Preface

During the second half of the nineteenth century the complicated processes of industrialization and urbanization produced a revolution in leisure and recreation of which sport was the most spectacular aspect. This revolution had profound implications for social control, and in it, as in society at large, class and gender were important variables reflecting potent power relationships. Sport, as a number of historians have demonstrated, was a particularly useful means of reinforcing distinctions of class, social standing, and territory, and also of gender. In all classes the patterns of Victorian sport reflected clearly the different roles and privileges historically ascribed to the sexes.¹

Prior to 1914 women and girls from almost all sections of English society took part in various forms of calisthenics and gymnastics. But the female dimension of the sporting revolution was primarily middle-class, for it was women of the middle ranks whose sporting consciousness was awakened first by educational and recreational experiences, who had the free time and financial means participation required, and who, despite numerous impediments related to the patriarchal nature of social relations and restrictive perceptions of femininity, began to ‘play the game’ by the thousands. In comparison women of the working classes were much less involved, because the requisite schooling, money, and time for leisure activities were lacking, and because of their subservient relationships with men of their own class and with women of higher classes. There are, however, important lower-class aspects of the history of women and sport which merit scrutiny, for working-class women’s sport played a role in the formation and reformation of class and gender relationships.

¹ A version of this essay was delivered at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, 29 December 1990.

My consciousness of this was raised by a reviewer of my recent book, who chided me for a “somewhat cavalier dismissal of the involvement of working-class women in sport” without having done the research to substantiate this, and more significantly, by Catriona Parratt, one of my former students. In an insightful paper presented to the North American Society for Sport History, Parratt attacked as overly simplistic the explanatory models, theories, and perspectives on class used by the mainly middle-class historians of women’s sport, because of their concentration on the experiences of educated, bourgeois females. Parratt considered it ironic that it has been mainly the male historians of male, working-class sport who have illuminated the rich sporting traditions developed by the working classes, and who, despite their neglect of women, have shown how the inter-relationships of class, gender, and sport should be approached. Parratt’s doctoral work is breaking new ground by exploring the role which working-class women’s sport played in the formation and reformation of class and gender relationships, and by presenting a history of women’s sport, rather than a history of women in sport.

My more modest aims here are to examine some class and gender issues relating to the physical training and sports participation of lower-class females and the ways they were affected by prevailing values and social judgments, and to demonstrate that the history of working-class women in sport requires much more scrutiny. Explored briefly will be physical education and sport in state-supported elementary schools, women’s participation in team sports, and the extensive sports programs developed for workers by the Cadbury and Rowntree Companies. The findings presented are preliminary and a prelude to further investigation and analysis.

Elementary Schools

During the late-Victorian period the development of physical education and sport programs in English schools was marked by notable class and gender differences. The view was generally accepted that each class had its own educational and physical requirements. Social and economic conditions thus produced two distinct systems, one for the rich and one for the poor. As is well known, in public schools for boys from affluent families an obsessive and extremely influential cult of athleticism developed, which was based on highly organized and competitive team games intended to build the character necessary in leaders and derogated physical training in the form of exercise systems. At the same time in public schools for girls of similar backgrounds a progressive and comprehensive system of physical education evolved, which combined

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4. My definition of the late-nineteenth century includes the period up to 1914, and that of working-class women, those of the working-class who had some education and opportunities to play games. Lower-middle-class working women come into the picture on occasion as well.
Swedish exercises with competitive games. What happened in elementary schools could hardly have been more different.

Before 1870 there was little interest in the physical needs of poor children on the part of governments and the religious societies and poor law authorities that ran what schools there were for working-class children. The only exercise received by boys was a monotonous form of military drill. Girls got almost no exercise at all.

With the Forster Education Act reformers won a small victory, for the act allowed—although did not require—a form of military drill by boys in elementary schools to count for attendance and hence a government grant. After further reports and recommendations by school inspectors, the Gladstone government gave permission in 1873 for girls to receive some physical training as well, and from then on, something unusual happened. Innovations were introduced first into the physical training of elementary school girls, and only later adopted for boys.

In 1876, having succumbed to the arguments of reformers, the relatively progressive London School Board decided that physical exercises must be given in every girls’ department. Two years later the board took the first major step toward the introduction of systematic physical education in elementary schools when it appointed Concordia Löfving, and upon her resignation in 1881, Martina Bergman-Österberg, both of the Central Gymnastics Institute, Stockholm, as Lady Superintendents of Physical Education, and commissioned them to offer courses in scientific exercises to female board school teachers. Thus began the steady rise of the Swedish system of exercise to a position of dominance in the physical education programs of state-aided schools. Under Bergman-Österberg, a woman of remarkable energy and determination who possessed an almost fanatical desire to popularise Swedish exercise and who founded the women’s physical training profession in England, 1300 teachers were trained, and Swedish gymnastics were introduced into all the London Board’s girls’ schools and departments and into several training colleges for female teachers.

While the Swedish system took over the physical education of elementary school girls, that of boys followed a different course because of the strong resistance of the militarists. The report of the Cross Royal Commission on Elementary Education (1888) referred specifically to Bergman-Österberg’s “interesting account of the Swedish system of exercises for girls based on the

5. Military drill was considered unsuitable for girls, but prior to 1873 some girls were drilled anyhow.
6. The Swedish system of exercise originated in Stockholm in the late-eighteenth century with Per Henrik Ling, who developed an elaborate system of free-standing movements without apparatus designed to cultivate all parts of the body harmoniously by gradually progressing from simple and gentle movements to more difficult and complicated ones. The system emphasized discipline, identification of individuals with a group, and the repetition of identical movements. Excessively regimented and conceptually narrow, it gave little thought to individualistic or imaginative ways of moving, or to the idea that exercise should be enjoyable. But it was a distinct improvement upon military drill, which was taught to boys by untrained drill sergeants and lacked a philosophical or scientific dimension; and in elementary schools it offered a swift, inexpensive answer to a pressing problem.
study of physiology,” and expressed the hope that it would gradually be introduced into all elementary schools. But in fact it actually recommended nothing more imaginative for boys than the prevailing form of military drill whose primary purposes remained to improve physiques and maintain discipline.

During the 1890s, however, as a result of both the Cross Commission’s gloomy findings on the state of children’s health, and pressure from teachers, physicians, and educational reformers, the Education Department was finally convinced that all lower-class children needed to be systematically physically educated by trained teachers. It thus recognized both military drill and scientific exercise as legitimate forms of instruction for boys, made physical training compulsory, and ordered that no higher governmental grants would be paid to schools not conforming.  

