for women's inclusion in Olympic competition, says Paula Welch, a sports history professor at the University of Florida. By participating in sports like tennis and golf at country clubs, they made these activities socially acceptable. And just four years after the launch of the modern Olympics, 22 women competed alongside men in sailing, croquet and equestrian competitions, and in the two women-only designated events, tennis and lawn golf. While the competition was small, women had officially joined the competition.

Working-class women, meanwhile, pursued other means of getting exercise. Long-distance walking competitions, called Pedestrianism, were all the rage. The great bicycle fad of the 1890s showed women that they not only could be physically active, but also allowed them greater mobility, explains Schultz. During this time, some medical researchers began to question the accepted ideas of what women were capable of.

WOMEN IN OLYMPICS

Born in 1884 in Nantes, France, Alice Milliat believed women could achieve greater equality through sport. In 1921, frustrated by the lack of opportunities for women in the Olympics, she founded Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale. The organization would launch the first Women's Olympic Games, held in Paris in 1922. At these games, women competed in physically strenuous events like the 1000-meter race and shot put.

ALICE MILLIAT

Millat's success bred contemptment from the athletic establishment, namely the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Association of Athletic Federations (IAAF), who chafed at the independence under which these women flourished. In 1926, an agreement was struck such that the FSFI would agree to follow IAAF rules and drop its catchy name. In turn, the IOC added track-and-field events to the Amsterdam Games.

The 800-meter race, the longest distance women were given to run would become a flashpoint that would resonate for decades. After the Olympic event, the female competitors appeared, sweaty and out of breath. Even though the men didn't look any better after their race, spectators were aghast. The distance was perceived as too much for the women.

1928 - Amsterdam Summer Olympics :-

The pushback came in part from physical educators, who were trained medical doctors yet believed that women could not handle undue physical strain. "When women were participating they generally didn't train," says Welch. "So when they did something that involved some endurance after they ran 200 or 300 yards they were rapidly breathing." That spurred the idea that around 200 yards was the farthest distance a woman should run.

By 1920, despite these doubts, 22 percent of colleges and universities in the United States offered women's athletic programs. But physical educators so deeply objected to women's competitive sports that they successfully fought in the '30s to replace competition at the collegiate level with game days and exercise classes. The mainstay Victorian belief that vigorous exercise was detrimental to childbearing echoed on.

Sports Women's way to Equality :-

There were exceptions to the mainstream narrative. Women who swam, for instance, made early inroads. As no one could see them sweat, the sport didn't look as strenuous. This likely was what allowed aquatics events for women to be introduced in the 1912 Olympic Games. But women had to work around gender norms of the day to train, Welch points out. As beaches required women wear stockings, members of the Women's Swimming Association would swim out to the jetties, where they'd take their stockings off and tie them to the rocks. At the end of their practice, the swimmers would return to the rocks, untie and put their stockings back on so they looked "presentable" when they resurfaced at shore. Gertrude Ederle trained at the Women's Swimming Association (WSA). Referred to by the press as the "Queen of the Waves" she became the first woman to swim across the English Channel.

Shaking assumptions about what women were physically capable of took many forms in the early years of the Olympics. The swagger of early women athletes like Mildred “Babe” Didrikson Zaharias and Stanisława Walasiewicz “Stella Walsh” served as inspiration for others; both came away with gold hardware at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics. But it was after the war, when the Soviet Union entered international sporting competitions, that the dogged, pervasive stereotypes of the Victorian era were finally forced out in the open. At the 1952 Helsinki Games, all Soviet athletes men and women arrived ready and trained to win. As the post-war Soviet Chairman of the Committee on Physical Culture and Sport, Nikolai Romanov, put it in his memories.

Researchers during this time also began dispelling the widespread fears of combining exercise with menstruation. Long considered dirty or incapacitating in some cultures, menstruation has “historically been the focus of myth and misinformation,” according to a 2012 article on mood and menstruation. “It became justification for restricting women’s participation in everything from sport to education to politics.” In 1964, researchers surveyed Olympic athletes competing in Tokyo and determined that competition had few detrimental effects on menstruation and pregnancy. Surprisingly, athletes who bore children prior to competing reported that they “became stronger, had even greater stamina, and were more balanced in every way after having a child”—a notion echoed by multiple later studies.

