Journal Surveys

I. Women


Brazilian women were traditionally relegated to family life and motherhood. Their athletic participation was discouraged and as recently as 1975 was restricted to certain sports. Swimmer Maria Lenk was born to athletically-minded German-Brazilian parents in 1915. In 1932, she became the first South American woman to participate in the Olympics; she competed again in 1936. Lenk set Brazilian and South American swimming records, was recruited to teach at the new National School of Physical Education in 1938 and later became its director, and was the first female member of Brazil’s National Sports Council. Based on primary and secondary sources, 103 notes.

―RICHARD V. MCGHEE


Valla competed internationally at 13 (in 1929) and set Italian records in the high jump and 80m hurdles the next year. In the 1936 Olympics she equaled the world record for 80m hurdles. Her Olympic gold medal (and national records in five events) opened opportunities denied earlier to Italian women athletes. When the Fascists came to power in the 1920s, Mussolini and the Catholic Church tried to restrict women to traditional roles, especially as prolific mothers. After the mid-1930s Mussolini’s imperialistic ambitions and Valla’s athletic accomplishments helped diminish opposition to women’s sport activities. Based on primary and secondary sources, 52 notes.

―RICHARD V. MCGHEE
Gibb (1891-1958) was an athlete, a manager of Olympic (1928, 1932) and other international teams, a sports administrator and promoter, and the most important female sports journalist of her time in Canada. She occupied the presidency and other offices in Toronto, Ontario, and national sports organizations. Her women's sports column appeared in the Toronto Daily Star, 1928-1940. She favored femininity and criticized "mannish women athletes," but she was an outspoken champion for unlimited opportunities for women in sport and for administration of women's sport organizations by women. Based on primary and secondary sources, 60 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE

Although not a supporter of general feminist ideas, Stansfeld (1860-1951) contributed significantly to expansion of women's opportunities in exercise and sport in England. As a teacher in London she learned about Swedish gymnastics. She began teaching gymnastics at Bedford High School and in 1903 established a private college with a two-year program (later three years) for training female physical education teachers. The college's students were outstanding in sport competition, and graduates were sought after for teaching positions. A formal, but family, atmosphere prevailed at the college; practical costumes were used for physical activities. Based on primary and secondary sources, 68 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE

Profe (1867-1946) grew up in Prussia before higher education there opened to women. She attended university and medical school in Switzerland and spent her life as a doctor and advocate of exercise and sport for girls and women in Germany. She believed women were the "stronger sex" and needed only freedom to prove it. Profe was a member of associations and committees promoting physical activities for women. She wrote and lectured attacking traditional concepts of female weakness as well as potential dangers of physical activity for women. She supported dress reform and full opportunities for physical education and sport for women. Based on primary and secondary sources, 69 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE
Rout (1877-1936), growing up in Australia and New Zealand, was renowned for her physical energy, fitness, and physique. She worked independently as a typist and championed women's rights. During WWI, without government approval, she took a group of female volunteers to Egypt to aid New Zealand soldiers there. Recognizing the dangers of venereal disease, she began a campaign for practical methods of prophylaxis which evolved into a lifelong crusade for healthy sexual practices and birth control. In Britain in the 1920s and 1930s, she published books containing sexual information and ideas and promoted the themes of nutritious eating and exercise based on "native" dances. Based on primary and secondary sources, 47 notes.

—RICHARD V. MCGEHEE

The surf organization, Life Saving Australia, admitted women as full members in 1980. Women had occupied inferior roles in many of the association's clubs for years and were denied participation in patrols and competitions. This was done ostensibly due to their inability to perform but principally to maintain the club's masculine ambience and aura of male superiority. Rising strength of feminism, election of less conservative national governments which included women in leadership roles, declining active membership in some states, interest of some club members in admitting women, and changes in life-saving techniques were critical factors in integration. Based on primary and secondary sources, 84 notes.

—RICHARD V. MCGEHEE

The "New Woman" was often portrayed wearing knickerbockers or other rational dress, frequently astride a bicycle. Cycling women were criticized as lacking respectability and being mannish. Wearing a bifurcated costume brought more censure. By drawing attention to themselves and their bodies, they were said to put themselves in danger, and sometimes were identified with prostitutes, who favored similar costumes. Another criticism maintained they would be taken for men. Violating men's domain of public space was bad enough, riding fast or recklessly was worse, and racing was considered most unladylike even by many women. Based on primary and secondary sources, 102 notes.

