



## **The Birth of The University of Akron's Women's Athletics**

*Ken MacDonald*

The US Congress passed Educational Amendments on June 23, 1972, that included a section called Title IX, dealing with sex discrimination within public schools and universities. Title IX states that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” The impact of Title IX has been most felt by girls and women in the sports community.

The beginning of women's sports on The University

of Akron's campus was prompted by female students who began clamoring to play intercollegiate competitions in the late 1960s. In the fall of 1969, Canton freshman Linda Kampfer organized a group of interested athletes and arranged basketball games with nearby colleges at the expense of each player. The following year, Kampfer and teammates Carolyn Bower, Molly Gerber, Debbie Heinlein, Karen Kennedy, Karen Mitchen, and Cathy Schweitzer approached graduate assistant Lynda Smole with the idea of starting a basketball club team. Smole took the proposal to Andy Maluke, department head of Physical Education, who told Smole he had no problem with a women's basketball team as long as, "they always act like ladies, dress like ladies, and behave both on and off the campus like ladies."

With Maluke's help, Smole got \$300 from the Student Activity Fund to help with the expenses. Although this club team did play a college schedule, its wins and losses have been lost to antiquity. Athletic Director Gordon Larson saw that women's athletics was inevitable and in September 1971 hired Mary Ann Tripodi to initiate a women's intercollegiate sports program at The University of Akron. She coached the first two, basketball and volleyball, and both officially became varsity sports in 1974. Tripodi was instrumental in the formation of seven programs in her 17-year tenure, tennis and slow-pitch softball in 1977 when The University of Akron women were first granted athletic scholarships, and cross country and track joined the fold in 1981. Since then, the University has added swimming (1998), soccer (2006), golf (2008), and lacrosse

(2019) to its women's athletics program.