

# **Women's Athletics and Aurora University**



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“Visions of amazons dance in our heads when W.A.A. takes over the gym. Looking healthy and sturdy, they play with a vigor you wouldn’t expect when you see them gracefully walking down Calumet Avenue.”<sup>1</sup> This passage is from the 1959 Aurora College yearbook describing the women playing basketball for the Women’s Athletic Association (W.A.A.). The passage epitomizes some of the attitudes towards women’s athletics during the mid-twentieth century because it separates “regular” women from the ones who participate in athletics. It implies that the women who were athletes were “amazons,” which by definition is “a very strong, tall or masculine woman.”<sup>2</sup> This characterization belittles women by assuming they would be unable to play vigorously and maintain their grace; however, the public often described male athletes as being graceful. It was this type of double standard that women’s athletics has had to fight against for over one hundred years.

During this time at Aurora College, the progression of women’s sports has not been linear. Unfortunately, the one constant over the first three-quarters of the twentieth century were the fears and arguments levied against women’s sports. Despite these fears and many arguments against women’s athletics, Aurora College was able to foster an environment that allowed the development of women’s athletics. Aurora College will be used throughout this document to refer to the institution that today is Aurora University. In order to understand the predicament women’s athletics faced one must understand the attitudes towards women and sports in the twentieth century along with the women’s movement.

During nearly the first half of the twentieth century, the prevailing attitude concerning women’s participation in sports was negative. There were widespread beliefs “that being athletic could cause a woman’s uterus to fall out.”<sup>3</sup> What is surprising about views like this is that they were not just held by men but also by women. Another example of this attitude comes from Ethel Perrin, who was a board member of the Women’s Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation in 1928. She was quoted as saying, “Under prolonged and intense physical strain, a girl goes to pieces nervously. A

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<sup>1</sup> *The Pharos 1959*, 91, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “amazon.”

boy may be physically so weak that he hasn't the strength to smash a creampuff but he still has the 'will' to play. A girl is the opposite."<sup>4</sup> This attitude is shocking considering that the source was one of the leaders of women's athletics at the time. It also shows the adversity women's athletics faced.

Women's athletics not only faced the challenges presented by administrators and supporters of men's athletics, but it also faced the challenge of convincing their own leadership that women were capable of participating and excelling in athletics. As a consequence of views similar to Perrin's, most higher education institutions only allowed women to participate in intramurals and "play days." A "play day" would consist of three or four colleges or universities bringing their women's athletic associations together for a day of sports activities.<sup>5</sup> Many different sports would be played on these days, but the most interesting fact about them was how the competitions were set up. Participants would not compete for their school colors, but instead the teams would be mixed with players from every school. This approach was used to emphasize participation over winning because with the mixed teams no one school could claim victory.<sup>6</sup> The term "play day" also makes the women sound like children going to a supervised day of games instead of women headed to a day of athletic competition.

By the 1960's, the view had somewhat changed from women being physically unable to participate to them being mentally unfit to participate. For example, in the April 14, 1961 issue of *The Aurora Borealis*, the school newspaper, there was an article entitled "Female Failure to Comprehend Problem to Men." In the article, the male author offers his opinion as to why members of the female sex do not attend baseball games. He goes on to say, "A girl finds it extremely hard to master the principle of 'four balls and three strikes' while the difference between a hit and a home run is beyond her grasp."<sup>7</sup> This quote is incredibly degrading to women and the fact that it was allowed to run in the school newspaper shows that feelings about women and sports, from a man's perspective, had not

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<sup>3</sup> Welch Suggs. *A Place on the Team: The Triumph and Tragedy of Title IX*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 20.

<sup>4</sup> Suggs, *A Place on the Team*, 23.

<sup>5</sup> Wushanley, Ying. *Playing Nice and Losing: The Struggle for Control of Women's Intercollegiate Athletics 1960-2000*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Wushanley, *Playing Nice and Losing*, 13.

changed much in the years since Ethel Perrin made her remarks. However, there was one significant difference that separates the perspective represented in this article from ones written in the past. In the column next to the article, a woman wrote a counter argument. In her article, Marilyn Woody echoed the voice of many women by saying, “[Women] would very gladly devote part of their time to learning the fundamentals of the sport. The only problem-getting the all-wise male to devote a portion of time to teaching her.”<sup>8</sup> Marilyn Woody echoed what some women had been saying for years. She concluded that if women were given a chance to participate in or even be spectators at sporting events and taught how to play sports, they would be able to succeed. However, both of these desires were inescapably linked to male administrators, coaches, and players. Here the work of the women’s movement can also be seen. No longer were women going to accept that they could not do something or should not do something.

The women’s movement was an initiative that had many goals and lasted for a considerable period of American history. Famous women’s rights activist Carrie Chapman Catt summarized the women’s movement by saying, “The whole aim of the woman’s movement has been to destroy the idea that obedience is necessary to women; to train women to such self-respect that they would not grant obedience; and to train men to such comprehension of equality that they would not exact it.”<sup>9</sup> This passage is an excellent summary of the problems the women’s movement had to overcome. Women had to change the entire culture and the everyday relationships between men and women. In the beginning, the women’s movement was born out of the abolitionist movement.<sup>10</sup> From there the “women’s movement developed from an isolated fringe group into a moderate reform coalition.”<sup>11</sup> This coalition struggled because its goals were too ambitious and far-reaching. Instead of focusing on issues specific to the women’s movement such as suffrage and equal pay, the coalition included more diverse social issues such as temperance and aid for the poor. However over the years, the

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<sup>7</sup> *The Aurora Borealis* April 14 1961, 4, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> William Henry Chafe. *Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles 1920-1970*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), vii.

