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ATHLETICS FOR GIRLS

By

MRS. FRANK M. ROESSING

VICE-PRESIDENT, PITTSBURGH PLAYGROUND ASSOCIATION

AND

ELIZABETH BURCHENAL

INSPECTOR OF ATHLETICS, GIRLS' BRANCH, PUBLIC SCHOOLS ATHLETIC LEAGUE,
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Athletics for Girls

MRS. FRANK M. ROESSING

Vice-President, Pittsburgh Playground Association

Of the many problems confronting playground workers I believe that the most important, because least successfully treated, problem today, next to the financial one, is the so-called "girl problem". Those of you who are familiar with our local work know the prominence which the Pittsburgh Playground Association gives to two subjects; one being PLAY, spelled not with one capital letter but with four, and the other being GIRLS of all sizes and ages. I wish to deal briefly with these two subjects in combination, so that the particular phase of activity for girls in this paper will be play for girls. In one sense it will not be a practical paper, for it is not its purpose to suggest a list of games eminently suited to our younger sisters, but rather to urge the more comprehensive assimilation of this feature into the general playground curriculum.

Frank social workers tell us that at the bottom of many conditions which our modern code of civilization deems unhealthy lies the under-development of certain fundamental qualities in girls. Some unfortunate tendencies noticed among girls who frequent playgrounds, and observed, for instance, in a false sense of modesty, in an inclination to morbid sentimentality, to premature domesticity, to servile regard for public opinion, and in an unconscious submission to the doctrine that "might makes right," serve directly to produce much of the average girl's mental limitations, early physical deterioration and the sadly frequent moral weakness. They are the qualities which make her one of a type and not an individual. Furthermore, if these tendencies are so subtly strong as to promote insanity, intemperance, drug

habits, and prostitution, to say nothing of smaller evils, it is surely a vital part of playground work to supply such activity as will strike at the causes of both these lesser and greater deficiencies in girls. It is practically an established fact that one of the causes of the spread of social evil today is the growing inability on the part of our people to resist fatigue. When we build up the bodies and minds of our girls strong and vigorous enough to insure them power to withstand the exhausting taxation of our modern life, I believe we shall have taken a long step towards the elimination of these evils. It is the more a part of playground work to give such up-building activity for the very reason that all other education as embraced in public or private schools so deliberately and consistently fails to supply it. And the chief form of that activity is play.

First let us understand that play for girls is not in any sense covered by athletics, and it is often not even suggested by gymnastic work nor by the popular folk dances now so generally used in the playground system. Gymnastic drills and dancing are indeed highly valuable and give much needed practice in rhythm, grace, and many purely physical benefits. Dancing, especially, gives opportunity for the expression of the poetic nature and can be made a positive social and moral agent. But the final goal for a girl is not reached by either dancing or gymnastics. They do not give her freedom of initiative, the joy of spontaneous movement, nor on the other hand a full sense of group activity as in team work. One thing that we need to do for girls at once is to give them play of the kind that will develop them mentally as well as physically—indeed mentally more than physically.

The right kind of play for girls will consist in games of all varieties. At first such play will have to be directed. We have so long allowed the imagination of girls to be personal and passive that they show an unwillingness to play and lack the play spirit necessary to begin a game. Many have observed that generally when a teacher leaves a game, no matter how fully organized, the group of girls gradually loses interest and disintegrates. How different is this helplessness from the initiative of a group of boys in a game of basketball, baseball or football. If it is necessary to teach girls the joy of running, skipping, hopping, leaping, let us by all means teach them, but let us be sure that the result is the awakening and cultivation of the joy

of unconventionalized self-expression, independence, strength, success. To the coyness of a kitten let her add something of the friskiness of a colt.

There should also be the games involving the encouragement of communal energy, interdependence and that exhilaration which comes from being part of a larger and more powerful unit. Games calling for coöperative effort on the part of a group of individuals are not only typical of the spirit of the times, but one of the best results of team work for girls is its indirect tendency to free them from personal timidity and the fear of being overcome by mere physical strength. I wish to emphasize again this point, before mentioned, that one of the most general and deplorable characteristics in girls is the submission to an often imaginary superiority of mental or physical strength which the untrained girl finds it impossible to combat and to which she succumbs without even a protest. This self-sustained prohibition from the more active fields for growth leads her mind and body to the petty forms of activity injurious to both girl and woman.

