

The Makings of Women's Basketball

Indiana University Edition / 1896-1974

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The current women's basketball team for Indiana University continues to find success as more of the women's players are finding their place in women's basketball history. Team leaders such as Tyra Buss and Amanda Cahill join the ranks of the 1,000 point club in their junior seasons. Last season, the Hoosiers were selected to play in the NCAA tournament for the first time since 2002. As a No. 9 seed, IU won its first tournament victory. Their last NCAA tournament victory was in 1983 victory against the Kentucky Wildcats. Success is not easily achieved nor does it happen overnight. People may not realize the years it took many female athletes to come to the point in athletics we are today. The positive experience women currently enjoy in basketball and all sports are due to pioneering women who went through many hardships. These women fought to change cultural norms, biased standards, and fight for the right to play basketball in an unrestricted manner. This article is about the story of the female basketball athletes of Indiana University. Their story is one marked by diligence, perseverance, and determination.

Before Tyra Buss ever donned an Indiana University jersey, women like Tara VanDerveer represented IU in the early years of varsity play. VanDerveer would continue to be a pioneer in women's basketball long after her undergraduate days as she became the Stanford University women's coach and in 1996 coached the Olympic Women's Basketball Team to a gold medal in the Atlanta games. As an early collegiate athlete, VanDerveer did not play for a scholarship or for the thrill to be on television; rather, she and her teammates played purely out of love for the game. The experience she had as a student-athlete at Indiana University is one she attempts to emulate for her many Stanford teams. Players like VanDerveer of the 1970s helped legitimize the heritage of women's basketball as they encouraged the passage of Title IX which required

equality in education including school athletics for men and women. However, the story of Hoosier women's basketball begins long before the talented teams of the 1970s took to the court. Generations of women at Indiana University advocated for the right to play basketball. Without their valiant efforts before the passage of Title IX, the foundation

for the record setting Hoosier team of the 1970s would not exist. Women on campus with the help of generous faculty members formed extramural and intramural teams decades before the 1970s to encourage the development of

women's participation in athletics. In fact, Hoosier women had been boxing out and hustling down the court since the 1890s. Indiana University had formed its first intramural competition for women in 1896 a century before the United States historic Olympic gold.

Dr. James Naismith created the game of basketball in 1891 in Springfield, Massachusetts. However, it was Hoosier native Nicholas McKay who added the iron hoops and coffee bag nets in 1892. Not surprisingly, basketball found a home in Indiana's culture. Indiana University established the Women's Gymnasium in 1890.....



1922 Coed Championship Match



Indiana University - Ladies' Gymnasium

and quickly added the new sport to its physical education curriculum. By 1896, Juliette Maxwell, Director of Women's Gymnasium of the Department of Physical Training, created a thriving athletic culture on the Bloomington campus. With her nurturing, funding and opportunities for women's athletics continued to increase. She taught women how to play basketball in the first women's gymnasium which was the basement of Wylie Hall, the chemistry building at the time. Dangerous fumes from the labs above created a noxious environment for the women who already were adapting to the cramped, unheated space. The combination of fumes, limited space, and low-ceilings made basketball very difficult for the women to play. The upgrade to Mitchell Hall provided the athletic women a larger, safer facility without the possibility of becoming sick from the chemicals. Their play was not without hazard as six large support pillars in the middle of the court disrupted the games. The women remained undeterred in their effort and desire to play basketball. They continued to play the game albeit cautiously and slowly in order to prevent injury from the pillars. The passion on campus for the women's game continued to grow resulting in yearly championships being played in the main (men's) gymnasium.

The excitement for the annual championship game expanded beyond the collegiate women themselves. By 1899, the women's annual championship game became open to the public including male students, faculty, and townspeople at large. All fans were charged a small admission fee which was donated to the Women's League of Indiana University and the YWCA. The 1901 Arbutus, Indiana University's yearbook, reported the fanfare surrounding the championship game was so great, the game became an established tradition eagerly looked forward to by many. Today's fans would not recognize the version of basketball that the fans of the 19th and early-20th century would have watched. Clothing for women at the time greatly differed from the men in regards to appropriate attire for physical activity. Women dressed in the required bloomers which were lifted to the knees, a white middie blouse with long black ties, and long black stockings with high

laced tennis shoes .

