

WOMEN'S HISTORY

100+ Years of Women's
Athletics at UCO

University of Central Oklahoma
Max Chambers Library
Archives and Special Collections

Edmond, OK
March 2021

SPECIAL THANKS

In celebration of Women's History Month, the Chambers Library, Archives & Special Collections presents 100+ Years of Women's Athletics at UCO. Photographs from UCO's Archives Photograph Collections and UCO's Photographic Services Department will be presented. Images from the Archives Photograph Collection can also be viewed online at the Chambers Library, Archives & Special Collections, Image Gallery. Two of the University's most significant historic collections were used to compile this brief history. The campus student newspaper since 1903 the *Vista* and the campus yearbook from 1909-2003 the *Bronze Book* provide a glimpse into the growth and changes over the years in UCO's women's athletics and physical education. We would like to thank the following people for their assistance and support in producing this exhibit.

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Starting out

in the 1900s



Women's basketball team, 1908

In the late 19th Century, sports for women was frowned upon as a threat to female fertility. The elite women's colleges and country clubs associated with the wealth and leisure of the Gilded Age made certain that the only sports acceptable for aristocratic ladies to pursue were those in which they didn't have to exert themselves; this included tennis, croquet, archery, and bathing-beauty swimming. Thus, setting the fashionable standard for much of the country. Sports for women existed in the form of play activities that were recreational rather than competitive. Healthful beau-

ty, not aggression or the personal desire to triumph over competitors, was the custom of the day.

As the 20th Century dawned women began pushing the social and political boundaries of what was acceptable in many areas of life, and

1903

first intercollegiate contest

women's athletics was no exception. Around this period men began organizing the first athletic clubs and

did not include women. Considering the mores of the time it probably did not occur to most of these men that they should. However, when it was suggested they should include women it became deliberate exclusion. In response women began forming their own women-only organizations. But the reproach didn't come from just men. Many women physical education instructors strongly opposed competition among women fearing it would make them less feminine.

During the 1900 Olympics the world saw the first nineteen women compete at the games in Paris, France, playing in just three sports, tennis, golf, and croquet. The following year in 1901 field hockey was introduced to women in the United States by Constance Applebee, a British physical education teacher who presented a hockey exhibition at Harvard University. Following these world examples Central began organizing women's athletics during the same period with high participation.

The *Vista* first reports on athletics at Central on November 1, 1903, with the statement, "Athletics at the Edmond Normal School have taken an encouraging turn as far as local interest is concerned. A larger number than ever before



Women's basketball team, 1911



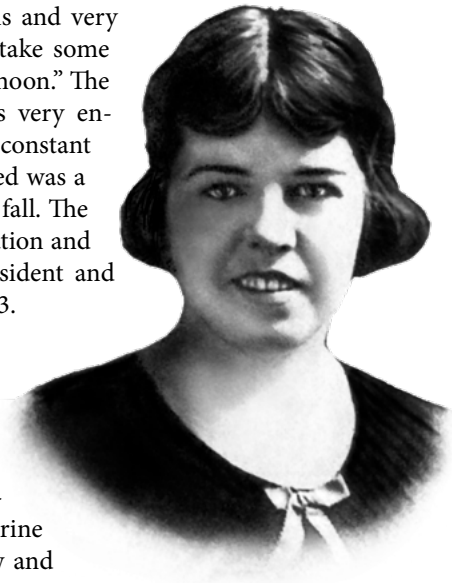
Women's basketball team, 1908

engaged in basketball and tennis and very few of the boys or girls fail to take some form of light exercise every afternoon." The outlook for tennis that fall was very encouraging as the courts were in constant demand, which the *Vista* reported was a striking contrast to the previous fall. The women formed a Tennis Association and selected J. E. Armstrong as president and Bessie Smith as secretary for 1903.

While some girls played tennis, by November their attentions turned to basketball. The players organized that year with Louise Houston as president, Bessie Smith as secretary and treasurer and Catherine Horner as manager. Grace Shaw and Lennie Schuyler were named captains. The teams practiced every afternoon and the grounds were said to have been crowded with players and onlookers.