By the turn of the century the physical education of girls in elementary schools was exclusively Swedish, while that of boys was moving steadily in that direction. Henceforth, although unsure exactly where they were going, a succession of governments introduced more imaginative programs for both sexes. A new Syllabus of Physical Exercises (1904) for children of both sexes, combined features of the Swedish system and military drill. Emphasizing the harmonious development of the whole body, it deliberately introduced recreational, relaxing, and pleasurable elements, such as running, skipping, and games.

In 1909, as the state increasingly recognized its responsibilities to the public and responded to changes in educational theory, further revisions were introduced through another syllabus which ended up dominating elementary school physical education for decades. Although still heavily influenced by Swedish exercises and by the apparent necessity to continue teaching obedience and discipline, it put more emphasis on recreational elements for children of both sexes.

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Between 1894 and 1896, 12,000 London School Board children received instruction in swimming; in 1902, 50,000; and in 1910, 35,300 schoolgirls alone. See “Swimming in Board Schools,” Englishwoman’s Review 10 (August 1875): 368; Physique 1 (May 1891); 77; Englishwoman’s Year Book (1895): 113; C. Chapman, “The London Schools Swimming Association,” Physical Culture 4 (January-June 1903): 195-99.
Important developments also occurred in elementary schools in the realm of competitive games, the introduction of which, from the 1890s, was the result of encouragement by school inspectors and initiatives taken by energetic male teachers who began to arrange for boys to participate in sports outside school hours. By 1893 there was a London Schools Football Association, and soon thereafter, organized inter-school competitions in football, cricket, and athletics in a number of other cities and large towns. Through the 1890s, however, games and sports among elementary school pupils depended almost entirely on the initiative and encouragement of selfless teachers working on their own time without proper facilities and without financial assistance or official encouragement from any level of government; and the focus was almost exclusively on boys.

Finally, in 1900, the newly constituted Board of Education instructed inspectors that games were a suitable alternative to drill or Swedish exercise, and that they had useful moral and physical benefits for the working as well as the upper classes. It was argued in the public school manner, for example, that games would improve health and character and teach the principles of discipline, courage, loyalty, and fair play. Football was particularly recommended for boys, and a few years later, netball and rounders for girls, in whose physical education games were also beginning to be recognized as a useful factor. In 1906 a revised educational code permitted football, hockey, and cricket for boys, and “suitable” games for girls to be played in school hours. Unfortunately, a relatively small number of children benefitted, for the reality was that games were still impractical in most urban elementary schools because of a lack of space and facilities. Drill or Swedish exercises thus remained the only practical alternatives.

The development of physical education in elementary schools for working-class children was predicated on their subordinate class position and social roles and their conformity with expected behavioural norms. Middle-class decision makers thought of exercise for such children, particularly unruly boys, as part of a process of social control designed to produce obedient workers. Their highest priorities were economy and efficiency, so they promoted activities—i.e., compulsory military and Swedish drill—which could be performed cheaply by large numbers in limited time and space, would provide training in discipline, industry, and cleanliness, and would improve the nation’s health and thus its economic, military, and maternal capacity.

Working-class boys especially suffered, because for decades what physical training they received rested primarily on monotonous and mindless forms of


military drill. Generations marched, turned, and wheeled, stiff as pokers, to the orders of untrained instructors. There was no room for freedom of movement or individuality, because such were considered unnecessary and undesirable in the masses. 13

The development of physical training for elementary school girls was also conceptually narrow, but rather more progressive. Unlike the boys’ system, it had powerful middle-class leaders and plenty of well-trained middle-class teachers who had influence with educational authorities. By the turn of the century, virtually all girls under the jurisdiction of the London and other large school boards received systematic physical training along Swedish lines from qualified teachers, which was intended to develop the mind and all parts of the body harmoniously. Although tedious by modern standards, it was at least based on sound physiological principles and was vastly superior to the work done with boys.

Thereafter, in response to social reformers’ increasing pressure on the state to assume responsibility for the physical well-being of children, governments started to introduce a series of physical welfare services, such as school meals and medical inspection of children, to which new concepts, standards, and expectations of physical education were related. As has been indicated, a more imaginative program was introduced for children of both sexes which, while centred on Swedish exercises, increasingly emphasized as well the importance of recreation and enjoyment. The idea that all that was required of physical training was the inculcation of habits of obedience was partially de-emphasized. Henceforth, physical education was to play a part in developing character, which meant the way was opened for an infusion into elementary schools of aspects of the public school spirit of games. The playing of games by boys, and to a lesser extent by girls, received official encouragement; and, in at least a few areas, a little money was provided by local authorities to improve facilities. 14

In the decade before 1914, teachers, superintendents, and inspectors, armed with the 1904 and then the 1909 Syllabus and now including women, promoted comprehensive physical training in state-supported schools more zealously than ever before. On the whole, however, far too little continued to be done to care for the bodies of the children of the masses. Because of a continuing reluctance to spend public money, facilities for physical education and sport remained appallingly inadequate, and the official exercise program, like the whole elementary education system, remained far too mechanistic. On the male side, trained physical educators remained in extremely short supply, and although games were encouraged for both sexes, no systematic provision for them was made, with the least being done for girls. 15


15. Hughes, “Socialization of the Body,” 84; McIntosh, Physical Education, 145,166-68; Smith, Stretching, 97-118. There were no men’s physical training colleges until 1933, and not until the late 1930s did opportunities for working-class schoolchildren to play recreative games become widespread.
Team Sports

The fact that the physical training girls received in elementary schools centred on a rigid system of gymnastic exercises rather than on athletic games meant that they were not provided with a sporting tradition to carry into the adult world. In addition, the opportunities working-class girls had for taking exercise and participating in sport outside school hours and after their schooling was complete were much fewer than their brothers. They usually had much less time for play of any sort, as a result of having to help their mothers with domestic tasks and child care. Furthermore, playgrounds, where they existed at all in working-class neighbourhoods, were often for boys only; and there were many more boys’ clubs which organized recreational physical activities than there were girls’. One of the results was that working-class women’s participation in team sports was extremely limited, relative to that of men of their own class and women of higher rank.

A major element in the history of middle-class women and sport was their involvement in the playing of team games such as hockey, cricket, and lacrosse. Society in general, and men in particular, disapproved of women playing team games on the grounds that they would be masculinized, that their place was in the home, and that their participation threatened the separate spheres of the sexes and thus the purity of men’s sport. Women persisted nevertheless, and by 1914 a relatively extensive network of women’s teams existed, particularly in hockey. Unfortunately, working-class women had even more difficulty gaining entry into team sports than did their middle-class sisters, for in addition to gender issues they were dogged by class ones.

