

Mabel Lee

**A History of
Physical Education and Sports
in the U.S.A.**

A History of Physical Education and Sports in the U.S.A.

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To
Edward Mussey Hartwell
and
Fred Eugene Leonard
America's
First Historians
of
Physical Education

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PREFACE

Within the profession of physical education there is much interest today in researching and writing about the sociological, physiological, psychological, and philosophical aspects of the discipline. But there is little enthusiasm for the study of its history. True there is an awakening of interest in the history of sports, which are a subdivision of physical education. Also, sports themselves are split into numerous sub-subdivisions with, it seems, an enthusiastic following for each individual sport so that a great wealth of historical research and writing is being offered for the enrichment of the profession within that area. But few workers in the field have been concerned with the overall history of the profession in its relation to general education.

The historians of physical education have been for the span of the ninety years that their efforts have embraced but a very few compared with the total number of researchers and writers in the profession. I am happy therefore, even at a late date in my own career, to be at least one woman who has taken up this challenge. Much of this history, particularly in regard to physical education for girls and women, reflects my own experiences over seventy years of commitment to the profession.

This book has four purposes: first, to acquaint undergraduates with the profession of physical education as a part of general education—this is a basic textbook for students preparing for a career in physical education; second, to bring physical educators up to date in the overall history of physical education since their own student years—this is a refresher book; third, to all workers in any branch of physical education who need quick information on the historical development of

various aspects of physical education, this is a reference book to have close at hand; and fourth, to persons of the lay world who are interested in the development of any one of the many facets of physical education, this is also a handy reference book.

The references at the end of the book are a valuable source of supplementary assignments for students. Also there is a wealth of history being published today that makes excellent supplementary material for a course in the history of physical education: these periodicals, small pamphlets, and booklets offer a collection of articles by a group of well-known authors on many of the subtopics discussed in this book. Much of such writing consists of biographies of leaders (many on file in college and university libraries as doctoral theses) and histories of a given sport, with the field generally well covered sport by sport.

The topic of sports presents a problem. In a book such as this, I have intended to include only amateur sport, but when it comes to the intercollegiate contests of the sports that are most popular with the lay world, amateur becomes deeply involved with what savors of professionalism. One must decide where to draw the line to keep the discussion objective and focused on the purposes and objectives of education. Therefore, I have tried to keep the line clear between professional and amateur sports by distinguishing between them on the basis of the sports that contribute toward the goals of education and those that do not. For example, in discussing the Olympics, I have played down a discussion of medals won in favor of accenting the coming together of athletes to build a brotherhood of Man. Hence, the accent on the Olympic Academy of today.

As to today's brand of sports called intercollegiate sports, especially of the big leagues for football, the brand supposed to be amateur is a far cry from actual amateurism. It seems that nothing short of doing away with scoreboards, getting rid of athletic scholarships and recruitment, giving the game back to the *bona fide* students of a college or university, sending the coaches to the bleachers during a game, will bring back true amateur sports worthy of an educational institution. At any rate, since sports are so large a part of physical education, and offered properly have a real place in education, it is impossible to ignore them in any discussion about physical education in general. I have tried to keep "quack" amateur sports in their correct place in relation to educational sports and have given educational sports a large coverage in keeping with their relative importance in the physical education program.

Today, authors are aware of the need to be watchful to avoid any form of discrimination in their writings. Especially since the Education Act of 1972 with its Title IX mandates, sex discrimination is readily suspect. But on the whole this is a small problem within the field of physical education itself. There is no denying the fact that there has through the years been much discrimination against girls and women in the physical education segment of education. But what has existed has come from male education administrators and male coaches, not from male physical

educators. Generally, there has been little need to overcome prejudice from within the profession itself.

To give equal recognition to both sexes in the presentation of biographies of outstanding leaders, I decided to offer three photographs of each sex in each of the three eras—late nineteenth century and early and mid-twentieth century. It posed no problem for from the very beginnings in this profession in the United States, women have along with men led the way. In each period, women have been accepted as worthy partners of men. The problem was not to find as many capable women as men but to choose three of the several worthy ones. I made the selections to represent workers in a variety of interests in each era. I have devoted much space to biographies of the profession's talented leaders who have caused things to happen. There has always been a wealth of talented leaders in the United States in the field of physical education. The difficulty has been to limit recognition to so few.

If students are bothered about the seeming overabundance of dates throughout this history, they should be reminded that it is a date that ties a person, thing, or event to its proper niche in history and to its relative position in time in relation to other bits of history. Dates are not things to be memorized but to be recognized as reference material, quickly available in this form. A recital of history in any aspect requires dates to tie things together properly.

Several state and national offices of various organizations related to physical education have been most generous in their help. For such assistance I am particularly indebted to ACSM, AAHPERD, ICHPER, NCAA, NFHSAA, and to the National YMCA and the National YWCA.

I acknowledge the good help of Marie Cripe, who so painstakingly typed this manuscript for me and helped with other chores related to it, to James Crabbe, who until he left his position in the Department of Physical Education at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln was my chief library contact during the preparation of this manuscript, to Ruth Levinson, who took over in helping me after James Crabbe was gone and who ran countless errands for me to conserve my time to work at my desk, and to Ruth Schellberg, AAHPERD archivist, who procured for me much information on the international affairs of our profession and on related topics of organizations concerned with physical education.

For permission to use various photographs and for information from their archives I am grateful to Wellesley, Smith, Vassar, Oberlin, and Springfield colleges, and to the University of Iowa. For the courtesy of supplying me with copies of several photographs and for their generous sharing of records I am deeply grateful to AAHPERD.