After developing a fair degree of skill and team work the women's basketball team organized the first intercollegiate contest of the session on November 21, 1903, against the girls from Oklahoma City High School. The girls of the Territorial Normal School of Oklahoma (TNSO) played an outstanding game winning their first competitive game of the season 13-0.

The *Vista* reported, "The team together with Prof. Imel, Miss Horner, and some other loyal enthusiasts, left Saturday morning and returned that night. They were met by a large body of students who gave them an ovation and woke the town at the same time by vigorous yelling.



Carrie Wantland, 1920



Women's track meet, ca. 1913-1919

WAA

Women's Athletic Association



Zona Smith, 1928

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These girls are striving to live up to the highest of Central's ideals.

”

the Lettergirls Club. The first year twenty-four sweaters were awarded. The Central sweater could only be earned by girls of athletic ability, good sportsmanship, and endurance.

In 1924, just three years after the first National Women's Athletic Association was established, a Women's Athletic Association (WAA) was organized at Central State Teachers College placed under the control of the Physical Education Department. Miss Zona Smith was the first sponsor of the organization. The WAA offered intramural sporting events for female students in hockey, basketball, volleyball, hiking, tennis, and track. The 1925 *Bronze Book* indicated, "The WAA has been the means of keeping some girls interested in school and has led to closer friendships and a better understanding of school spirit. These girls are striving to live up to the highest of Central's ideals."

As a member of the WAA, girls earned points through the pursuit of athletic activities in order to win sweaters given by the College. Initially one hundred points were required to earn a sweater. The girls who won sweaters were initiated into



Women's softball, ca. 1920s-1930s

Plunkett

Dynasty

In the late 1920s, girls' athletics and basketball in particular got a big boost with the hiring of Miss Emma Plunkett, a former star guard on the George Peabody Teachers College varsity women's basketball team. Plunkett was recruited by President Mitchell who said he visited the college in Nashville, TN on a regular basis looking for new talent. By naming Emma Plunkett as the new women's physical education director in 1928, Mitchell launched a whole new era not just for women's athletics but for the whole college.



Emma Plunkett, ca 1930s

That year saw the biggest crowd in the history of the WAA at it's first meeting of the fall semester. It was reported



Circus archery, ca. 1920s-1930s

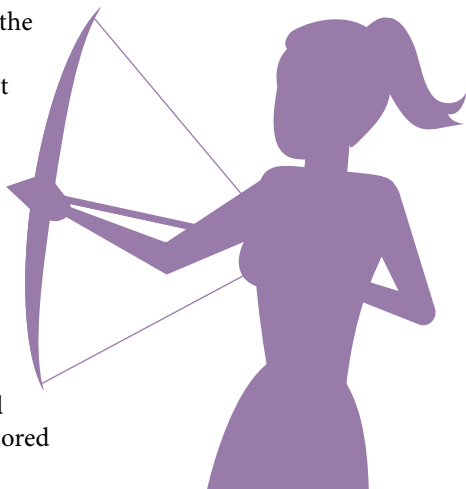


Physical Education Department "Circus," 1929

that about seventy-five girls were in attendance and listened to an enthusiastic talk by Emma Plunkett. She announced at that meeting she had "revised the point system for winning a sweater so that a more workable system will be in use this year and one better adapted to the needs of Central's girls." She increased the number of points required to earn a sweater from 100 to 800 points. By earning 700 additional points a blue letter sweater was awarded and a stripe was won for each additional year of work. In 1936 the WAA voted to select a pin and any girl who earned one hundred points got the privilege of wearing it.