Dr. Naismith originally established thirteen rules for basketball. However, the women played a modified game of basketball distinct from men's game. In 1892, Senda Berenson of Smith College, first defined adaptations to the women's game. As the Director of Physical Training, Berenson believed that the development of the body for a woman was just as important as the development of her mind . Previously to this concept, the ideal woman was "a small waisted, small footed, small brained damsel, who prided herself on her delicate health, who thought fainting interesting, and hysterics fascinating" . With the development of women's physical education, a new type of collegiate woman was emerging and the new sport of Basket Ball was held in high regard. As Berenson wrote: "[Basket Ball] also cultivates self-denial, as it teaches to give up one's own honors for the good of the whole, and gives good opportunity for self-control and gentle manners, all of which form such a great part in the development of character and true womanhood" .

Shortly after debuting basketball, Naismith asked A.G. Spalding to develop the first basketball. Not long after, the rules of basketball required an A.G. Spalding & Bros. basketball as the official ball. Not surprisingly, Berenson worked with Spalding to publish her adaptations for the women's game as official rules in 1901; her changes limited activity in order to avoid undue physical exertion by the women . In addition to avoiding exertion, the women's game focused on developing an athletic spirit that encouraged enthusiastic team play and fostered true womanhood. It was believed that allowing players to run unhindered all over the court would lead to several offending traits such as individual playing, discouraging team work, overworking the ambitious players, and excluding the less competitive players . From this ideology, the women's game divided the gymnasium into three equal parts: one for the home women, one for the centers, and one for the guards with no movement in between the assigned positions. This limited women to structured and restrictive play which was contrary to the free and flowing men's game.

Originally, the women's game permitted five players per side, but in 1905 nine players per team

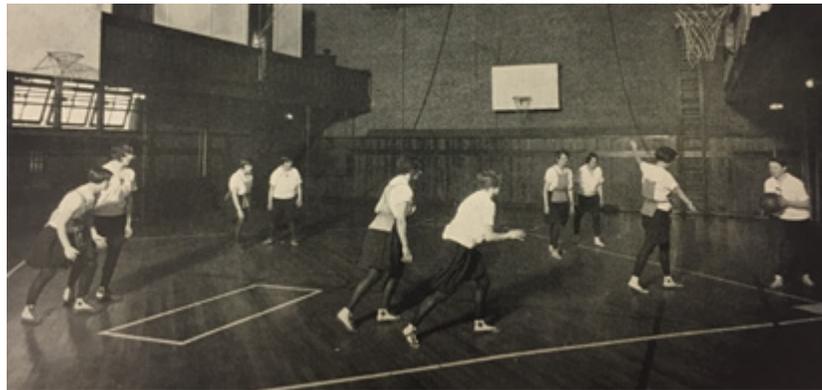


GIRL'S CHAMPION BASKET BALL TEAM

were allowed on the court with a minimum of six players required to play. As Berenson outlined in her adaptations, roughness and physical contact in the women's game had to be avoided at all cost. This cultural desire to keep women nonaggressive led to restrictive rules such as the inability to grab the ball from an opponent's hand. Therefore, each woman was only permitted to hold the ball for up to three seconds. As women played more, dribbling came to be seen as individualistic and too competitive which led to the establishment of three bounces per person and eventually in 1910, dribbling in the women's game was completely eliminated.

Dribbling was brought back in 1913, a victory for the women's effort to play more competitively like the men; however, it was contained to a single dribble per player. It would not be until 1966 that the unlimited, continuous dribble would not be part of the women's game. Additionally, in the early years of basketball, placing one hand on a ball held by an opponent constituted a foul as did double teaming a shooter. There was no coaching allowed from the sidelines, and each team received zero timeouts and zero substitutions.

Despite the limitations in the women's game which lacked the freedom of movement and contact seen in men's play, excitement for basketball led to the development of an interclass competition system, yearly tournaments, and an honorary varsity team being nominated at the end of each season. The undergraduate women organized themselves and created a formal athletic association in order to promote women's athletics on campus as interest continued to grow in the early 20th century. The Women's Athletic Association (W.A.A.) limited its membership to undergraduates who obtained 100 points within the system. Points were awarded through participation in multiple sports teams, holding an officer position,



and being nominated to an honorary varsity team. All women in the W.A.A. were expected to uphold the ideals of physical efficiency, scholarship, and good fellowship. Beginning in 1916, participation points and leadership positions led to the most distinguished of members of the W.A.A. to receive Indiana letter sweaters.