Cricket and football were two major team sports which working-class women entered in the late-nineteenth century, but in such tiny numbers and so briefly that their efforts amounted to little more than interesting episodes. At the same time, however, across England a plethora of voluntary associations existed which did their best to meet some of the health, welfare, and recreational needs of working-class girls. Peoples’ palaces, church institutes, girls’ brigades, girls’ guilds, settlement houses, and friendly societies, for example, were centres of recreation, which to varying degrees conducted swimming lessons and competitions, ran drill and gymnastics classes and sponsored public displays and contests between competing clubs, and occasionally borrowed school and other playgrounds to enable girls to play such games as rounders and netball on Saturday afternoons. In toto, however, these affected only a minority, and neither constituted nor precipitated a revolution in working-class women’s sport akin to that affecting women of the middle ranks at the time. See Bathurst, “The Physique of Girls,” 830-31. (Bathurst was a former school inspector under the Board of Education.)

Middle-class women won public approval of their participation in individual sports much more easily than in team games, because they seemed more conducive to the production of aesthetically pleasing images and much less competitive and overtly masculine. The opposite was true of working-class women, for whom social snobbery, lack of opportunity, and expense were even more acute problems. The playing of lawn tennis and golf, the premier individual sports, was monopolized by socially exclusive clubs which did not welcome “outsiders.” Limited numbers of working-class women can, however, be found ice and roller skating, swimming, and even rowing in the late-nineteenth century; and with their middleland upper-class sisters they can certainly be found cycling by the thousands, for the bicycle provided them with both a delightful means of physical recreation and a cheap and practical mode of transportation. See Chambers Journal 57 (1880): 466; Englishwoman’s Review 10 (September 1875): 423-24; Englishwoman’s Year Book (1904): 163; Joseph F. Heighton, “A Sculling Club for Girls,” Physical Culture 7 (July-December 1902): 6; Frederick James Furnivall, A Volume of Personal Record (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), xxviii, lxxix, 77-78, 81, 181.

McCrone, Playing the Game, 127-53.
time, they illustrate some of the problems facing women in sport, especially working-class women.

Women’s cricket was the only team sport for women of any class which had a history pre-dating the nineteenth century. In the late-eighteenth century in the south of England, teams of upper-class ladies occasionally played; and between the 1740s and 1830s matches involving females of the rustic set flourished in villages in Sussex, Hampshire, and Surrey, because they offered an entertaining spectacle and welcome opportunities for betting and winning prizes. In the early-nineteenth century, however, women’s cricket entered a long slump. Cricket playing by ladies of quality was too discordant with the evolving Victorian ideal of helpless and fragile femininity, while the time and space requirements of the factory system and the increasingly censorious attitude of the middle class toward the recreations of the masses put an end to cricket among lower-class women.  

From the 1870s cricket reemerged as a fashionable entertainment on country house lawns, as a popular sport in girls’ public schools, and as a sport played decorously by middle- and upper-class ladies in socially exclusive clubs. Female cricketers were never accepted, however, because cricket was the ultimate manly and national game. Women’s efforts to play seriously were treated as a foolish parody which threatened to desanctify the real, masculine thing, and challenge men’s natural right to monopolize athletic power and privilege.

The most interesting, if aberrational, event in the history of women’s cricket was the formation in 1890 of the Original English Lady Cricketers (OELC). The first professional women’s teams in any sport, the OELC were the brainchild of a group of male entrepreneurs who anticipated turning the growing popularity of women’s cricket to profit. Through advertisements in several London newspapers, enough enterprising young women from the lower-middle and upper-lower class were recruited to form two XIs. Although lacking experience in cricket, they were motivated by a desire to earn money in an unconventional way. After practising privately on grounds in the London area under the tutelage of two leading male professionals, the OELC toured the country playing exhibition matches against each other on major grounds before large crowds undoubtedly attracted by the novelty of the spectacle.  The promoters originally intended to follow the English tour with one to Australia. Instead they absconded with the profits at the end of the first season, and the teams disbanded.

The Original English Lady Cricketers did nothing to popularize cricket among women of any class. They were looked down on by the highly respectable lady amateurs; and the whole enterprise was generally regarded as a stunt. Original and English they may have been, but they were considered neither

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20. Fifteen thousand turned up to watch a match on the Police Athletic Ground, Liverpool.
ladies nor cricketers. Their legacy was nothing to be ashamed of, however, for they demonstrated that a practical style of sports costume could be becoming, that cricket was not too severe or dangerous for women, and that women could in fact play seriously and well. They also probably provided the inspiration for the British Ladies’ Football Club.

Football was the single most popular team sport among men in general and working-class men in particular by the late-nineteenth century. But even the most ardent advocates of female physical freedom recommended against participation by women of any class, because they considered the game too rough and masculine. So football did not become a major part of the history of women in sport. 21 Briefly, however, in the mid 1890s, there was a British Ladies’ Football Club (BLFC) comprised of two teams.

The lady footballers were the brainchild of a pseudonymous and elusive Miss Nettie J. Honeyball, who founded the club in London in 1894 “with the fixed resolve of proving to the world that women are not the ornamental and useless creatures men have pictured.” 22 Players of a social background similar to the OELC’s were found by similar means. Thirty women, aged 15 to 26, including several who were married, turned up for the organizational meeting. None had played previously, although a few had some familiarity with the game as

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21. Working-class women attended football matches in limited numbers and one was even a shareholder in the Woolwich Arsenal club. But few married women had the opportunity to spectate even if they could afford it, for they usually had children to look after; and in the winter, when matches started early so as to finish before dark, their husbands went straight from work to grounds on Saturday afternoons and expected a hot meal as soon as they got home. Tony Mason, Association Football and English Society (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), 153-56.

22. Sketch 6 (6 February 1895): 60. Honeyball was an ardent supporter of votes for women and of their right to sit in parliament. She also considered it possible mat women would play football on the same clubs as men some day.
Miss Nettie Honeyball, Captain of the British Ladies’ Football Club, in her football costume.

_The Sketch_, February 6, 1895
spectators. A certain Lady Florence Dixie, who must have been an iconoclast, was persuaded to become president, her title adding respectability to what at the time could only be considered a dubious enterprise.

After several unsuccessful attempts to arrange practice times on established grounds, a small ground became available; and, coached by a well-known half-back, the BLFC began to take shape. By February 1895 the group of “fair performers” was regarded in some quarters as “the sporting sensation of the hour.” Their first match, however, was severely criticized in the press as “an astonishing sight.” “Ten thousand curious spectators” showed up for what, from the athletic standpoint, turned out to be “a huge farce.”