With enthusiasm and zest for life, Plunkett breathed life into almost every area of the college. One *Vista* reporter said, "The energetic professor communicates differently than most people. She doesn't just talk, she pokes, and pounces, and glows." In addition to athletics Plunkett staged and choreographed musical performances, sponsored

the freshman class for twelve years, chaired the committee that planned and constructed the Max Chambers Library (today's communications building), was instrumental both in the building of the Broncho Fieldhouse and the Student Health Center and was the faculty advisor of the first graduating class of graduate students in the summer of 1955. One of her dearest projects was the circus, a unique display of talent that incorporated all areas of physical education as well as music and dance. The performances involved hundreds of





Women's tennis, ca. 1920-1930s

students and attracted spectators from across the state.

Under Plunkett's 38 years of leadership at Central, she enlarged the women's physical education department and its teacher training

program to one of the best in the nation. The women's physical education program expanded to include fencing, synchronized form and speed swimming, bowling, soccer, softball and archery. Plunkett often led Saturday morning hikes north of campus which included a breakfast made over a campfire. Ac-

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Guided Central women to one of the most successful spans of women's athletics in state college history.

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1928

The first State Play Day for College Women



Women's swimming, ca. 1930s



Women's volleyball team, 1936



Women's swimming, ca. 1940s

According to a September 1974 issue of the *Vista*, Miss Plunkett “guided Central women to one of the most successful spans of women’s athletics in state college history.” A remarkable woman with diverse talents, Plunkett left her mark on Central.

Instigated by the National Amateur Athletic Federation the Play Day movement came to Oklahoma in 1928. Put very simply Play Day was a day when girls from several schools met and played with rather than against each other. It created a spirit of non-competition when each year the physical education department of one college would act as host



Female sports group, ca. 1930s-1940s



Women's softball team, ca. 1930s-1940s

inviting ten members from the girl's department of the colleges in the state. Oklahoma University hosted the first State Play Day for College Women in 1928. In 1935 Central State Teachers College was the scene of the activities. It was thought to be a more wholesome use of leisure time for women than competitive sports. While Physical Fitness Day was supposed to take the place of the former Play Day in 1942, Play Day remained on campus in some form until the 1960s.



Women's tumbling, ca. 1940s



Women's field hockey, ca. 1920s-1930s

WWII

through the 1960s

During World War II women's athletics got another boost. With male students and faculty gone from campus, more emphasis was placed on the sports activities of women. Money designated for the men's programs was brought into the female athletic budget. Even after the war Central's administration saw the need to continue financing women's sports programs so they could grow.



Women's softball, ca. 1950s



Women's swimming, ca. 1950s

By 1957, the women's physical education department at Central State College was considered one of the best in the state. The facilities at the time included two gymnasiums, a swimming pool, several tennis courts, an archery range, a playing field and dance studio. Dance, swimming, tennis, field hockey, and basketball were



the most popular women's activities at the time. The Women's Recreation Association (WRA) organized the Women's Intramural Sports Program on campus each year. The competition was divided by resident units; the girls sororities, dorms and apartments made up



Women's field hockey, ca. 1954

the teams. Trophies were given to first place winners in each sport, and teams accumulated points throughout the year towards an overall championship trophy and a participation trophy. Women were encouraged to join the program for fun and enjoyment.



Women's volleyball, ca. 1950s

-day meeting. The institute was the first of its kind in the history of U.S. women's sports. The purpose of the institute was to increase the depth of experiences and expand the opportunities for women's sports throughout the nation. Betty Dryden, instructor of physical education at Central State College, was selected as one of three delegates to represent Oklahoma.

In 1963, the National Institute of Girl's Sports was held at Oklahoma University. Created and sponsored by the Women's Board of the U.S. Olympic Development Committee, representatives from all over the nation attended the six

1957

the women's physical education department at Central State College was considered one of the best in the state.

Peters

Takes Over

Another individual who had a significant impact on women's athletics, first as a competitor and then as a coach and administrator, was Miss Plunkett's protégé and successor Virginia Peters. Peters participated in basketball, field hockey, swimming and volleyball four straight years earning the Outstanding Freshman Women Athlete award in 1954 and the Outstanding Senior Women Athlete Honor in 1957. Peters started her coaching career at Central in 1958 directing the basketball, field hockey, track & field, volleyball and men's and women's fencing teams. She also served as Coordinator of Women's Intercollegiate Sports during a career that lasted 34 years.