The passage of Title IX of the Education Act of 1972 opened up opportunities for women athletes and the researchers who studied them. The historic legislation required that women be given equal opportunity in education and sport, marking the most significant turning point in the history of women’s athletics. Before this mandate, there were fewer than 30,000 collegiate women athletes in the United States. But over the next four decades, that number would increase to 190,000 by 2012, according to a White House press statement. Title IX is a national, not international, initiative. Yet, as Sutton points out, the influence of the United States on the world has had a global impact on girls in sport.

Sports Women’s Trouble with Gender :-

On the world stage, women have gone from being banned from competition to performing feats that appear superhuman. But with these triumphs came pushback. Women who performed “too well” were viewed with suspicion, and often forced to submit to gender tests, an indignity never asked of their male counterparts. Since the early 20th century, the IOC and IAAF had focused an inordinate amount of resources on trying to discover men posing as women in

competition. But they found no imposters, only identifying intersex women who demonstrated that gender is not as binary as many believed at the time.

Heinrich “Dora” Ratjen :-

One of the biggest gender scandals was the case of Heinrich “Dora” Ratjen, who placed fourth in the 1936 Olympics high jump competition. At birth, Ratjen was classified by doctors as female, likely confused by unusual scar tissue on his genitalia, later documented on medical examination. So Ratjen was raised as a girl, but long harbored suspicions that he was male. It wasn’t until 1938, when a police officer stopped him on a train for appearing to be a man in women’s clothing that Ratjen was forced to reckon with his gender identity.

In the two years leading up to the 1968 Olympics, officials began gender testing elite female athletes on a trial basis through demeaning genital checks later called the “nude parade.” To quell the rising tide of complaints about these humiliating tests, the IOC adopted chromosomal testing for women competitors in the 1968 Games. But the chromosome tests were far from reliable. according to a 1992 New York Times article, “The test is so sensitive that male cells in the air can mistakenly indicate that a woman is a man”. And what the test results meant remained unclear.

Amid complaints from both athletes and the medical community, the IOC resolved to end Olympic gender verification in 1996, abolishing the practice by 1999. But suspicions of gender cheating were aroused again when runner Caster Semenya dominated the 800-meter race in the 2009 African Junior Championships, leading Olympic authorities to require her to submit to sex testing after that year’s World Athletics Championship.

Caster Semenya - 2012 London Olympics :-

This led the IAAF to implement mandatory tests for hyperandrogenism, or high testosterone in 2011. Women that test positive have two options, Schultz says, they can either drop out of the sport or undergo surgical or hormonal intervention to lower their testosterone levels. But it still remained unclear if naturally high testosterone levels truly give women an extra boost.

Men are not subjected to any of these tests their whole range of genetic and biologic variation are deemed acceptable, Schultz adds. “We don't say that it's an unfair advantage if your body produces more red blood cells than the average male,” she says. “But we test for testosterone in women.” Beyond the physiological aspects of gender testing is a broader social problem. “They say they don't sex test anymore, but that’s just semantics,” says Schultz. “It’s still a sex test, they're just using hormones instead of chromosomes to test for sex.”

The Modern Sports Woman :-

Medical researchers have realized that women are more prone to specific injuries, Sutton explains, such as tears in the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) a result of anatomy. Though women can't change their bone structure, they can change the muscles supporting it. "Strength and conditioning coaches weren't seen as instrumental as they are now; now they're just as key as your nutritionist, your athletic trainer," she says.

Despite these advances, today's athletes still must contend with some lingering Victorian-age logic. Just this week, Chinese swimmer Fu Yuanhui, clearly in pain, mentioned in a post-race interview that she was on her period. Many applauded her for freely speaking about menstruation in public. But the fact that this made headlines at all emphasizes the stigmas that still surround periods.

Still, unlike in 1896, women are an integral part of the Olympic narrative today and the women in this narrative are more diverse and inclusive than ever before. In an Olympic first, in 2012, every country sent at least one woman competitor to the London Games. Though many countries have yet to move past token representation, there is a long road ahead.

SUMMERY/CONCLUSION

In ancient times, women were prohibited from participating in sports, but now they are allowed to participate in sports like wrestling, running races. While women's participation in sport increased during the Victorian period, there were many barriers to their participation in the first half of the 20th century, but in the second half of the 20th century, some laws were passed in favor of women in sport. Therefore, the participation of women in sports increased. Recently women are coming forward in almost all sports. In many countries of the world, sports are given special importance. They have been given special preference in employment. Therefore, the participation of women in sports is increasing rapidly.

RESOURCES :

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