The efforts of the performers were watched with supreme pity, and the exodus began before the affair was half-way through. . . . The first few minutes were sufficient to show that football by women . . . is totally out of the question. A footballer requires speed, judgment, skill and pluck. Not one of these four qualities was apparent. . . . For the most part, the ladies wandered aimlessly over the field at an ungraceful jog-trot. A smaller ball than usual was utilised, but the strongest among them could propel it no further than a few yards. The most elementary rules of the game were unknown. . . . Let not the British Ladies misconstrue the enormous attendance into a sign of public approval. These people had attended purely out of curiosity. . . . It must be clear to everybody that girls are totally unfitted for the rough work of the football-field. As a means of exercise in a back-garden it is not to be commended; as a public entertainment it is to be deprecated.

Critics equated the lady footballers with female acrobats and weight-lifters whose quest for notoriety was similarly misguided and absurd, and they expressed certainty that football was a game utterly beyond a woman’s strength or natural power and would never gain favour among Englishwomen generally.

The lady footballers disbanded in 1896, the constant abuse, heckling, and ridicule heaped upon them by the press and by spectators having taken their toll. In the last analysis they were an aberration which left no permanent impact on women’s sport in general, or on that of working-class women in particular. However, they deserve credit for having dared to try to play a game that was almost universally considered beyond women’s powers and proper sphere.

Of much more importance than cricket and football to the sporting history of working-class women was their involvement in hockey, the paramount winter team game for adult women by 1914. While hockey originated as a game for men, it failed to develop as a major male activity. At boys’ public schools it was often regarded as effeminate and fit only for malingerers, so it never acquired the grandeur or overt masculinity of cricket and football. Gender issues thus proved less important than class ones in the history of women’s hockey.

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The female public schools, university colleges, and clubs which first played

24. Ibid. (27 March 1895): 444.
25. The Archdeacon of Manchester called an exhibition match between the two teams a disgrace to his town, and an old Notts player described play as “the level of a cricket match played by professional clowns.” See Englishwoman 1 (April 1895): 155; 1 (May 1895): 233; 2 (February 1895): 494.
hockey, were very middle class and socially exclusive. Practices and matches were held during the day in the middle of the week, which excluded working women as did club subscription fees and the cost of uniforms and travel. When the All England Women’s Hockey Association (AEWHA) was founded in 1895 by women who had played at the likes of Roedean School and Oxford and Cambridge, there were no businesswomen’s or working-girls’ clubs of any kind. The association’s constitution did not mention social differentiation, but for years neither it nor affiliated clubs made much effort to breach class barriers. In 1907 a letter to the Hockey Field, the AEWHA’s official organ, recalled an attempt to introduce into a ladies’ club a skilled player whose father had been in trade, which failed because members thought themselves above playing with a tradesman’s daughter.

By then, however, there were signs that “the game was passing from a sociable pastime for those with plenty of leisure to be an enterprise, a recreation and an enthusiasm for those working for a living,” for it was starting to be played in schools for the poorer classes, by working-girls clubs whose players—mainly clerks and shop girls—could only play during their Saturday half holiday, and by clubs formed in factories and offices in Midland and northern communities.

In response to the changing realities, the Hockey Field began to describe the game as suitable for the mental, moral, and physical training of girls in every station in life. It also supported appeals for donations of old equipment to help hockey clubs for working girls get started, on the grounds that such clubs provided opportunities to “women who had never before had a chance of playing any combined games, and in many cases hardly know the meaning of outdoor exercise.” Once in a while a particularly enlightened writer even began to refer to hockey’s “invaluable” power to mix women of all sorts by providing them with a common interest, and to urge players of various classes to combine, particularly in areas where numbers were insufficient to support separate clubs of different social standing. But in practice most ladies’ clubs gave the idea a cool reception, despite assurances that such combination was unlikely to blur social boundaries and that players need not socialize off the field.

Devotees of the AEWHA had some sympathy with ‘town girls’—i.e., the daughters of such people as clerks who normally neither worked nor took regular exercise—who wanted to play hockey, although they did not want them

26. For detailed information on school and university hockey and on the All England Women’s Hockey Association see McCrone, Playing the Game, chapters 2, 3, and 5.
27. Hockey Field (10 January 1907): 189. The same month the Hockey Field told the story of two hockey clubs in a town, one of high social standing and the other comprised of tradesmen’s daughters. Both lost members, but the club of high social standing refused to countenance amalgamation, so both clubs ended up folding. Hockey Field (3 January 1907): 163.
29. Hockey Field (11 January 1912): 195. See also (3 January 1907): 163; (3 September 1908): 348; (22 December 1910): 149.
on their teams. But they had a very scant understanding of the sporting aims and needs of working-class women, as is evidenced by an illuminating article in the *Hockey Field* in 1910 which expressed “A Few Thoughts on Working Girls’ and Other Hockey Clubs.”

While nothing but admiration can be felt for those who try to brighten toil-worn lives, one wonders, nevertheless, whether hockey is the best means to this end for girls of the working class. Let it not be thought for one moment that I am in the slightest degree in sympathy with those who imagine that to allow these girls to play a game which their social superiors happen to play, will be ‘putting notions into their heads,’ or ‘taking them out of their proper positions,’ for no mere game, played once or twice a week, will suffice to take any girl out of the position for which she is designed, or to put her into it; . . . those who desire that no one shall budge from what is deemed to be their positions may take comfort even if there be a club of the sort near. But the question is: Is not hockey too violent an exercise and too prolonged a strain for those who often spend much of their time in heavy manual work? . . . Very often these girls, in addition to close application to wage-earning work . . . have the heavy part of the household work in their own homes to perform . . . and get a liberal allowance of exercise in washing clothes or scrubbing floors-which last is a fine exercise, but somewhat ‘self-sufficing’ from an athletic point of view. . . . For girls who do this kind of thing daily . . . are not violent games unnecessary, and likely to take them ‘beyond the health limit of fatigue’? . . . Would not a shorter and less violent game, such as rounders, be better? 31

It was no wonder that working girls’ clubs went their own way.