<sup>10</sup> Chafe, *Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles 1920-1970*, vii.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

movement began to focus its efforts on women's suffrage. Women believed that if they won the right to vote they would be able to solve all of the other problems that the movement had originally set out to correct. Finally, in 1920 the United States Congress passed the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave all women the right to vote. However, this was not the solution that women thought it would be because they had failed to change a woman's status within the culture of America. The problem they faced was that "the whole notion of a woman's place contradicted the idea of female independence."<sup>12</sup> This issue caused low numbers of women to go to the polls. Some of the women who did go to the polls simply voted as their husband did to avoid conflict in the home. It became clear that for women to truly be liberated they had to change the culture in which they lived.

Ironically, the seeds of this cultural change were planted back in 1873 with the invention of the typewriter, but they did not come to fruition until the 1950s. The invention of the telephone and typewriter in the late nineteenth century led to a rise in women working outside the home. This trend continued into the twentieth century; however, the circumstances of a working woman were far from equal to that of a man. For example, in the 1930s, twenty-six states had laws prohibiting the employment of married women.<sup>13</sup> Then on December 7, 1941, there was a fundamental change in the involvement of women in the workforce. The United States declared war on Japan, signaling the beginning of America's involvement in World War II. With men overseas fighting, women were called upon to join the workforce.<sup>14</sup> As they joined the workforce, women also moved into positions of labor union leadership that had been vacated by men.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately in the 1950s, it was still said that "woman worked for man but not with them."<sup>16</sup> Women were commonly denied positions of power in the workforce and were often treated as children. It was socially acceptable to call a fully-grown

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>14</sup> Dorothy Sue Cobble. *The Other Women's Movement*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 16.

<sup>15</sup> Cobble. *The Other Women's Movement*, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Carol Hymowitz and Michaela Weissman. *A History of Women in America*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), 304.

woman with children a girl or gal.<sup>17</sup> However, things were beginning to slowly change as more and more labor women joined unions and became dedicated to women's equality and social justice.<sup>18</sup>

Finally in 1964, women won a major victory. During this time, southern congressmen were fighting a losing battle against civil rights legislation. Therefore, Virginia Congressman Howard K. Smith demanded that the word "sex" be added to Title VII of the Civil Rights Bill.<sup>19</sup> Title VII stated that employers could no longer discriminate based on race, religion, color, or national origin. Smith believed that no civil rights bill linked to women would pass because women were not a minority group.<sup>20</sup> He and his southern colleagues were wrong as the bill passed and it became illegal for employers to discriminate based on sex. More importantly, though, the passage of this bill led to the formation of the first active feminist groups since the suffrage movement. However, these groups realized something the earlier groups had not and that was that "the personal is political."<sup>21</sup> This phrase meant that women finally saw that they were a caste linked together, no matter the class, race, religion, education, or life style.<sup>22</sup> It was with this idea and an undying passion that women fought to bring Title IX into effect in 1972.

The United States Congress tried to counter the fears and arguments against women's athletics with Title IX of Educational Amendments of 1972, which prevented discrimination based on sex in high school and college education, activities and athletics. Once enacted, the schools were given a six-year period, 1972-1978, in which to conform to the guidelines set forth in the act.<sup>23</sup> Title IX itself does not specify any regulations because it is only 37 words long. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the Department of Education was charged with developing and enforcing regulations.<sup>24</sup> Once the OCR developed the regulations and how to enforce them, their proposal was sent back to Congress on June 18, 1974. Congress had 45 days to review the proposal and one year later

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<sup>17</sup> Hymowitz and Weissman. *A History of Women in America*, 316.

<sup>18</sup> Cobble. *The Other Women's Movement*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Linda Jean Carpenter and R. Vivian Acosta. *Title IX*. (Human Kinetics, 2005), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Carpenter and Acosta, *Title IX*, 5.

passed the proposal. On July 21, 1975, the regulations were given the “force of law.”<sup>25</sup> Force of law means that courts must give the regulations the same weight as the actual law (Title IX) when reviewing cases.<sup>26</sup> The one downfall of the legislation was that there were no instructions given on how to measure compliance.<sup>27</sup> However, by looking at the examples provided in this paper, one can begin to determine whether Aurora College was in compliance.