In the up to date playground of today a physical director and special athletic track director are supplied to take care of the boys, but in how many centers is there such a special teacher and such attention paid to girls' play? Is not our way rather to leave the neglected and weaker half to an already over-burdened kindergarten director who has neither time nor training for the right kind of play with older girls? The ideal playground remedies this mistake by providing one or more game instructors for girls. If athletics are desirable for girls, and this morning's symposium would argue that our National Association believes that they are, why not make athletes of girls as well as of boys? There seems to be a fear in some quarters lest the delicate distinction between being a boy and being a girl will be lost in the playground life. It is fully conceded that the qualities which go to make the charms of the two sexes should be and probably forever will be entirely distinct in the mature man and woman. But have we not rather overdone the idea of differentiation in the normal development of children and begun it too early? Should not the accent of difference wait for the period of adolescence instead of beginning at infancy? There is perhaps a real if crude wisdom in that custom of the inhabitants of the island of Marken in the Zuyder Zee by which boys and girls are

brought up exactly alike until they are seven years of age. They are even dressed in exactly the same styles of costume, and the only way that their own people know them apart is by a little round patch put on all boys' caps, the girls' caps being not so ornamented. Even here, too, the boy has the advantage; but this difference, it will be observed, is not a prominent one in the eye of the child.

There is one way in which we could profitably adapt this old world idea to an American need. As for our boys, so for our girls the ideal playground should provide a suitable athletic garment. Since from Maine to Florida and for a similar distance on the western coast custom has made the bathing suit for girls a distinctive and appropriate garment, surely an equal respect can be secured for an athletic field costume for girls modelled possibly like the bathing suit, though better still would be a full model like the gymnasium suit without the bothersome and in some cases dangerous skirt. It seems to me that it would be quite within the province of this congress to take some action furthering the universal adoption of a girls' practical athletic garment for outdoor use. American common sense would soon give sufficient public approval.

It is now generally agreed, by playground workers at least, that no group needs the fresh air and sunshine of the playground as much as the girls from eleven to twenty years of age. But when we have enticed them into the grounds it is not enough to let them sit languidly on the benches, or worse, to stand or walk stiffly about for fear of mussing the clean best dress. These girls are always ready to work—the hardest workers of the world with the longest working hours are girls and women; tramps and corner loafers, young as well as old, have the honor to belong to the stronger sex. For the complete development of the girls, then, they should have play; open, breezy games, and a game director, not a gymnastic expert but a game "coach" for girls. Play is the real life of the child, and every girl as well as every boy should have this life more abundantly.

ELIZABETH BURCHENAL

Inspector of Athletics, Girls' Branch, Public Schools Athletic League, New York City

Why do we not urge athletics for girls more vigorously? Surely we all want to win back a race of splendid women abound-

ing with that wonderful vitality and joy of living that springs from glorious health and physical fitness.

If you are honest, I think you will admit that it is because we do not know just what it is we want to advocate for them. Where is the man or woman who will for a moment claim that athletics could ever grip the mind, heart and soul of the girl as it does that of the boy? Athletics do not exist at all for girls in the same sense that they exist for boys. To the boy, athletics are the breath of life—do you think they are to the girl? I believe boys' athletics and girls' athletics serve two different purposes: for boys, primarily as a necessary outlet for their inherited fighting instinct; for girls, as a substitute for the natural, wholesome, exhilarating activities which are necessary to health and happiness, and of which convention and dress and resulting unnatural habits have deprived her.

Hence, girls' athletics are to my mind of equal importance with boys', but based upon entirely different fundamental principles.

Two separate groups of athletic exercises for boys and girls chosen with this principle in mind might incidentally overlap each other, as in the same way the physical and mental characteristics and interests of men and women overlap each other, and yet men are men, and women are women.

Athletics in their commonly accepted sense (by which I mean the athletics of men and boys) are the inheritance of boys. They have evolved from the primitive pursuits and activities of men—not women. The man was and is the fighter—the shedder of blood, the exerciser of brute force; woman is the product of a different physical specialization.

It is therefore to my mind as illogical to attempt to establish the use of men's athletics for girls and women as to fit a circle into a square—which obviously only touches at certain points.