In 1910 interest in, and a demand for, hockey among working-class women and the number of working-class women’s clubs was so considerable that a Ladies’ Hockey League (LHL) was formed in Oldham in Lancashire, 32 by a group of businessmen. While players were not paid, the league deliberately copied the professional Football Association model of points, standings, and cups, all of which were anathema to the idealistic AEWHA to whom the honour of winning was the only legitimate reward for victory. Another major negative, in the eyes of the exclusively female administration of the senior association, was that the working-girls’ clubs which joined the league, and the league itself, were run mainly by men. Before long, however, the LHL provided regular matches on Saturday afternoons, and attracted so much support that it was able to divide into four nine-team divisions, to form Lancashire and Cheshire county teams, and to arrange matches against teams in the Bradford and District Ladies’ Hockey League, a similar organization that sprang up in Yorkshire late in 1911. 33

Despite the league’s disavowal of any desire to interfere with the AEWHA, the latter became worried. Although it resolutely refused to recognize the LHL until 1921, it agreed to the *Hockey Field’s* reporting the results of league matches, and it belatedly attempted-albeit unsuccessfully-to persuade

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31. Ibid. (22 December 1910): 149.
32. Unfortunately, the writer has been unable to locate the records of the Ladies’ Hockey League or to plumb the depths of local newspapers from the areas in which the LHL operated. As a result, her primary-and not very friendly-source of information on the league is the *Hockey Field*.
working-girls’ clubs to affiliate and its own members to accept them.\textsuperscript{34} In 1914 it even agreed to a match between Lancashire of the AEWHA and the LHL’s premier team. Lancashire won easily, for the LHL played the game as the AEWHA had played it ten years earlier—with “no aggressive back play, no marking, no short passing, no combination between attack and defence, and very little among the forwards, and a lack of cleverness with the stick.”\textsuperscript{35} The \textit{Hockey Field} was impressed nevertheless that hockey among a “different class of women” had come so far so fast. But the reality was that the AEWHA’s victory only confirmed many of its members’ condescending conviction that working girls had much to learn about hockey—as about life—from their social superiors, and that they had practically no hope of ever being first class players.\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{Company Sports}

Historians of sport are only now realizing that among the most important sites of sport for working-class females were factories and offices which provided games schemes for workers. By 1900 a few large companies were developing a new type of company culture that included a recognition of education and recreation as significant to the performance of workers of both sexes, and to that end, they provided paid holidays and extensive educational and recreational programs and facilities.\textsuperscript{37} Two such companies were Cadburys and Rowntrees. Both were chocolate manufacturers, and both were run by devout Quaker families who applied religious ideals to business. Thus they aimed to provide high quality but reasonably priced products to consumers and to advance the well-being of their employees as individuals and citizens.

As Charles Dellheim has demonstrated in a fascinating exploration of the relationship between economic behaviour and cultural values, among Cadburys’ virtues was a tradition of enlightened management directed towards combining business efficiency with the protection of workers against unemployment, illness, and old age. In 1878 the firm built a new factory in a rural setting four miles from Birmingham in order to have larger premises and room for expansion, but also to provide workers with the pleasure of laboring amidst green fields and clean air. Several years later the company financed the building of Bournville, a model village for workers adjacent to the works, replete with cottages, gardens, and acres of parks and sports grounds.\textsuperscript{38}

To create a strong corporate identity, generations of Cadburys deliberately created an ethos that was encoded with, and advanced by, a plethora of rituals, myths, and symbols reminiscent of those used for the same purpose by elite public schools. Convinced, as were the schools, of the validity of the healthy

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. (6 April 1911), 385-89; (13 April 1911), 414; (19 October 1911), 9; (4 January 1912). 179; (11 January 1912): 195, 211, 222; AEWHA, Women’s Hockey, 8.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Hockey Field} (8 January 1914):379.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. See also (11 January 1912): 195; (23 October 1912): 12.

\textsuperscript{37} C. B. Fry’s Magazine 2 (November 1904): 247; Waters, “All Sorts . . . of Outlandish Recreations,” 2 1.

mind in healthy body philosophy and that participation in sport advanced players’ moral, social, and physical well-being, over the years they encouraged workers of both sexes to take physical training and recreation by providing unusually extensive opportunities and abundant and ever-improving facilities.

From the 1890s compulsory swimming classes in local baths and then in Bournville’s own outdoor bath were available to boys, and boys were also offered evening gymnastics classes and the opportunity to attend summer camps. For men there were voluntary evening classes in a gymnasium at Bournville, and for boys and men an athletic club (1896), which, with company moral and material support and annual fees of three to five shillings, arranged annual sports days. Competitions, both internal and against other companies and clubs, were organized in cricket, football, rugby, basketball, tennis, quoits, bowling, hockey, swimming, walking, running, cycling, fishing, and gymnastics. After the public school fashion, the athletic club’s officers regularly urged members to persuade others to join and so uphold the firm’s honour, and they promoted a variety of affiliative and legitimating awards. Also as in the schools, the works magazine, by particularly encouraging participation in sport, “aimed to promote . . . the Bournville ‘Spirit’-to foster comradeship and good fellowship, and to add one more to the links binding together the community at Bournville in mutual service.” Long lists of fixtures and cricket batting and bowling averages were published, along with photographs of, and congratulatory messages to, individual and club champions and teams; and victories and defeats were discussed in terms reminiscent of ‘the old school tie’ ordinary Bournvillians would never wear.

Between 1902 and 1911 membership in the men’s athletic club rose from 650 to 1316 and its budget from £400 to £720, and the club was given permission by the firm to manage its own affairs, which meant its budget and the men’s sports ground and cricket pavilion. Senior Cadburys, like public school masters, retained the presidency and vice-presidency.

True to Quaker principles, the Cadburys believed in the spiritual equality of women, and for women workers this meant better than average working conditions, wages, and benefits. Edward Cadbury, who took charge of the women’s departments around 1900, was particularly committed to promoting the welfare of female employees who at the time outnumbered men by more than two to one. However, he and the firm continued to make gender distinctions. As was typical with much less enlightened companies, to protect morality, male and female workers were not allowed to work or dine together. To protect the family and women’s “highest calling” and discourage husbands from loafing, married women were neither hired nor permitted to stay on. Men were allowed

39. Bournville Works Magazine (BWM) 1 (November 1902): 1. The BWM is the writer’s primary source of information on sport at Cadburys. As was to be expected, it presents a view of the Cadbury world from the top down rather than from the workers’ perspective.