The changes due to Title IX can clearly be seen when comparing the number of women’s sports in the decades before 1972 to the numbers in the decades after 1972. It is important to note that during some years a sport might have been offered; however not enough participants were found so the season was cancelled that year. The first evidence of sports at Aurora College is a photograph of a football team in 1900. Unfortunately, records are very sparse from this year and the next ten years so it is unclear exactly what sports the college offered.<sup>28</sup> Starting in the 1910 school season, there were no women’s athletic teams at Aurora; however, the school fielded successful male football and baseball teams. During this time, the only mention of women’s athletics was that the students loved to play tennis, and all students regularly participated in this intramural type of athletic event.<sup>29</sup> In the 1913 school season, the college had a men’s basketball team to accompany the football and baseball teams.<sup>30</sup> However, again there was no mention of women’s athletics during this school year. It was not until the 1918-1919 school year that a woman’s sport was adopted. The first women’s sport adopted by the college was basketball.<sup>31</sup> During the next several years, the college continued to field a women’s basketball team along with the men’s basketball and baseball teams. The football program had been dropped due to funding and was not reinstated until the late 1920s. By 1933, the college made the decision to adopt intramural sports, which replaced the women’s basketball team.<sup>32</sup> At the same time that the women’s basketball team was cut, the college

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Charles W. Anderson. *Upon a Rock*. (Aurora University, 1987), 28.

<sup>29</sup> *The Epitome 1910*, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>30</sup> *The Epitome, 72-79* Aurora University Archives.

<sup>31</sup> 1919-1920 Women’s Basketball Team photo see Appendix B.

<sup>32</sup> *The Pharos 1933*, 45, Aurora University Archives.

added a men's tennis team.<sup>33</sup> Thus during 1933, the college had four men's teams and no women's teams.<sup>34</sup> By 1938, the college administrators had decided to return women's basketball to a varsity sport, and they added women's tennis as a varsity sport.<sup>35</sup> However, men's sports still outnumbered women's sports four to two.<sup>36</sup>

During World War II the college dropped all athletic programs and opted for intramurals instead.<sup>37</sup> Sports were dropped during the war years because almost all able-bodied men were in the military, and more women were getting jobs, which caused college enrollment to dip dramatically. Intramurals continued for women even after the war was over. However, men's intercollegiate athletics returned after the war ended. For example, in 1948 the college fielded a men's football and basketball team while only providing women with intramural basketball.<sup>38</sup> This difference continued into the 1950's and was even amplified. By 1953, the college had five men's teams (football, basketball, baseball, tennis, and golf) and only one women's team (cheerleading).<sup>39</sup> This trend continued into the late 1950's and early 1960's with even more expansion of men's athletics (cross-country and wrestling), but continuation of the status quo for women's sports.

Finally, in 1967 Aurora College returned a women's team to intercollegiate athletics, basketball. Robin Marlowe was a freshman that year and was a member of that team. In 1968, the college added women's volleyball to its intercollegiate athletics; in 1969, it added women's tennis; and in 1970, women's field hockey was added. Robin Marlowe participated on all of these teams and found the experiences to be very rewarding. In fact, Marlowe was inducted into the Aurora College Athletics Hall of Fame in 1991. She stated that her participation "in athletics made me manage my time better [and] there was never time to put things off until later."<sup>40</sup> In her opinion, the reason the college suddenly started adding "new varsity sports year after year was because our teams did well."

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> *The Pharos 1938*, 50-52, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> *The Pharos 1943*, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>38</sup> *The Pharos 1948*, 64-78, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>39</sup> *The Pharos 1953*, 58-79, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>40</sup> Robin Marlowe, interview by Kirk Williamson, Naperville, IL, 11-2-10.



For example, one year the women's basketball team took second in the state tournament. Robin Marlowe also discussed how even though the women's varsity sports were just beginning, there were role models for the women to follow. Coaches like Karen Heiden, Doris Crews, and Fred Bornkamp provided strong leadership and great character for the female athletes.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, opportunities for women in athletics still trailed those available to men.

In 1973, the College had five women's athletic teams (basketball, volleyball, field hockey, tennis, and cheerleading).<sup>42</sup> During that same year, the College fielded seven men's athletic teams (soccer, basketball, golf, wrestling, cross-country, tennis, and baseball).<sup>43</sup> This trend continued into the 1978 season when the college fielded a women's softball team, yielding six female teams and seven male teams. Although the women's cross-country team had yet to be formed, the College allowed Lynn Riley Schoenhardt, a freshman, to run on the men's team. According to Lynn, she "did not plan on joining the team, initially, but I was noticed because I ran around the campus area on a daily basis to keep in shape. I was asked to join the team by the coach and team members, and I did not hesitate."<sup>44</sup> Lynn Riley Schoenhardt was impressed with how warmly she was welcomed by her fellow teammates and coach and "felt encouraged to participate." She felt completely comfortable and felt as though her being a woman had no impact on her performance or relationship with her teammates.<sup>45</sup> This specific example shows how the athletic culture of Aurora College had changed from the 1930s through the early 1960s. By allowing her to participate, Athletic Director Dr. Sam Bedrosian<sup>46</sup> created an avenue in which women could show they could compete in cross-country and this eventually led to the formation of the women's cross-country team.

Another example of the progress promoted by Title IX and Bedrosian was the Aurora College softball team. The 1978 softball team went undefeated and became state champions, and the 1982

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *The Pharos 1973*, 74-101, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Lynn Riley Schoenhardt, interviewed by Kirk Williamson, Naperville, IL, 11-10-10.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Bedrosian also served as a head coach in several different sports including men's basketball and women's softball to name a few.

team was ranked fourth in the nation.<sup>47</sup> Kathy Lang, a player on both of those softball teams, along with playing on the tennis and basketball team (which she was a captain of), thought that her experience as an Aurora College woman athlete was very beneficial, not only to her college career, but to her life.<sup>48</sup> She was also inducted into the Aurora College Athletic Hall of Fame in 1999. The experiences both of these women had at Aurora show how the expansion of women's sports teams helped to positively impact the lives of the student-athletes.

