

Unequal Playing Time

In his book *The American College Town*, Blake Gumprecht claims one of the defining features of college towns is that they are more progressive, liberal-minded, and socially-blended spaces. However, this is not the type of college town that appears in Marshall University's collection of archives. During the 1920's the student yearbook, *Mirabilia*, was dominated primarily by men's athletics and women's beauty. This was partially because women had few options when it came to athletics. In fact, during the entire decade the college did not offer a single sport for women. They did, however, offer recreational sports and an athletic association for women but these were rarely mentioned in the school's yearbook. Instead, yearbook only mentions female athletics when women were editors, despite the popularity on campus.

In the start of the decade, Marshall offered a separate gym class for women of the college. In the 1921 yearbook, at the end of the athletics section, a small blurb is mentioned about the classes. There were two classes offered specifically for women, both were taught by Miss Anna Bell Chaffin ("Miscellaneous" 142).

One class consisted of games and dances that were typically taught in grade schools. This class was along the lines of a recreational course. The other class was, in some sense, a good workout. Photos found in the yearbook, show female students doing arm circles and lined up in rows similar to soldiers. One photograph is captioned with the words "Chaffins Army" ("Miscellaneous"142).

These women have one page dedicated to their classes at the end of the athletics section. This is due to the members of the yearbook editorial board. Nine of the members were women and seven were men (“Mirabilia” 124). This could be why the women received a page in the yearbook’s athletic section unlike previous years where they received no credit.

Though the women of, what was then, Marshall College had two gym classes to choose from, they were not given the opportunity to participate in competitive sports. However, in October of 1922, these women created The Girls’ Athletic Association. The goal was to provide fun recreational athletic events among women at Marshall (“Girl’s” 178). The association tends to be very successful in membership and in tournaments, in the following years.

In 1924, The Girls’ Athletic Association represented Marshall College at The Young Women’s Christian Association’s annual basketball tournament, which was held in Marshall’s gymnasium. The girls divided into three teams: Kampus Kids, Valkyre, and Bobs. The women of the Kampus Kids team won in overtime against the Petites, a team from another school, with a final score of 38-35. The women of this team received a banquet held in their honor, thrown by the Huntington community. This winning team also received a trophy and a picture in the 1924 Marshall College yearbook (“Y.W.C.A.” 180). The four pages talking about the girls win, was the most women’s athletics was mentioned in the entire decade.

The large article on women was impacted by the large number of women on the yearbooks editorial staff. This year, there were ten women and only five men (“Mirabilia” 156). This happens to be the largest number of women on the yearbook staff during the entire decade.

In 1925, the number of female yearbook editors dropped and the number of male editors rose significantly. The board now consisted of seven women and eleven men (“*Mirabilia*” 178). The dramatic change in editors meant that women were no longer considered athletes. The Girls’ Athletic Association went from four pages in the athletic section of the college’s yearbook, the *Mirabilia*, to an even smaller segment in the organizations section (“Girls” 152). The same lack of recognition on Marshall’s campus, followed women throughout the world.

Women during this time period were fighting for their acknowledgement and acceptance in the athletic world too. The problem even reached the Olympics. Since women were not fully seen as equals in the athletic world, they were not allowed to participate. The Federation Sportive Feminine International (FSFI), an international women’s athletic organization in France, organized its own alternative to the Olympics. They called it The Women’s World Games and was housed in Paris, France during 1922. The creation, and later expansion, of these athletic events did not go unnoticed by the Olympics. In 1924, women were finally granted Olympic status (Cahn 2007). Still, women were restricted to solely tennis and swimming, two things that were not popular at Marshall College during this time.

Right after the Olympics women were given more credit for their athletic abilities. In 1925, many high schools offered women’s basketball as a competitive sport. Then, in 1926, the first national basketball championship was held for women. The event was sponsored by the Amateur Athletic Union to give women around the nation an opportunity to play competitively (Imbornoni).

On Marshall's campus during 1926 the Girl's Athletic Association became part of the National Girls' Athletic Association. This brought a many new opportunities for their organization. Now, young women of the college can participate in swimming, hiking, volleyball, basketball, and soccer ("Girl's" 132). However, it was still considered recreational sports.

