

Local historian chronicles girls sports in Gothenburg

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Females played basketball early in 20th century.

Tot Holmes doesn't know why the Nebraska High School Athletic Association ended the state girls basketball tourney and the opportunity for girls to play the sport around 1923.

"They never gave a reason," said former newspaperman Tot Holmes about documentation he found in old newspapers. "I don't know whether they thought it was too expensive or what."

"My guess is that someone figured that girls didn't want to get all sweaty," he said with a laugh.

Holmes, 82, is digging into the history of girls sports in Gothenburg which started with basketball.

Stories about girls playing basketball was first found in the files of the Gothenburg Independent in 1904 although he said there may have been some games played earlier that were not reported.

At the time, even boys basketball drew little attention in the newspaper and girls participation meant even less to either the school or the newspaper, Holmes said.

When they did, they kept team—not individual—scores.

Women's basketball was organized at Smith College in 1892 and the first girls high school

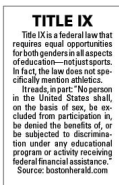
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game was in the Chicago area in 1896, according to the website womenshistory.about.com.

Bloomers, as a playing costume, also debuted in 1896.



Before football was introduced to Gothenburg High School in 1910, he said basketball was played in the fall in the Opera House, the Gem Theatre or outdoors on the lot across the street west of the school where the American Lutheran Church stands.

Some games were also played in the spring.

When basketball games were played in the 1910 school, Holmes said the low ceiling created a new way of shooting.

“You had to shoot from the hip and put a back spin on the ball so it would hit the backboard and go in,” he said.

Because the games were rough, a final score might be 15-8 or less.

From newspaper records, Holmes said Brady girls and boys teams traveled to Gothenburg for games in 1906 and stayed overnight.

Holmes found his mother’s name (Hazel Baker) in an article published in 1924.

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“She played basketball and she also was the cheerleader for all sports,” he said.

An article also told of a game when the whereabouts of “the cheerleader” was unknown.

“They couldn’t find anyone to lead the cheers so the superintendent did,” Holmes said with a laugh.

Holmes also said there weren’t guards on basketball teams, either boys or girls, just “barricaders” or players who would stand under the basket and block shooting.

When Title IX passed in 1973, Holmes said he didn’t remember that the legislation made much of an impression on anyone except on school board members since they knew they could lose federal funds by non-compliance.

Some time later, Holmes recalls that a federal official called the school after noticing that the boys had played more basketball games than the girls.

“The boys had gone to state that year but she didn’t care,” he said.

As Gothenburg editor of the Tri-City Tribune at the time, Holmes remembers some area sports writers calling local girl athletes “Swedettes.”

FIRST VOLLEYBALL TEAM AT GHS
Patti (Peden) Aden was on Gothenburg's first high school volleyball team that played during the 1970-71 season. Aden said coach Carol Frost made a wonderful impression on the players. She always called us 'ladies,' never girls and we took so grown up because of that," she recalled. Because the team didn't have uniforms the first two years, they wore their physical education outfits with player numbers safety-pinned to their tops. Aden remembers that Frost's first son was born while she was discussing teaching and coaching in Gothenburg. "A pregnant teacher at school was unheard of then," she said. "We loved how fit she was throughout her pregnancy and she made it seem the most normal thing I remember was that for a woman to be expecting a baby and going ahead with teaching and coaching." Aden describes the time as special and exciting for all the girls on the team. "And most of all, fun."

“I swore we’d (the Trib) would never call them that,” he said. “If they worked hard, they were all a ‘Swede.’ ”

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The first girls sport to be offered after passage of Title IX was basketball in 1975, coached by former Gothenburg teacher Diane Mann.

Before Title IX, the district began re-offering girls volleyball in 1970 and girls track in 1971.

Both were coached by discus-throwing legend Carol Frost who competed in the sport during the Summer Olympics in 1968.

The first basketball game, against Eustis, was a blowout with the Knights winning 45-15.

Interestingly, Holmes said smaller towns had good girls basketball teams because they had organized and played the sport longer.

In fact, he said the Brady girls beat North Platte at least once.

Watching girls play sports, since the early 1970s, Holmes said he's noticed how it gives them a sense of self worth.

And that tall girls are prideful.

"There's no stigma now," he said. "When I was growing up, most boys were intimidated by a tall girl."

Holmes said he also sees more confidence in girls, something he attributes to girls sports and other activities open to them.

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“I think we’ve gotten to the place where we can say ‘She’s a really good athlete,’ not ‘She’s a really good girl athlete.’ ”

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