Jim Schmid, the head baseball coach of Aurora College from 1982 to 1992 and Dean of Student Development from 1985 to 1992, also believed that the expansion of women's sports helped the college in a positive way. He thought the success experienced by some of the women's teams, like softball, helped to drive other teams, male and female, to get to that championship level.<sup>49</sup> He also believed that their "growth in numbers and depth of talent" as well as their success helped in the recruitment of more and better athletes and coaches to the Aurora family.<sup>50</sup>

In 1983, the college fielded six, male varsity teams (soccer, golf, cross-country, basketball, tennis, and baseball) and four female varsity teams (volleyball, basketball, softball, and tennis).<sup>51</sup> This trend continued until the mid-1980s, after which the Athletic Department brought back the football team and also added a women's dance team.<sup>52</sup> In 1994, the college added a women's soccer team, which would go on to win twelve conference championships in their first sixteen years.<sup>53</sup> By 2000, the college maintained this ratio by having seven male teams (football, golf, cross-country, soccer, basketball, baseball, and tennis) and six female teams (soccer, volleyball, basketball, tennis, softball, and cheerleading).<sup>54</sup>

In 2003, Athletic Director Mark Walsh (Assistant Athletic Director 1994-1997 and Athletic Director 1997-present) added both men's and women's indoor/outdoor track and field and a women's

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<sup>47</sup> Kathy Lang, interview by Kirk Williamson, Naperville, IL, 11-17-10.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Jim Schmid, interview by Kirk Williamson, Naperville, IL, 10-12-10.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> *The Pharos 1983*, 26-130, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>52</sup> *The Pharos 1992*, 64-92, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>53</sup> Mark Walsh, interview by Kirk Williamson, Aurora, IL, 11-17-10.

<sup>54</sup> *The Pharos 2000*, 32-53, Aurora University Archives.

golf team.<sup>55</sup> By adding these teams, Walsh brought the total number of men's teams to eight and the total number of women's teams to eight. This action achieved equity in terms of the number of athletic teams provided for both genders. Currently, Walsh has added a men's lacrosse team that will begin competition in spring 2011 and plans are in the works to also add a women's lacrosse team sometime in the near future.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, sports will continue to be added while maintaining the balance strived for in Title IX.

The number of sports teams is not the only criterion by which Aurora College can be judged. One can also look at the school newspaper and yearbook coverage of the teams before and after 1972. For a more complete description of the yearbook coverage described in this section, please refer to Appendix A. By looking at the period from the middle 1910s to the beginning of the 1930s, one can see a noticeable trend developing. During this period, women's sports received more coverage than expected, considering the cultural views of the times. For example, in the *Pharos*, the Aurora College yearbook from 1923-1924, there is a large focus on sports. For instance, there are four pages dedicated to discussing ways in which to raise money to sponsor a football team.<sup>57</sup> In this issue, the men's basketball and baseball teams are also discussed for over four pages, along with a few pictures of the teams and players.<sup>58</sup> However, this edition also covers the women's basketball team extensively. The women's basketball team was featured in six different articles, and the coverage was in-depth, listing game locations and scores.<sup>59</sup> This type of coverage continued into the 1924 edition of the *Pharos*, which featured two pages dedicated to the women's basketball team. Coverage like this is found throughout the 1920s, but begins to decline once the 1930s begin.

From the 1930s to approximately 1945, the coverage of women's athletics significantly declined as evidenced in the number of pages dedicated to discussing women's athletics in the Aurora College yearbooks. As discussed earlier, intramural sports were adopted for women during

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<sup>55</sup> Mark Walsh, interview by Kirk Williamson, Aurora, IL, 11-17-10.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> *The Pharos* 1923, 19-84, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

this period in Aurora College's history. All women's varsity sports teams were eliminated, but the W.A.A. continued to be an organization on campus.<sup>60</sup> For example, the W.A.A. was highlighted on three pages in the 1933 yearbook, but that publicity did not compare to the thirteen pages given to the male sports teams (football, basketball, and baseball).<sup>61</sup> The coverage of women's sports continued to decline, and by 1938, the school yearbook was covering football with two pages, basketball with two pages, and the men's baseball and tennis teams with one page.<sup>62</sup> During this year, only one page was given to discuss women's athletics, and it was split between basketball, swimming, and coverage of a play day. By the time World War II ended, coverage of women's athletics had become almost non-existent, and unfortunately the coverage of women's athletics would only get worse.