40. Young Woman 7 (1898-99): 144, reported that Cadburys employed 1900 females and 700 males. See also Dellheim, “Creation of a Company Culture,” 22; BWM 5 (May 1907): 214.
to perform more skilful and strenuous tasks and to work somewhat longer hours, and they were paid more on the grounds that they had to support families. At the same time, separate lines of command for men and women were deliberately designed to increase women’s opportunities for advancement.41

In addition, because Cadburys believed that healthy minds and bodies were as important to women as to men, it provided female workers with unusually extensive sports facilities—tennis courts, a gymnasium with a modern, shower-equipped dressing room, a large, heated indoor swimming bath, and acres of playgrounds. Girls under 16 were given time off work several mornings a week for compulsory swimming and Swedish gymnastics classes; and they were encouraged to play cricket, hockey, netball, and tennis during the dinner hour, after work, and on Saturday afternoons. Those older were urged to attend voluntary evening classes in gymnastics, swimming, and morris dancing. In imitation of girls’ public schools, the company hired on regular contracts at competitive wages three or four full-time female instructors, trained at the new physical training colleges for women, to teach gymnastics, swimming, and games. As in the schools, the instructors were expected to keep elaborate statistics on the physical development of the girls in gymnastics classes with an eye to remedying ‘defects.’ They also coached and organized games and competitions. In so doing they became great favourites with their charges, to whom they gave regular pep talks about keeping up a high standard of good will and fellowship and never letting the side down.42

After the fashion of the men’s athletic club, in 1899 Cadburys inaugurated a Bournville Girls’ Athletic Club (BGAC) with an initial membership of 113. Before long the club was sponsoring an annual gymkhana, sending Swedish gymnastics teams to the annual competitions of the Birmingham Union of Girls’ Clubs (whose shield it won several years in a row), providing a summer camp for girls in Wales, and organizing sports teams of various sorts for internal and external competition.

The first girls’ contest on which the works magazine reported was a cricket match in 1902 between the BGAC and an XI from the men’s club, which played left-handed to make the competition more even as was typical in such situations.43 When the netball team played its first outside match against the Anstey Physical Training College in 1903, spectators were struck by the working girls’

For years, apart from Rowntrees, Cadburys was the only factory in the United Kingdom where gymnastics and swimming classes were held during working hours and, after 1907, under government inspection. The Board of Education was very interested in the Bournville experiment and hoped it would induce other manufacturers to take responsibility for the physical training of their employees. In 1910 a special four year physical training course for girls, including gymnastics and swimming, annual examinations, and a certificate of completion, was inaugurated. See BWM 5 (May 1907): 214-15; 6 (December 1907): 45; 7 (May 1909): 207-9; 8 (April 1910): 231; 10 (November 1912): 340.
43. BWM 1 (November 1902): 15. In the early years of the BGAC office men were invited to teach the girls to play cricket.
easy victory over their older, socially superior, and more athletically experienced opponents, and by their “steady sportsmanlike bearing.” By 1906 there were three netball grounds at Bournville, and five teams which played during the dinner hour, “of which three could hold their own against any ladies’ team in England.”

However, as was the case throughout the world of women’s sport, hockey became Bournville’s great women’s team game. In 1905 a new women’s hockey ground was provided, and three teams were formed, which practised during dinner hours and on Saturday afternoons, and played against schools, local girls’, women’s, and church clubs, teacher and physical training colleges, and other companies. By 1908 the number of teams had risen to four, and by 1911, to five. In articles written by members of the physical training staff, who used language that could have come straight from the Roedean School News, the works magazine urged “men” to “do their best,” to be full of “good fellowship and staunch friendship,” and to display “eagerness, quickness, and sporting spirit,” because “the honour of the Club and Works is at stake in all matches, and self, little self, is of no account.”

Like public school inter-house matches, sports competitions between workers in different departments in different sports were encouraged, “to create a greater interest in [and identity with] each department and encourage girls to join the athletic club.” Games players were expected to behave like ladies—although their social standing excluded them for society’s definition of such; and their successful efforts were rewarded with legitimating ribbons, cups, and shields, which were presented at the athletic club’s annual meeting, an event reminiscent of school prize or speech days. Uplifting addresses were given by those in authority—i.e., by the senior male Cadburys who held the presidency and vice-presidencies of the club, and their wives and daughters, who took “a lively interest in the club’s proceedings,” and who in this context were the functional equivalents of head- and house-mistresses. Repeatedly emphasized were the “honour” brought to their departments by girls’ “splendid work” and “sportsmanlike behaviour,” the durable memories and “splendid traditions.”

44. BWM 1 (April 1903): 145. See also 5 (May 1907): 215.
45. Ibid. (May 1906): 228.
46. Ibid. 2 (September 1904): 417. See also 7 (May 1909): 209; 8 (November 1909): 9; 8 (January 1910): 79; 9 (May 1911), 207; 11 (May 1913): 141. Roedean was one of the most exclusive and sport-oriented of girls’ public schools.

Another sport that received much encouragement at Cadburys was swimming. In 1905 a large bath was provided for female workers, along with classes in swimming, diving, and life-saving, which were held much of the year on most weekday evenings and Saturdays. Two hundred girls had learned to swim by 1905-06, and 700 by mid 1909. From 1906 each July a Girls’ Swimming Sports Day, involving “keenly contested races,” was held before a “large,” “enthusiastic,” and mixed audience of parents and friends, and before male judges and timekeepers. Before long Bournville was competing in county ladies’ championship meets, and against local ladies’ clubs, an unusual social mix at the time. It joined the Amateur Swimming Association in 1909, and in 1912 sent representatives to the All England Ladies’ Competition organized by the Royal Life Saving Society. Until a separate men’s indoor bath was built about 1911, men were given permission to use the women’s bath on weekday mornings from 7-9 a.m. and on Friday evenings. See BWM 4 (August 1906): 345; 5 (September 1907): 334; 7 (May 1909): 209; 7 (July 1909): 266; 7 (August 1909): 306; 8 (November 1909): 9; 9 (May 1911): 144; 9 (September 1911): 273-77.
being created by games playing, the excellent example being set for others, and
sport’s value to health, character, and “the future of England.”  
Indeed, the ideal Bournville girl, at least in theory and poetry, was very
much like the ideal public school girl, although the twain were destined rarely
to meet.

She can dive and she can dance and she does her Swedish drill,
Plays at hockey or at net ball—or e’en at cricket, till,
She grows straight and strong and fearless—a woman with a will,
But a woman with a heart that’s made of pure gold.  

By 1914 the BGAC’s membership had grown to 678. For an annual fee of one
shilling members could participate in any or all of the activities under the club’s
jurisdiction: hockey, cricket, netball, croquet, lawn tennis, swimming, gymnastics, morris dancing, girls’ events in the annual sports day, and a summer
camp. Furthermore, they were usually allowed to do so before mixed au-
diences and in practical tunics, things that caused endless debate in the middle-
class context and were often forbidden. It should be noted, however, that
although there were more female than male workers at Cadburys, the propor-
tion of women who belonged to the BGAC was considerably lower than that of
men who belonged to the men’s athletic club. In addition, the range of their
activities and competitions was much more limited, and although they had
representation on the executive committee, they were not given permission by
the company to run their own financial affairs.