—RICHARD V. MCGEHEE

After the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949, women obtained many rights previously denied them. Physical education and sport became important for the health and fitness benefits, and elite sport for its international political uses. Elite sport was promoted through specialized training of athletes in the military and general populations, development of sports schools and physical education training colleges, employment of foreign coaches, and visits of foreign athletes especially Soviets. Sport opportunities greatly increased for women. Not only could women have careers, but sport itself became recognized as a legitimate career. Based on primary and secondary sources, 118 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE


The lives described in Freeing the Female Body demonstrate the errors of traditional views of women’s bodies and female possibilities. Further studies should be based on lived experiences and recognize the diversity that exists not only between men and women and between cultures but within each culture and each gender, and the commonalities that exist rather than relying on theorized universal dichotomies. Based on secondary sources, 59 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE


Gilman (1860-1935) was a lecturer and major author of feminist literature in America. She was dedicated to physical activity and fitness, which she saw as a key to female emancipation. After a nervous breakdown she abandoned her marriage and dedicated her life to feminist and socialist ideals. Her story "The Yellow Wallpaper" attacked the contemporary "rest cure" for neurasthenia and, symbolically, women’s entrapment within dependent, inferior roles. Central to all her writing was recognition of the importance of health and physical strength and the importance of work and physical activity to women’s salvation. Based on primary and secondary sources, 77 notes.

—RICHARD V. McGEHEE
Qiu Jin’s upbringing prepared her for unconventional life as a Chinese woman. As a girl she began writing patriotic poems about freeing China from foreign dominance. Strongly opposed to traditional Chinese oppression of women, she went to Japan to study Western learning and martial arts along with other Chinese students committed to revolution in China. Back home, she fomented revolution while teaching physical education, establishing a sport society, and administering a school. Thirty years old in 1907, she was arrested for planning a revolt and executed. Her life and poetry were dedicated to women’s rights and Chinese democracy. Based on secondary sources, 120 notes.

—RICHARD V. MCGEHEE

Stanton (1815-1902) grew up in America participating in physical and intellectual activities usually reserved for males and spent her life championing women’s rights. As a girl, she was introduced to abolitionist ideas and became aware of society’s discrimination against women. Later, she worked with Susan B. Anthony and others interested in women’s rights. Through leadership in women’s organizations and congresses, writing and lecturing, she fought for educational opportunities, coeducation, dress reform, religious freedom, property rights, divorce law reform, and especially political and voting rights for women. She advocated physical activity for both boys and girls. Based on primary and secondary sources, 66 notes.

—RICHARD V. MCGEHEE

Research on the body in the social sciences and cultural studies has greatly expanded since the 1980s. The history of women in sport reveals the struggle to free their bodies. Several important books and many articles have pointed out the social construction of the female gendered body and its role in the control and oppression of women. Theories that go beyond feminism are needed to understand sporting bodies. Also needed are stories of individual women who have worked to free women’s bodies through sport. Based on secondary sources, 20 notes.

—RICHARD V. MCGEHEE

Alice and Marge Greenough were prototypes of the 450 professional cowgirls employed in rodeos in the 1930s. Most of these women competed in relay races, trick riding or the lucrative saddle bronc riding. The demise of the professional cowgirl was the direct result of Gene Autry and his Flying A Rodeo; by the end of World War II only 12 women per year earned a living in rodeo. Based on secondary sources, 18 notes, 3 photographs.

—LYNNE EMERY


In 1965, 25-year-old Nellie Kleinsmidt began karate training in Cape Town. She was a founder of the Karate-Zen organization in 1973, received her first black belt in 1977, became a full time instructor in 1982, and won her sixth black belt in 1998. She is the first colored woman in Africa to gain international referee status. These accomplishments for a woman of color in South Africa represent a continual battle against racial and gender discrimination. Her athletic, educational, officiating and organizational contributions to karate have served to create new perspectives for women. Based on primary and secondary sources, 59 notes.

—RICHARD V. MCGEHEE

II. Europe


The Yearbook was the main publication of the Central Board for Furthering Folk and Youth Games in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Articles indicate the Board’s interest in health, walking excursions, folk and patriotic games, military preparation, female sports, construction of playing fields and particularly the promotion of soccer and other sports for youth, based on principles of the English public schools. Activities of the Central Board contributed significantly to the needs of adolescents, the most numerous population group in Germany at the time. Based on secondary sources, 21 notes.

—RICHARD V. MCGEHEE