In the twenty years from 1947 to 1967, coverage of women's athletics became dismal. During this period, the cultural views and sexism that drove the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s had taken an immense toll on the coverage of women's sports. For example, in 1948 the men's football and basketball teams received six pages each, compared to the one page of press that women's intramural basketball received.<sup>63</sup> Five years later, in 1953, this trend of sexism and cultural discrimination continued with men's sports receiving nine pages of coverage along with several pictures.<sup>64</sup> Women had yet to receive a varsity sport, and the coverage the W.A.A. received was limited to a page.<sup>65</sup> By 1956, the coverage of the men's teams was almost identical to that of 1953, with men's teams receiving eleven pages.<sup>66</sup> The one thing that differentiates this edition from the 1953 edition is the coverage of the cheerleaders (one page) that went along with that of the W.A.A. (one page).<sup>67</sup>

Unfortunately, the dismal coverage received over the last ten years would only get worse. The coverage reached an all-time low in 1963. In this edition of the yearbook, men's basketball was given

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<sup>60</sup> *The Pharos 1933*, 45, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> *The Pharos 1938*, 49-55, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>63</sup> *The Pharos 1948*, 64-78, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>64</sup> *The Pharos 1953*, 58-70, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> *The Pharos 1956*, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

six pages.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, this would be the first time since 1913 that women's athletics or intramurals was not mentioned in the yearbook. The only record that women did any athletic activities that year were a few pictures of women playing basketball.<sup>69</sup> This observation is very important because it goes to show that the development of women's athletics has truly not been linear. One will recall that the first mention of women's athletics was in the 1923 *Pharos*, and there were team pictures from 1918 and 1919. Therefore, just over forty years after the first record of women's athletics at Aurora College, there was almost no record of any women's athletics. Moving on to 1966, the yearbook featured fourteen pages dedicated to men's athletics.<sup>70</sup> By contrast, the women had four pages dedicated to the cheerleaders and a half page dedicated to the W.A.A., which only described the intramurals that were offered to the women.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, by the late 1960s things began to improve for women's athletics and their press coverage. During the years leading up to Title IX, coverage of women's athletics would begin to return; however, the disparity between the men's and women's coverage was still large. Looking in the February 21<sup>st</sup> issue of the 1968 school newspaper, one can find the first mention of the new, women's varsity basketball team.<sup>72</sup> The May 3<sup>rd</sup> issue of the 1968 school paper featured several articles on women's athletics. In this issue, there was an article that discussed the volleyball team, which had been practicing for the last two years and would become a varsity sport during the next school year. This story was followed by an article on the women's tennis team, which would become a sport within the next few years.<sup>73</sup> The 1968-1969 school year featured a school newspaper that contained several articles covering the women's basketball and volleyball teams.<sup>74</sup> It even had articles written by the W.A.A. president, Linda Brown.<sup>75</sup> Unfortunately, coverage in the 1969 issue of the *Pharos* was nowhere near the coverage that the men received.

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<sup>68</sup> *The Pharos 1963*, 112, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>70</sup> *The Pharos 1966*, 144-161, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>72</sup> *The Aurora Borealis Feb. 21 1968*, 4, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>73</sup> *The Aurora Borealis May 3, 1968*, 4, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>74</sup> *The Aurora Borealis 1968-1969*, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

In the 1969 issue, men's sports received seventeen pages of coverage, including two for the junior varsity basketball team.<sup>76</sup> The women had two pages dedicated to the varsity cheerleaders, one page for the junior varsity cheerleaders, and one-half page for the women's varsity basketball team, which was listed under organizations instead of sports.<sup>77</sup> This year was very important because it highlights the discrepancy in coverage between men's and women's athletics. The men's junior varsity basketball team had as many or more pages than all of the women's sports.<sup>78</sup> The men's junior varsity basketball team receiving more coverage than the varsity sports of the women goes to show that women's sports were still not widely recognized at Aurora College. Despite the growing coverage of women's teams in the school newspaper and the teams' success, women's sports coverage in the yearbooks remained lackluster at best. Over the last sixty years, it can be seen that the coverage of women's athletics has gone through several cycles, ranging from adequate to almost no coverage. This cycle would begin to change after 1972 with the implementation of Title IX.

In the 1973 issues of the *Pharos* and the *Aurora Borealis*, one can start to see a change in the coverage received by women's athletic teams. In the 1973-1974 issues of the school paper, several articles on women's athletics can be found. For instance, there are several issues that contain articles on the women's basketball and field hockey teams.<sup>79</sup> Skipping ahead to the 1978 yearbook, one can see that the number of pages used to cover women's sports increased considerably; the men had a total of twenty-two pages while the women had ten pages.<sup>80</sup> The women's tennis team had two pages, women's volleyball had four pages, and women's basketball received three pages of coverage.<sup>81</sup> This might not sound like progress, but when compared to the 1953 yearbook, in which men's sports had nine pages of coverage, women's varsity sports had zero pages of coverage, and the W.A.A. received one page of coverage, the difference is significant. During 1978, Aurora College sports also received some special attention from the *Aurora Beacon News* (city's paper). In the fall,

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<sup>76</sup> *The Pharos 1969*, 66-84, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *The Aurora Borealis 1973-1974*, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>80</sup> *The Pharos 1978*, 76-106, Aurora University Archives.

the *Beacon News* ran an article on Lynn Riley Schoenhardt, who, as mentioned before, was the first woman allowed to participate on the men's cross-country team.<sup>82</sup> While this article was not technically on a women's sports team, it did feature a female athlete who was helping to break down the gender barrier at Aurora College.