Virginia Peters, 1968

With the retirement of Emma Plunkett in 1967, Peters took over as director of the Physical Education Department. Peters believed that competitive women's sports was the "coming thing" in athletics. Women's opportunities for competitive physical activities were limited in America until Federal Legislation leveled the playing field. Peters stated in a 1969 *Vista* interview, "Provided that women athletes are not exploited, and their education comes first, women should be given athletic scholarships." Peters felt that a skilled athlete was just as deserving as a skilled pianist.

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Title IX

and the Changes it Created



Women's golf, 1961

Changes were on the horizon for women's athletics as Peters predicted. The federal civil rights law, Title IX, was passed as part of the Education Amendment of 1972. The law protected people from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance. This change led to the combining of the men's and women's physical education departments in May of 1976, in what Peter's called a "shot-gun wedding." Beginning that fall semester, P.E. classes were co-edu-

cational. After the departments were combined, Peters stated in an interview, "the women felt they lost control over the quality of the educational programs."

Basically, the mandates prescribed by the new law had three parts. First it required women and men be provided equitable opportunities to participate in sports. It does not require institutions to offer identical sports but an equal opportunity to play.

Second, the law required that female and male student-athletes



Women's golf, 1961

receive athletic scholarship dollars proportional to their participation. Lastly, it required equal treatment of female and male student-athletes in the provision of equipment and supplies; scheduling of games and practice times; travel and daily allowances/per diem; access to tutoring; coaching; locker rooms; practice and competitive facilities; medical and training facilities and services; housing and dining facilities and services; publicity and promotion; support services and recruitment of student-athletes.

Initially Peters said, "There was no big upheaval or gigantic change caused by Title IX at CSU." She believed CSU women's athletics program had always been a d -

1976

P.E. classes were co-educational and women coaches got paid for coaching

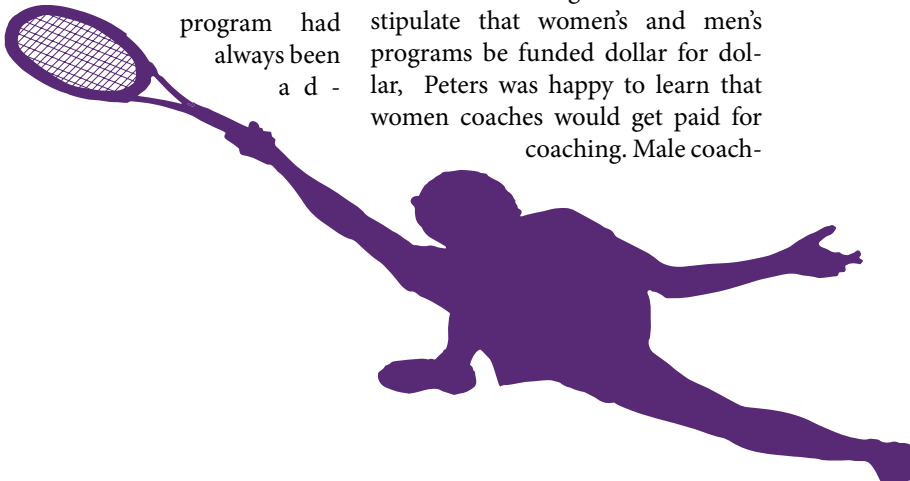
equately funded for the times. During this period CSU offered 12 women's sports including field hockey, volleyball, basketball, softball, swimming, track and field, gymnastics, badminton, tennis, fencing, golf and dancing. Women's and men's athletics operated under separate budgets with women getting about 14% of what men's athletic programs received. That year in 1976, the CSU administration antic-



Women's track team, 1967

ipated an increase in funding of 40% for women's athletics and physical education if the money was available.