Yet the association was also offering other opportunities for women that were not specifically athletic. The association sponsored dances, lifesaving classes, and circus exhibitions. In addition to social parties and other communal activities that they were hosting in the previous years. The 1926 yearbook, states that the Girls' Athletic Association is the largest organization at Marshall College ("Girl's" 132).

However, the yearbook staff drastically dropped in numbers during 1926. There were only three women and four men. Despite the male dominated editorial board, the women of Marshall were given several pages about their athletic achievements. During this year, these women were given their largest documentation on athletics throughout the entire decade.

In 1927, there was no women documented as part of the editorial board ("Mirabilia" 100-101). This same year there was also no recognition of The Girls' Athletic Association. This lack of acknowledgement was due to the low number of women on the editorial staff. Without the women's input, The Girls' Athletic Association was overlooked for more popular men's sports.

With men dominating the yearbook editorial board, The Girls' Athletic Association is not mentioned again for several years. Instead, the 1928 yearbook goes back to talking mainly about women's beauty; something men stereotypically care more about. ("Features" 181-184). The pages of the athletic section are mostly crowded with men's football, basketball, and baseball;

the three most popular sports on campus. This is due to the fact that the yearbook staff of 1928 consisted of only men.

During 1929, the women of Marshall College are given three pages dedicated to their beauty (“College” 182-184). The yearbook staff this year was entirely males with the exception of one female, the art editor. This explains the reason why female athletes received no recognition in the athletics section of the yearbook. They were featured in the College Life section in a small photograph at the top of a page. The photo is of seven girls holding a basketball with the caption “Champs” (“College” 177). This can conclude that the women of this time were playing basketball competitively but that they were not viewed as important.

However, I did notice that when women were the primary editors of the yearbook, women’s athletics were mentioned. For example, in 1926, The Girls’ Athletic Association was given a large piece in the yearbook. Then, when there were no women as editors, as in 1927, the association had either a small blurb or nothing at all written about them at all. Yet when men were the bulk of the yearbook editors, women were primarily noted for their beauty. This shows that men simply did not value women’s athletics as much as women did.

In the start of the following decade, 1931, women’s athletics were mentioned again. This time they were in the activities section of the yearbook. However, it was not the Girls’ Athletic Association but the Physical Education Club for Women (“Activities” 130-131). This is the closest thing to women’s athletics that is documented for the next few years.

Yet women’s athletics was not something that started in 1920 with the classes taught by Miss Anna Bell Chaffin. They can be dated back to 1908 using the first student yearbook published. In this version of the *Mirabilia*, girls are said to have played on baseball and tennis

teams. Though they are not viewed as competitive sports, they were still offered by the Athletic Board in 1908 (“Athletics” 126-140). In this first issue of the *Mirabilia*, women were the primary editors of the yearbook (“Mirabilia” 6-7). Then in 1909, there were less women on the editorial board (“Mirabilia” 6-7). Thus, in 1909 there was no mention of women’s athletics in the yearbook. Meaning that the trend of recognition did not start in the 1920’s but started much sooner.

Blake Gumprecht, author of *The American College Town*, states that “sporting events are a central component of student life at American colleges and universities” (Gumprecht 238). With this statement about college towns, Marshall yearbook editors should have paid more attention to women athletes in the yearbook. This would have allowed women to feel as though they were a significant part of the college.

However, it could be assumed that the young women of the 1920’s on Marshall’s campus were not focused on their representation in the student yearbooks. This decade was a crucial time for feminism. Women across the nation were fighting for higher education, visibility in government and law, and, most importantly, suffrage (Dickens 30). Many could assume that the women of Marshall College were too busy fighting for their national rights rather than their representation on campus.

Yet perhaps it was just too soon for women to be recognized as competitive athletes. As Rory Dickers says in her book, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, “because of second wavers’ activism, a girl can play sports on school and community teams,” (Dickers 6). This quote says that though women of the 1920’s fought hard for their rights, it was not until the second wave of feminism, 1960-1970, that young women were viewed as equals in athletics.

Though women were not viewed as equals in the athletics world until the second wave of feminism, women of Marshall College were striving for their equality a long time before this era. When women were on the yearbook editorial board, the female athletes have a section dedicated to all that they do. These women were ahead of their time because it was not until the 1960's that women around the nation were fighting for equality in athletics. Though Marshall was not fully a progressive, liberal-minded, and socially-blended space, as Gumprecht assumes, it was headed in that direction.

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