Starting with the *Aurora Borealis* in 1979 and continuing until 1981, the coverage of women's sports increased significantly. In the August 31, 1979 issue of the paper, not only are the women's tennis and volleyball schedules printed, but there are also articles on both teams.<sup>83</sup> Then in the fall of 1980, Lynn Riley Schoenhardt began writing for the paper and focusing her articles on the women's sports teams. According to Schoenhardt, not only did she want to help promote the teams and their athletes, but then Athletic Director Sam Bedrosian had similar goals. She stated that "he was very supportive of women's athletics and most likely wanted to promote the programs offered at Aurora College."<sup>84</sup> She proceeded to write an article in almost every edition of the paper that year. Her articles on women's volleyball and tennis were featured in the October 3<sup>rd</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup> editions of the paper in 1980.<sup>85</sup> Her articles on women's basketball were featured in four different editions, and her articles on the women's softball team were featured in two editions of the 1980 *Aurora Borealis*.<sup>86</sup> In 1983, one can observe a large shift in the coverage of the Aurora College yearbook. This year the women's volleyball team had two pages of coverage, the women's tennis team had two pages, the women's basketball team received two pages, the softball team received two pages, and the athletic awards banquet also received two pages.<sup>87</sup> In the section on the athletic awards banquet, nearly half (6 of 13) of the photos were of women athletes or women's teams. On the other hand, the men's sports were given ten pages of coverage.<sup>88</sup> When comparing the women's coverage with the men's coverage, there was only a two-page difference.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 80-103.

<sup>82</sup> Lynn Riley Schoenhardt, interview by Kirk Williamson, Naperville, IL, 11-10-10.

<sup>83</sup> *The Aurora Borealis Aug. 31 1979*, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>84</sup> Lynn Riley Schoenhardt, interview by Kirk Williamson, Naperville, IL, 11-10-10.

<sup>85</sup> *The Aurora Borealis October 3 and 31 1980*, 9 and 11 respectively, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, Dec. 18, 4, Jan. 21, 16, Feb 13, Mar 27, 13-14, Apr. 30, 17.

<sup>87</sup> *The Pharos 1983*, 26-130, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

In the 1988 *Pharos*, the women's teams received nine pages of coverage and the men's teams received only eight.<sup>89</sup> This marks the first time that women's athletics received more coverage in the yearbook than men's athletics. Looking ahead to the 1992 *Pharos*, this type of parity continues. The men's teams received thirteen pages of coverage while the women's teams were given eleven pages.<sup>90</sup> By the 2000 edition of the *Pharos*, the coverage was even with each gender receiving seven pages.<sup>91</sup> Another interesting feature to this edition was a page dedicated to all the male and female athletes who were awarded all-conference, region, or All-American awards, along with a two-page sports photo collage that featured ten pictures, five of which were of women's athletics.<sup>92</sup> One can see that in the years since Title IX was introduced, coverage in the *Pharos* and *Aurora Borealis* had become almost even between the men and women. Another outlet that also provides equal coverage of both men's and women's sports is the Aurora College website. Over the years, the sporadic coverage of women's sports has become extinct and an age of parity between the coverage of male and female athletics has begun.

Looking at the number of teams and articles should not be the only measures used to determine the standing of women's athletics over the past one hundred years. One also needs to take into account the language used in and content of these articles. There is an excellent example of this in the 1923-1924 edition of the *Pharos*. In this edition, there is an article on the women's basketball team, in which the author says, "When it comes to athletics, the girls do not have as much to boast of as the men do, but when it comes to pep, we are right there."<sup>93</sup> The language in this article refers to women negatively in two different ways. It implies that the women are not as athletically gifted as are the men, and it refers to the males as men and females as girls, which is demeaning because by using girls instead of women, the author implied that the women were young and immature. A counter example can be seen in the same edition of the *Pharos* in the February

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<sup>89</sup> *The Pharos 1988*, 18-182, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>90</sup> *The Pharos 1992*, 64-92, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>91</sup> *The Pharos 2000*, 36-53, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 36 and 52.

<sup>93</sup> *The Pharos 1923-1924 Fri. Sept. 28*, 19, Aurora University Archives.



1924 section. In this section, there is an excerpt on the girls' varsity basketball team, in which the author is very enthusiastic and even refers to the girls by their nicknames.<sup>94</sup> Referring to players by their nicknames was a common practice when writing about the men's sports teams, so referring to the women in the same way was a step toward equality. However, the author still uses the term girls instead of women, which, as discussed before, is demeaning.

Looking in the yearbook from 1933, one can see another clear example of how language was used to belittle and demean women. There is a snapshot of women playing basketball, and the jerseys the women had on had a large "A" on the front.<sup>95</sup> The picture had a caption that read, "A for Amazons?"<sup>96</sup> Clearly this statement was meant to be disrespectful to the women who participated in athletics because amazon was not a complimentary term. Again, in the 1938 yearbook, one can see the same type of language toward women athletes. In this yearbook, there was a section on the women's intramural swimmers and divers, and the women were referred to as mermaids.<sup>97</sup> This represents another derogatory word used to refer to the athleticism of the women of Aurora College.

The 1953 edition of the *Pharos* had a seemingly innocuous phrase that was: "They had a lot of fun."<sup>98</sup> At first read, this might not seem offensive to most people in today's culture. However, one must look at the entire context in which this phrase was written. During this time, as was already discussed, the women were still forced to participate in intramurals instead of varsity sports, and the women still had their "play days." It was frowned upon for women to be competitive or act in a competitive manner. So instead the women had intramurals and "play days," which allowed them to athletically have fun but not to compete. Even the term "play day" itself is offensive because it trivializes the day and makes the women sound childlike. Fortunately, this belief would not last forever, and women would be able to compete freely.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid February 24, 145-152.