This is hardly surprising considering the facts that females had much less
exposure to sport than males in educational settings and the world at large, and
that they had much less time for games playing after working hours because of
their domestic duties as unmarried daughters. In addition, even at enlightened
Bournville and in the midst of Cadburys’ deliberate promotion of women’s
sport, a gender based ‘division of labour’ prevailed that was characteristic of
society at large and stemmed from the ‘first principle’ that men’s sport was the
more serious, real, and legitimate.

A similar pattern is evident in the sports programs provided by the Rowntree
Cocoa Works at New Earswick near York. Rowntrees shared with Cadburys a
humanitarian philosophy firmly rooted in Quaker principles. They, too, aimed
to combine making a profit with setting a humane example to other employers
and so improving the general conditions of labour in England. They, too,
provided good working conditions, regular and reasonable hours and wages,
and extensive educational and social opportunities. They, too, provided their
own athletic facilities, or access to local ones, and extensive opportunities for

48. Ibid. 4 (February 1906): 129; 6 (May 1909): 207-9; 9 (May 1911): 143-45; 11 (April 1913): 139; 12 (June
49. BWM 11 (February 1913): 60.
50. Ibid. 10 (November 1912): 340. Participants had to provide their own sports costumes, an expense a
number may well have had difficulty affording.
51. BWM4 (May 1906): 227-28; 5 (May 1907): 214; 11 (May 1913): 139. Because the men’s average age was
older than women’s (women having to resign upon marriage), because their salaries were higher, and because the
range of their activities was wider, the men’s club charged an annual subscription fee of five shillings. This
translated into an annual budget in 1911 of about £700 for the men’s club and £115 for the women’s.
outdoor sport and recreation; and they, too, hoped the result would be a spirit of unity and good fellowship among all connected with the firm.\textsuperscript{52}

Of Rowntrees’ workers around the turn of the century 1500 were female (all single), and 1200 were male; and the twain rarely met, for they worked, ate, and usually exercised separately. Regular classes in Swedish gymnastics and swimming were provided for girls by instructors especially hired for the purpose—most of whom were trained at the women’s physical education colleges—at first during the evenings and then during working hours, the aims being to produce “keenness and alertness of both body and mind,” correct “unharmontious development,” and make girls supple, graceful, and healthy. In 1908, gymnastics classes were also established for boys under the age of 17; and the following year both came under the supervision and inspection of the Board of Education.\textsuperscript{53}

In addition, by 1914 Rowntrees offered its employees a wide range of external and internal sports competitions and activities. Inter-departmental contests, such as Almond Paste vs. New Cake, or Cream Packing vs. Gum Starch, became particularly notable for exciting “much rivalry” and “keen, sometimes too keen interest.” Men could play football, cricket, hockey, rugby, croquet, and tennis; they could bowl, cycle, swim, boat, fish, and camp; and they could participate in gymnastics, athletics, cross-country running, and annual sports days, the latter before crowds of 1500-2000 and offering a wide assortment of cups, colours, ribbons, and shields. On the other hand, as long as overstrain was carefully guarded against, women could play croquet and tennis, and somewhat belatedly, from 1911 and 1912, hockey and cricket; they could cycle, swim, do gymnastics, and from 1904 participate in a limited number of events at sports days. Furthermore, they were ‘allowed’ to provide refreshments at the social gatherings of the all-male sports clubs.

As at Cadburys the works magazine reported on all of this in detail and in a distinctly public schoolish fashion. Players were often referred to as “stalwarts” and incited to play well for the “love of the game and honour of the club,” while those who did so were congratulated for their “true sportsmanship” and for the spirit of “good comradeship” they were developing. Only occasionally does the magazine’s language provide revealing glimpses of the gender biases overlying women’s activities, in references one minute to gymnastic displays by girls as “pretty entertainments” and the next as the work—albeit of “excellent quality”—of “Amazons.”\textsuperscript{54} Although Rowntrees’ management treated female workers well, they shared with contemporaries a traditional conception of women’s roles and rights, which explains their establishment of compulsory sewing and housewifery classes for girls under the age of 17 and conviction that the greatest honour to befall a Works girl is to become a wife and then a mother.\textsuperscript{55}

52. *Cocoa Works Magazine (CWM)* (March 1902): 2; (June 1913): 1498. Rowntrees had less extensive on-site sports facilities than Cadburys, and so made more use of local ones.
53. *CWM* (January 1903): 130; (August 1903): 74-76; (February 1904): 147; (September 1908): 587; (December 1908): 623-24; (January 1909): 639; (February 1909): 664; (December 1909): 803-4; (June 1913): 1498-1512
54. Ibid (March 1902): 8; (April 1902): 22; (August 1903): 76.
55. Ibid. (June 1913): 1506. See also 1510.
Since the *Cocoa Works Magazine*, like its Cadbury counterpart, presented a view of things from the top down, sports reports are almost universally positive. One exception is the occasional lamentation that not enough girls availed themselves of the opportunity to learn to swim and that lady members of the tennis club practised less often than men.\(^{56}\) (The magazine ascribes this to an unacceptable lack of enthusiasm rather than, as might well have been the case, lack of time.) Another and more notable exception is the revelation that the male-only membership of certain sports clubs rankled some Rowntree women. In 1903 the magazine reported that “so many ladies feel aggrieved because they are excluded from membership [in the boating club], it is hoped that the Committee may find it possible to arrange for several open excursions on Saturday afternoons during the season.”\(^{57}\) Nothing appears to have been done to remedy the grievance, however, for women continued to complain. In 1906 an animated discussion of women’s rights in a meeting of the boating and swimming club was noted, along with a statement to the effect that the “practical application of the verdict in the matter of the desire of ladies to be allowed to join the boating section of the club” was awaited.\(^{58}\) Since the magazine failed to make any further mention of women in connection with boating, one can conclude safely that nothing to remedy their grievance was ever actually done. On the other hand, unlike Cadbury’s, Rowntrees’ cycling club had male and female members and committee members, while the tennis club was not only sexually integrated in terms of membership and competitions, but included representatives of both sexes on its committee, in 1903 in the surprising ratio of two men to four women.\(^{59}\)

The company culture of Cadbury’s and Rowntrees may now seem extremely paternalistic. There is no denying their aim was to imprint the firms’ values on workers and make them loyal and satisfied, nor can we ignore the deferential tone of the magazines’ frequent references to the firms’ “generosity, kindness and consideration” and to the feelings of gratitude workers should have for sports facilities, etc. But both companies genuinely believed in a degree of industrial democracy; so instead of promoting social control in the usual manner of making sure workers were kept inferior and dependent, they promoted equititarian and cooperative relations in the workplace and attempted to empower workers by providing them with various forms of security. The companies’ view that the interests of capital and labour complemented each other, and that treating people well made good business sense, because healthy, happy, and well-trained and paid workers produced better products and higher profits, was exceptional and progressive in the pre-1914 period.\(^{60}\)

Within the context of the time, this was also true of the emphasis they put on sport. Sport was a major element in the development of both firms’ company

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56. Ibid. (October 1906): 243-44; (September 1907): 401.
57. Ibid. (May 1903): 34.
60. Dellheim, “Making of a Company Culture,” 36-44.
culture, since managers realized that participation cultivated feelings of identity with the company and of mutual sharing of values among workers in different departments and between workers and bosses. But it is difficult to deny that the extent of company support was a good thing in its own right. The fact that female employees were included in sport, albeit to a lesser extent than males, and provided with unusually extensive opportunities to improve their physical condition and play athletic games, represented a major advance over the normal treatment of working girls at the time. How much this contributed to their own and their sex’s physical emancipation demands further exploration.