Organizations like the Amateur Athletic Union and athletic meets like Olympic games are tangible evidences that athletics are a great vital factor in the life of men. Compare with these the so-called girls' athletics of the present day. They exist almost entirely in a few of the women's colleges, where out of the large numbers there is a very small percentage of exceptional girls built something like men to whom men's athletics appeal. But even the most proficient of these can do but poorly what to the average youth is natural and easy. This small minority

cannot be accepted as evidence that men's athletics appeal to the average girl.

We must try to supply opportunity for the mass of girls to engage in healthful, natural, exhilarating, physical activities—call them athletics or what you will—but we must take girls as we find them today, not as we hope they may become in time.

I wish we might break away entirely from the idea that in order to have athletics for girls we must approach the subject from a man's point of view, and that we might face the issue squarely and evolve our own individual, natural sports regardless of whether or not they coincide with those of men.

Several years ago at a convention of the Public Schools Physical Training Society, New York City, the subject of athletics for girls was discussed. The speakers were Dr. Sargent, Dr. Gulick and Dr. Arnold, representing the physical training point of view, and Miss Blake, the principal of one of the largest elementary girls' public schools in New York City, who had opportunity to observe the moral and physical effects of boys' athletics on young girls. Miss Blake spoke as a layman, but observation had strongly convinced her of the evil effects both physically and mentally of the continued practice of boys' athletics by girls. Dr. Sargent pointed out the essential points of difference between the build of the typical woman and that of the typical man, and showed in terms of mechanics that certain athletic exercises of men were impossible or difficult for even unusually muscular women. Dr. Arnold spoke of the vitality of girls and of their power of endurance, and Dr. Gulick gave a vivid picture of the origin and evolution of men's athletics, showing clearly what girls' athletics *are not*. But in the end they all three agreed that beyond a certain point they could not go, that it was a question which women must answer themselves.

If we are ever to really have athletics for girls generally, we must settle at least the following points:

1. What exercises are likely to be injurious internally to matured girls?
2. What exercises are mechanically suited to the build of the average girl?
3. What are suited to her muscular strength and endurance?
4. What will contribute to her health and vitality and help to fit her for a normal woman's life?

5. What form of physical activity comes nearest to containing for her the primitive appeal that athletics in the accepted sense hold for boys?

In order to secure some definite information from which to form unbiased conclusions, I presented these questions to several of our highest authorities in physical education in this country, and to about forty women, all graduates of various schools of physical training, who either had practical experience in athletics or wide opportunities for observation. Some of these women are now wives and mothers, some are practicing physicians, the remainder are directors or teachers of physical training. I believed that if there were any consensus of opinion among such people as these it would be of great value to have it known. The material thus collected is of such significance that I present some of it to you verbatim.

The five people from whose replies I quote represent five different points of view.

1. A woman prominent in the physical training world, who has made a long and close study of the effects, both mental and physical, of physical training upon young women, writes:

"So far as I have observed track athletics for girls, I should eliminate them virtually. Basketball (women's game), played under strict supervision by girls who are in training and in splendid physical condition, is permissible, but, frankly, the supervision has to be so close that I often think it would be better if we did not play the game at all.

"Indoor baseball, which we play outdoors, field hockey, tennis, golf, walking, running, climbing, skating, horseback riding—cross saddle for very young girls and cross and side saddle for adults—swimming, rowing and dancing we believe to be most desirable exercises, and I would add snow-shoeing, skiing, paddling and coasting. Most of these kinds of exercise in moderation and under supervision may be given the average immature or mature girls."

2. The following was written by a woman, now married and a mother, whose physique and build at the age of seventeen, when she began the practice of men's athletics, was practically the ideal one for a woman whose vitality was high, whose strength and agility were far above the average girl's, and whose physical condition was practically perfect:

"By my continued practice of high jumping, vaulting, and other violent exercises, I was injured internally, and I know of several others who were also.

"I don't like jumping, high or broad, weight throwing or pole vaulting for girls. The others are all right if not overdone. The thing that appealed to me perhaps more than any other was swimming, and after that, tennis and the other lighter athletics and sports."

3. The following was written by a woman, now married and a mother, who was one of those exceptional girls with a build somewhat resembling that of a youth, who could and did practice exercises usually possible only for men, and who was allowed to follow unrestrained her own desires in this line:

"I have felt that my internal derangement was caused by my violent physical exertions. You probably remember my wild ambitions. But besides that, I feel very strongly that I sapped my strength and vitality to a degree from which I never have and never shall recover. I can see much benefit in different ways from the less violent exercises, but the overdose of practice and the unrestrained activity of every kind I cared to engage in have detracted from the benefit materially and done positive harm, I believe."