<sup>95</sup> *The Pharos 1933*, 76, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> *The Pharos 1938*, 50, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>98</sup> *The Pharos 1953*, 70, Aurora University Archives.

By 1968, one can begin to see a change occur in the writing covering women's sports at Aurora College. Many examples of this change can be found in the 1968 issues of the *Aurora Borealis*. One example comes from the May 3, 1968 edition, in which the female author comments on the upcoming varsity volleyball season. In the article, the author states that the team should be great because they have had two years of practice without being allowed to play other schools.<sup>99</sup> By using sarcasm, the author was making her opinion and the opinion of the players known that they wanted the chance to play competitively and represent Aurora College on the volleyball court. In the December 11<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Aurora Borealis*, there was a bulletin that covered the women's varsity basketball team's first two wins. In this bulletin, the author went into technical detail about how the women used a man-to-man defense that "smothered" the other team.<sup>100</sup> The tone of this article was very upbeat and exciting and focused on the success that the women had had on the court. This article represents a big departure from the earlier articles in which the players on the women's basketball team were referred to as amazons and possessing less skill than their male counterparts. This type of writing continued into the next issues of the *Aurora Borealis*. In the February 28<sup>th</sup> issue, there was a season wrap-up article describing the women's basketball team. The article used excitable language to describe how the women won ten games and lost only one and also managed to outscore their opponents 525 to 278.<sup>101</sup> This type of praise was not restricted to just the women's basketball team either, as the women's volleyball team also received praise for their good season and fighting attitude.<sup>102</sup> These articles also show a larger trend in that the articles began to focus more on the games and the players instead of focusing on the fact that women were playing sports.

After Title IX, the positive and supportive language continued in all but one form. That one form was how the women were referred to in the yearbook. As late as 1978 the yearbook still referred to male teams as varsity teams and female teams as girls teams.<sup>103</sup> Not until the 1983

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<sup>99</sup> *The Aurora Borealis* May 3 1968, 4, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>100</sup> *The Aurora Borealis* Dec. 11 1968, 4, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>101</sup> *The Aurora Borealis* Feb 28 1969, 6, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>102</sup> *The Aurora Borealis* Mar 28, 1969, 4, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>103</sup> *The Pharos* 1978, 94-103, Aurora University Archives.

yearbook was there a change to this policy. Elsewhere, women were receiving equal coverage. For example, in the February 8<sup>th</sup> issue of the 1974 *Aurora Borealis*, the women's basketball players were given nicknames like "Dynamite Debbie Carpenter."<sup>104</sup> This represented a huge step toward equality in reporting on women's athletics. Not since February of 1924 had a woman athlete been referred to by her nickname in the paper. In 1983, the male and female teams were now referred to as men's and women's teams respectively.<sup>105</sup>

During 1981, Lynn Riley Schoenhardt's articles on women's athletics presented an unbiased look at the Aurora College women's sports teams. Her consistent coverage of the teams was very complimentary and seemed to capture the excitement that surrounded the women's sports. She felt that "the athletes appreciated the attention given to them and their teams."<sup>106</sup> By the year 2000, there were few differences in the articles describing the male and female athletes in the yearbook.<sup>107</sup>

The last way by which to judge whether or not Aurora College has fostered an environment conducive to the growth of women's athletics is to look at student and administrative support. Beginning with the 1923-1924 school year, one can see that student support for women's athletics was high. For example, on "Saturday, March first, our Co-ed varsity played Elgin Junior College at the YMCA gym. The student body (the band included) attended the game in force."<sup>108</sup> This passage shows that even though women's athletics was not the mainstream activity that it is today, the students of Aurora College still supported the women and took pride in their participation. Moving forward to 1968, one can see that the student body still supported women's athletics, although varsity competition was just returning to the college. For example, women athletes received tremendous support during the intramural games, and every team had its own cheering section.<sup>109</sup> This point is quite significant because it shows that women's athletics was still supported, although few women's varsity teams existed.

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<sup>104</sup> *The Aurora Borealis Feb 8 1974*, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>105</sup> *The Pharos 1983*, 32-66, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>106</sup> Lynn Riley Schoenhardt, interview by Kirk Williamson, Naperville, IL, 11-10-10.

<sup>107</sup> *The Pharos 2000*, 36-53, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>108</sup> *The Pharos 1923-1924 March*, 175, Aurora University Archives.

In 1969, Ray Reed, the sports editor for the *Aurora Borealis*, issued a dramatic proclamation in one of his articles. He said, “Apathy and indifference threaten to undermine the growth and prosperity of our athletic program...it is up to you the leaders of tomorrow, who must make that vital decision between growth or stagnation.”<sup>110</sup> This proclamation is clear and concise and goes to show how passionately the students of Aurora College felt about their athletic programs and the desire the students had for an expansion of sports. During this same time, there were several members of the administration who began heavily supporting women’s athletics. Robin Marlowe stated that there were three coaches in particular who pushed for the expansion of women’s athletics: Karen Heiden, Doris Crews, and Fred Bornkamp.<sup>111</sup> Marlowe also stated that Carol Bragg was very influential in the advancement of women’s athletics during the entire 1960s.<sup>112</sup> She also thought that “they [women athletes] were getting support from the administration, because we were adding a sport every year.”<sup>113</sup> During the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, Athletic Director and coach Sam Bedrosian (inducted into the Aurora Athletic Hall of Fame in 2002) also fully supported the advancement of women’s athletics, and he even coached the women’s softball team.<sup>114</sup>