Conclusions

During the late-Victorian period, complicated social factors involving class and gender shaped the concept of what were suitable and acceptable physical activities for boys and girls, men and women, rich and poor. In other words, the use of the physical body was very much constrained by the social body, and rested at least partially on the assumption that class and gender differences involving patterns of dominance and subordination should apply to physical education and sport. 61

In public and elementary schools physical rituals deliberately prepared pupils for their future lives. Character building games were considered appropriate to the future leadership roles of public school children of both sexes, as long as sufficient differences were maintained between boys and girls to protect boys’ masculinity and inherent superiority and girls’ femininity and maternal capacity. 62 In state-supported schools for workers’ children, there were also differences between the physical education of boys and girls, but because pupils were pre-pubescent the necessity to differentiate between appropriate male and female activities was considered much less acute. For years boys’ physical training centred on compulsory and tedious forms of military drill, while girls’ was based on more scientific but similarly tedious Swedish exercises, all with an eye to preparing them for mechanistic occupations and obedient support roles in adult life. The changes in elementary school physical training from the turn of the century involved the introduction of more systematic physical education, competitive games, and a greater element of enjoyment, and in a sense they reflected a social system that was generating and undergoing significant changes. On the other hand, their limitations reflected both the determination of the ‘haves’ to hold on to their privileges and their belief that different systems of physical education and sport were desirable reflectors of class and gender.

Just as society disapproved of the sexes mixing on playing fields, so it disapproved of mixing by people of the same sex but different social class. In


62. See McCrone, Playing the Game, 88-91, for a summary of the gender based differences between the aims of public school sport for boys and those for girls.
the male and female worlds of sport as a whole there was an elaborate pecking order involving who could and should compete against whom and in what activities. The discouragement of social contacts between school children from different backgrounds thus extended to the playing field, and from there into the adult world where sporting needs and capacities were perceived as varying according to social background. 63 The sports clubs out of which many games were played, whether for respectable men, women, or both, deliberately restricted social and spatial zones. Prospective members who were not quite ‘right’ could be black-balled, while prospective opponents of a similar ilk could be ignored. Just as in male sport gentlemen amateurs avoided contact with professional players, in female sport there was never any question of the Original English Lady Cricketers playing against the aristocratic White Heather Cricket Club, or of female hockey players from Cadburys or Rowntrees being invited to trials for AEWHA county or national teams.

Historians of women must never be blinded by illusions of sisterly solidarity, and so neglect distinctive class differences in a gender context. There was even less semblance of gender identification in the world of women’s sport than in that of men. Whereas in the world of men’s sport, by the late-nineteenth century, one can see in the spread of common team games from the middle to the working class some signs of a drawing together of the forms of recreations of various classes, support for women’s team games remained markedly more middle-class and public school oriented. Within the privileged female population social snobbery and group segregation continued to dictate even more strongly than within the corresponding male one that different sports should be followed in different settings by different classes. Women had no desire to associate on the playing field with people they would never have entertained in their drawing rooms. 64

As for gender issues, at every turn both middle- and working-class sportswomen encountered discrimination based on the fact they were female. The femininity question which dogged the steps of generations of middle-class games players was much less troublesome to those of lower rank, for the latter were excluded ordinarily from society’s definition of ‘feminine,’ and thus its obsessive concern about the effects on ‘ladies’ of physical overstrain. However, the gender issue did surface in working-class women’s sport in elementary


school sports programs, in sports-oriented company cultures, and in disagreements about which sports were appropriate for adult women.

Although the quality of elementary schoolgirls’ physical education was long superior to that of boys, when games began to be introduced, boys were provided for earlier and somewhat better, because they, like games, had a higher overall status, and because boys and games seemed a more natural combination. At Cadburys and Rowntrees, while the sports opportunities provided were unusually extensive for both sexes, they were more extensive for males; and male workers responded more readily to the companies’ encouraging involvement in sport for the similarly gender-based reasons that they had greater exposure to, and thus familiarity with it in the outside world, and greater opportunity and freedom to participate. Further, within the working-class as a whole, women got nothing like an equal share of the increasing time and money there was for recreation. Like men of all classes, those of the working-class developed their own usually gender-specific recreational patterns, and while these became more diverse, their wives’ and daughters’ changed little. Much more than men’s lives, women’s remained centred on work and home. And, as was the case in the higher ranks, when a small minority of working-class women did develop an interest in sport as players or spectators, they were often told that this was inappropriate simply because they were female. 65 Whatever the class, the linking of sport and women implied a disjunction, a clash between ‘playing the game’ and societal perceptions of what was proper for females.

Despite progressive changes which relaxed the restraints on women during the late-Victorian period, traditional aspects of the English social order continued to be reflected in sport and reinforced by it. There remained clear distinctions between what was thought proper for the sexes and classes. By 1914 women of all ranks certainly had a much broader range of leisure pursuits, and were far more active in sport than had been the case in previous generations. But in terms of societal expectations the sportswoman remained something of an anomaly. For working-class females in particular, despite a growing desire, an experience with sport remained relatively rare, because the necessary training, freedom of choice, and free time and money continued to be in short supply. The working-class sportswoman who managed to overcome these handicaps then found herself caught in another bind: she was considered inferior to the men of her own class and inferior to sportswomen of higher classes.

The development of women’s sport in late-nineteenth century England, then, was trapped in a class and gender context. The power men held over women in society at large dominated the sporting relations between the sexes in all classes, while the power the superior classes held over those below them dominated the sporting relations between women of different classes. As a result, the sporting activities of working-class women were strictly limited in

time and space. By 1914, for the majority of women of the lower ranks, opportunities for participation in sport and physical recreation remained extremely restricted, and the poorer they were the truer this was. The establishment of equal or at least dramatically improved sporting rights for working-class women could only succeed if the basic social and economic roles allotted to their class and gender were broken down.