4. Dr. Mary Rees Mulliner has authorized me to quote her as follows:

"I know of quite a few girls and women who have been injured in taking such exercises without proper safeguards. The exercises have been harmless when taken under proper superintendence and assistance and when the vitality was high. I have known of injury to the pelvic organs and the general health by vigorous exercises at injudicious times. If the competitive element is decidedly subordinated, I don't see why a girl of good physique and normal functions could not use these exercises to advantage. Working for records or in competition is the element that is likely to be mischievous, but if a girl takes the exercises in moderation there is no necessity of harm being done. You will see that it is not what is done but how and when, that I consider of the utmost importance."

5. A man of international prominence in physical education and authority in mechanics of exercise made the following classification of my list of athletic exercises:

- (a) "Exercises to which the build of the average matured girl is adapted from a mechanical point of view:
- Canoeing
 - Dancing
 - Horseback riding (both cross and side saddle)
 - Rowing
 - Running
 - Skating
 - Swimming
 - Walking
- (b) "Exercises which are suited to the muscular strength and endurance of the average matured girl:
- Archery
 - Basketball (women's rules)
 - Field hockey
 - Golf
 - High jumping
 - Indoor baseball (played when possible in the open air)
 - Lacrosse
 - Low hurdles
 - Putting 6 lb. shot
 - Running from 100 to 400 yards
 - Tennis
 - Throwing base and basketball
- (c) "Exercises which would tend to keep her normal and healthy and would be of benefit to her later as a mother:
- Canoeing
 - Dancing
 - Rowing
 - Running
 - Swimming
 - Walking "

After compiling all the answers to my questions I have arranged the different exercises into five groups, as follows:

For the Mature Girl

1. Condemned
 - Broad jump
 - High jump (in competition)
 - Pole vaulting
2. Doubtful
 - High jump
 - Running more than 100 yards (in competition)
 - Weight throwing

3. Safe

Archery
 Ball throwing
 Basketball (women's rules)
 Climbing
 Coasting
 Dancing
 Field hockey
 Golf
 Horseback riding (cross and side saddle)
 Indoor baseball
 Low hurdles (not in competition)
 Paddling
 Rowing
 Running (not in competition)
 Skating
 Skiing
 Snow-shoeing
 Swimming
 Tennis
 Walking

4. Especially beneficial and suitable

Dancing
 Paddling
 Rowing
 Running
 Swimming
 Walking

For the Immature Girl

1. Condemned

Pole vaulting
 Running more than 100 yards
 Weight throwing

2. Doubtful

Basketball
 Field hockey

3. Safe

Archery
 Ball throwing
 Broad and high jump (not in competition)

Climbing
 Dancing
 Horseback riding (cross saddle)
 Low hurdles
 Paddling
 Rowing
 Running (not in intense competition)
 Skating
 Swimming
 Tennis
 Walking

4. Especially beneficial and suitable

Climbing
 Dancing
 Jumping (in moderation and not in competition)
 Running (in moderation)
 Skating
 Swimming
 Walking

5. Best loved, most commonly practiced and with greatest primitive appeal

Dancing (greatest unanimity of opinion in this answer)

Other exercises mentioned:

Basketball
 Climbing
 Jumping rope
 Running games
 Swinging
 Swimming
 Tennis

Outside of the essentially out-of-door, which are practically barred to the masses, this gives us the following:

Ball throwing
 Climbing
 Dancing
 Jumping (in moderation)
 Low hurdles (in moderation)
 Running (in moderation)
 Skating

Swimming
Walking

In these the combative element could be subordinated:

1. In running and hurdling, by making them relay events only.
2. In jumping, dancing, swimming, skating and climbing, by working for form.
3. In basketball and other team games, by making them games of wit and agility played for the fun of it, rather than of brute force, personal contact and played for the sake of winning, and by abolishing inter-scholastic match games.

Let me in conclusion recommend:

1. That athletics for the average girl be encouraged.
2. That the fighting element be subordinated.
3. That proper safeguards be made against injury.
4. That this difference be made between boys' and girls' athletics—let the former be for fighting, the latter for fun.