Just as Robin Marlowe believed that the administration supported women’s athletics, Kathy Lang did as well, saying that “we got a lot of support from the administration.”<sup>115</sup> She also noticed that the male athletes at the school supported the women’s teams over her four years at Aurora College.<sup>116</sup> During the time (1981) that Lynn Riley Schoenhardt was writing for the newspaper, she believed that the fan base for women’s athletics increased dramatically with the success the women were having.<sup>117</sup> The administration in 1990 showed another type of support by inducting Katie Keller (class of 1983) into the Aurora College Athletic Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame had been created two

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<sup>109</sup> *The Aurora Borealis* May 14 1968, 4, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>110</sup> *The Aurora Borealis* May 15 1969, 6, Aurora University Archives.

<sup>111</sup> Robin Marlowe, interview by Kirk Williamson, Naperville, IL, 11-2-10.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Kathy Lang, interview by Kirk Williamson, Naperville, IL, 11-17-10.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Lynn Riley Schoenhardt, interview by Kirk Williamson, Naperville, IL, 11-10-10.

years earlier, in 1988, and Katie Keller was the first woman inducted. This support continues into current times.

Athletic Director Mark Walsh has continued the administrative support of women's athletics by adding several teams over his time as athletic director. He also pointed out that the media guides for several of the teams are shared between men's and women's sports. For example, men's and women's soccer share the same media guide as do baseball and softball.<sup>118</sup> He believes that "this shows how little the administration has come to differentiate" between men's and women's athletics.<sup>119</sup> Another way in which Walsh believes that Aurora College has gotten to the point of equity is that "staffing, support financially, access to sports information and athletic training resource and administrative support are all identical across the board."<sup>120</sup> This support shows what a huge commitment has been made by the administration toward the advancement of women's athletics. However, Walsh is not the only person who feels this way about Aurora's progress.

Aurora College President Rebecca Sherrick states that "[I] don't think that people at Aurora distinguish at all whether it's a male or a female sport and in that regard I think we're ahead of a lot of schools."<sup>121</sup> President Sherrick was also instrumental in forming Aurora's current athletic conference, and during her work on that project, she worked hard to achieve parity among men's and women's sports teams.<sup>122</sup> With the head of the school and the head of the athletic department echoing almost the same sentiments, it has become clear that women's sports at Aurora University have become a meaningful and constructive part of the institution.

Although the progression of women's sports was not linear and despite the many challenges women's athletics had to endure at Aurora College, the school was able to foster an environment that allowed women to participate in varsity athletics. Over the years, the college was not immune to many of the cultural and sexist views of the time. However, Aurora College was able to take a

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<sup>118</sup> Mark Walsh, interview by Kirk Williamson, Aurora, IL, 11-17-10.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Rebecca L. Sherrick, interview by Kirk Williamson, Aurora, IL, 10-18-10.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

proactive approach and bring women's athletics into the forefront before Title IX was implemented. The women and their teams have become campus leaders and an integral part of the school. Having women's athletics at Aurora College / University has shown women as complete student athletes who have athletic ability as well as minds and spirits.<sup>123</sup> Lynn Riley Schoenhardt said it the best when she said, "I think Aurora's culture of diversity and equality was a natural fit for the growth of women's athletics."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Rebecca L. Sherrick, interview by Kirk Williamson, Aurora, IL, 10-18-10.

<sup>124</sup> Lynn Riley Schoenhardt, interview by Kirk Williamson, Naperville, IL, 11-10-10.

## Appendix A

Yearbook Coverage	Number of Pages	
	Men	Women
1910	3	0
1913	6	0
1923	8	5.5
1933	13	3
1938	6	1
1943	0	0
1948	12	1
1953	9	1
1956	11	2
1959	8	1
1963	6	0
1966	14	4.5
1969	17	3.5
1970	18	3.5
1972	16	3
1973	19	4
1978	22	10
1983	10	8
1988	8	9
1992	13	11
2000	7	7

## Appendix B

The following pictures are presented to help show the progression of the women's basketball team at Aurora. There are also two photos of men's basketball teams, which can be compared to women's photos. One can observe that over the years the women's photographs have moved away from a "play day" mentality and become serious athletic photographs, like the men's teams have had throughout their time at Aurora.



1918-1919 Aurora College Women's Basketball Team, Aurora University Archives





1919-1920 Aurora College Women's Basketball Team, Aurora University Archives



1919-1920 Aurora College Men's Basketball Team, Aurora University Archives



1919-1920 Aurora College Women's Basketball Team, Aurora University Archives



1923-1924 Aurora College Women's Basketball Team, Aurora University Archives



1967 Aurora College Women's Basketball Team, Aurora University Archives



1995-1996 Aurora University Women's Basketball Team, Aurora University Sports Information Department



2009-2010 Aurora University Women's Basketball Team, Aurora University Sports Information Department



2009-2010 Aurora University Men's Basketball Team, Aurora University Sports Information Department

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