Mabel Lee

Lincoln, Nebraska

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PART

A

**PHYSICAL
EDUCATION
HERITAGE**

CHAPTER 1

Heritage From the Ancient and Medieval Worlds

THE ANCIENT WORLD

Records of ancient times available in museums throughout the world or in sculptured pieces and bas-reliefs in situ in ancient ruins assure us that ancient peoples participated in much physical activity common to all human life of all ages—activities fundamental to all physical education today—running, leaping, hurdling, chasing, throwing, hurling, catching, climbing, boxing, wrestling, swimming, boating, and rhythmical movements. Such records date back as far as 3200 B.C. and became known to today's world through archeological discoveries made during the last 150 years.

Mesopotamia: Sumer, Assyria, Babylonia

The earliest records of the Sumerians, Assyrians, and Babylonians have come from the ruins of their ancient cities, Warka, Nineveh, Ur, and Babylon, which are all located in today's Iraq (old Mesopotamia). These records dating back to mid-600 B.C. were discovered by the British Museum Archeological Expedition of 1849 in a collection of 25,000 cuneiform tablets in the King's Library in the ruins of the ancient city of Nineveh.¹ Also among the old Sumerian records were the tablets giving the great epic poem, *Tales of Gilsamesh*,² the man of great physical prowess, the Paul Bunyan, the Superman of the Ancient World—the first great public exponent of physical fitness! This great library had but a brief existence. The great

city of Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C. Six years later the Medes laid what was left of it in desolate ruins, and the great library safely buried within the rubble of the palace waited for over 2400 years to be discovered by the British archeologists of the early nineteenth century. What a treasure they found!

Egypt

The bas-reliefs and other relics of ancient Egypt preserved today largely in museums throughout Europe and the United States as well as in Egypt give a clearer idea than do the relics of Mesopotamia of the great variety of physical activities engaged in by ancient people. Although there are Egyptian records dating back as far as 3400 B.C., those depicting participation in physical activities of a physical education nature are mostly of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries B.C. Racing in two-wheeled chariots and boating are depicted along with wrestling, swimming, gymnastics, dancing and games with balls and sticks.³

Greece⁴

As the Sumarians arose out of the mists of prehistory to become the leaders of the world, flourished, and then declined to be succeeded by the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Egyptians, each of whom also flourished and then declined so in their turn, the Greeks arose to replace them in the ongoing flow of history. There are records in hieroglyphics of early Greece dating back to 2300 B.C. depicting women dancing and men engaging in acrobatics, boxing, and wrestling.

Development of Sports Contests and Establishment of the Olympic Games. As early as 1000 B.C. sports contests had developed. In 776 B.C. the Olympic Games were inaugurated, lasting 1170 years. They were open only to male athletes of Greek blood, with no criminal record. They consisted of foot races, a pentathlon, broad jumps, hop-step-jump, and javelin throw. Rewards were a crown of wild olive and palm branches. When the Greeks (10,000 against 60,000 Persians) defeated the army of the great King Darius at Marathon in 490 B.C., the Greek Pheidipides ran twenty-two miles to Athens and with his dying breath informed the Athenians of the victory. Almost 2400 years later, memory of this notable event is kept alive by the many marathon races run annually all over the world by many thousands of runners in behalf of both historical memories and physical fitness. No other event in the history of the world has received from youth such long-lasting, worldwide acclaim.

Not looking upon their games as contests for a few of great physical valor and excellence to put on entertainment for the public the Greeks invited all youth to enter into the activities for their own physical development. Success was not mea-

sured by winning a contest but by participating in good form, in control of temper, and with dignified manner. To excel in any one activity counted for little. The important thing was to excel in a variety of activities; hence, the stress the Greeks attached to being able to perform well in the pentathlon and decathlon. Awards for physical achievement were not monetary. The olive wreath was considered a great prize. Greek sport was amateur sport at its best.

A favorite sport event was the discus throw. No doubt one of Greece's most famous sculptured pieces is *The Discus Thrower* (Discobolus) by the sculptor Myron of the Golden Age. The discus throw is one of the oldest of field sports and the oldest known discus was found in archeological excavations, measuring 8 to 10 inches in diameter and weighing 4 to 5 pounds.

Birth of Physical Education As a Discipline. Within the next hundred years following the Battle of Marathon, Herodotus, the great Greek historian and traveler, and the three great teacher-philosophers were born. From the teachings and writings of these four came the birth of the idea of democracy and of the responsibility of the state to educate the youth. Clear ideas of the need of organized physical activities for all citizens arose with the birth of the idea of physical education as a discipline in itself, a concern and branch of education.

There is a great wealth of literature available in many languages that reveals the extent of knowledge the Greeks of this Golden Age had about physical education. Gymnastic exercises in themselves were considered the foundation of all physical education, the body conditioner upon which sports, games, and dance were built. Plato claimed that swimming and gymnastics engaged in, even on a compulsory basis, were of great value and that participation in them should be obligatory for all youth, girls as well as boys.⁵

From these Greek writers we learn that dancing reached a high form in the Greek Golden Age, their choric dance being considered the highest art form, and that preschoolers enjoyed swings, seesaws, stilts, hoops, kites, and games of hide and seek and, drop the handkerchief.

With the limited knowledge at that time of anatomy and physiology, the operation of the body in motion, or the physiology of exercise, it is astonishing how knowledgeable these learned Greeks were about the values of exercise and how varied a program of physical education they advocated. Common goals in the teaching for all youth were obedience to commands, respect for authority, and ability to act in unison with others.

Rome⁶

As early as 2000 B.C. people were migrating from Greece into territory that is today's Italy. By 760 B.C. there was great Greek colonization especially in the Bay