While Title IX guidelines did not stipulate that women's and men's programs be funded dollar for dollar, Peters was happy to learn that women coaches would get paid for coaching. Male coach-



es at Central had always been paid for these activities, but the female coaches relied only on their teaching salaries, receiving no compensation for their coaching duties. However, Peters still believed very strongly that coaches should be teachers. Peters biggest fear with Title IX changes was the women's programs becoming semi-professional as had some of the athletic programs for men. She was determined to keep athletics in an educational environment for women. Ultimately, Title IX was a major step towards gender equality in college athletics and allowed Peters to grow women's sports at Central. On a broader scale the additional opportunities for coed participation in sports helped dispel the attitude that sports for women were unfeminine.



Women's track team, 1967



Women's fencing, 1968

AIAW

The Demise of

In 1971 the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) was formed as the sole governing body for women collegiate athletics and grew to include a total of 911 schools. With the changes brought on by Title IX, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), an association that barred women from men's events, became concerned about the potential weakening of its position as the dominant and controlling body of intercollegiate sports. If women were elevated to a status equal to men, its financial assets and political power were threatened. The association had never taken an interest in women's sports, but members of the associ-

ation saw the increased financial base and political power to be gained from exerting control over women's intercollegiate athletics. They sought to force the AIAW out and take control over women's athletics. The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) for smaller universities, of which Central was a member, decided on similar tactics.

Using a strategy of inclusion, the NCAA decided to introduce women's championships for intercollegiate sports, a tempting inducement for schools with women's athletic programs to leave the AIAW and join the NCAA. Earmarking

\$3 million for women's championships the NCAA offered schools additional incentives to join their association. Along with the women's intercollegiate championships the NCAA offered to pay all expenses for teams competing in a national championship; there was no additional



Women's field hockey, nd



Women's field hockey, 1980s

membership fee for schools to add women's programs; they created financial aid, recruitment and eligibility rules that were the same for women as for men; and they guaranteed women more television coverage.

Against the proposal that came for a vote from the NAIA Peters said, "Under the AIAW we have been moving just fine and I am afraid that under the NAIA women's programs will again be relegated to second place effectively reducing women's governance of women's athletics." She was strong in her belief the NAIA was an organization for men's athletic programs



Cheerleaders, 1970s

with male leadership. Even if the plans offered women appointments to committee positions she thought at best they were offering only token voting power. The AIAW could not compete; the loss of memberships, income, and media rights forced the AIAW to cease operations on June 30, 1982.

NCAA

The Joining of



Women's rowing, 2015

Acceptance of Central into the NCAA Division II came in 1976 under the efforts of Central's Director of Men's Athletics, Dale Hamilton. It improved many things for Central's athletic programs like the ability to recruit better talent. However, Peter's fears were confirmed as the most recent statistics from the NCAA show female head coaches comprise only 42% of head coaches of women's collegiate teams down from 55% in 1981, the year the NCAA women's championships got its start. Even worse, a study done by a Brooklyn professor showed that before Title IX more than 90% of women's teams were coached by women.

1981 *the year the NCAA women's championships started*

Competitive

Women's Sports Today

Women's athletics at Central has continued to grow. In 1997 women's soccer was added as a varsity sport bringing the total to eight women's programs, about half what it was in 1972, when Title IX was passed. In 2002 women's golf was added and in 2007 rowing. The women's rowing team won back-to-back NCAA National Championships in 2018 and 2019. Today, these ten sports continue to make up UCO's women's varsity sports. Intramural sports have remained a popular alternative for women who don't want to pursue competitive sports. Today, some of UCO's intramural sports for women include running, cornhole, bocce ball, biking, table tennis, and tennis.

Involvement in women's sports at Central was slow to develop. Opportunities for participation and recognition were almost

non-existent for decades. It was not until the advent of the equal rights movements and Title IX that Central women truly found a place as participants in the world of sports and in the public arena.

10 *sports make up UCO's women's varsity teams*



Women's volleyball, 2016



Women's cross country, 2013



Softball, 2015



Women's tennis, 2015



Women's basketball, 2016



Women's soccer, 2018