The leaders in the W.A.A. helped facilitate the popular athletic programs around campus. The 1922 Arbutus reported basketball to be very popular as

practically every organization had a team entered. The W.A.A. encouraged the growth of basketball throughout the campus by organizing intramurals in addition to the pre-existing interclass competition structure. The new intramural program facilitated basketball teams for any sorority or dormitory who wanted to compete. While the intramurals were open to all women, the interclass team remained a small, elite group of competitors considered to represent the best athletes in each class. The interest had grown so much by 1922, the freshman squad had more than 200 women report to try-outs for the freshman interclass team. In

the fall of 1922, there were 2,956 students enrolled in classes at the Bloomington campus. Women constituted 43.8% of the student body with 1,295 students. Thus making the 200 freshman reporting for tryouts a majority of their class.

Despite their skill and dedication to basketball, many of the women faced unfair stereotypes and had their femininity questioned. The public-at-large continued to masculinize women who participated in strenuous, contact sports such as basketball. By the 1920s, the national acceptance of female athletes showed significant decline. The image of the woman from the 19th century had not completely

lost its cultural predominance. The more women became active in athletics and competitive sports like basketball, the more there was a backlash to the “unlady-like” behavior of the athletes. Competition had empowered women to embrace a more aggressive and physical side of their nature. First Lady Mrs. Herbert Hoover and many other women believed in the antiquated image and place of women led a movement contrary to the expansion of women’s athletics and the growth of basketball for women. According to then First Lady, interscholastic competition overexcited the crowd in its desire to have a victor. She took issue with the sportsmanship or lack thereof as she cited witnessing a hair pulling episode in a game. She supported her anti-competition position by referring to basketball as a limiting sport which permitted only a select few the opportunity to shine. She thought it overstrained the “star” athlete of the team and diminished the quality of the sport as it was lost in the nervousness of the game. To replace the athletic drive and competitive atmosphere found in basketball, Mrs. Hoover suggested

an alternative approach, a program named Play Day. This program offered a non-coached intercollegiate sport competition opportunity for women. Mrs. Hoover aimed to eliminate what she believed were worrisome characteristics of female athletes and replace the growing women’s sport culture with a casual Play Day to promote good sportsmanship to all which would lead to the happiness and success of every individual who played. It was believed Play Days offered a wholesome, healthy atmosphere, devoid of bias and strong emotion for collegiate women .

In this spirit, the W.A.A. entered its members in an annual state-limited Play Day circuit. Each year a new university campus would host the Play Day. This tradition continued for several decades in the middle of the 20th century leading to opportunities for women to play basketball across the state. Beginning in 1929, Indiana University’s W.A.A. in conjunction with the Indiana High School G.A.A.’s (Girls Athletic Association) began hosting high school versions of Play Days on the Bloomington campus to help facilitate athletic growth for the

Bloomington community. While Play Days provided opportunity for less competitive play, Hoosier women still wanted to carry on the interclass and intramural competitions that had previously been established. It is no surprise the 1928 Arbutus reported on the ambitious coed hitting the hardwood for intramural competition season right after returning from Thanksgiving break. Contrary to the relaxed and recreational Play Days, many Hoosiers continued to hone their basketball skills and exhibit their athletic prowess defying the gender divide in athletics. It was also at this time that the first major change to the women’s athletic clothing occurred.

Women wore a less full black wool knicker, tucked-in white tailored button down blouse with short sleeves and a small collar, and low white tennis shoes with white ankle socks.

While the intramurals and interclass competitions continued to occur

year after year, the associations in charge of organizing the women began to change. By 1949, the Women’s Athletic Association had become the Women’s Recreational Association (WRA) in order to expand and open more opportunities for women to participate in recreational activities on campus. The WRA offered another level of competition for the eager woman which was advanced competitive play. Throughout the 1950s, basketball remained a fixture on the Bloomington campus, and the game for women continued to become less restrictive. It now included an overtime period, allowed for more movement and freedom on the court not seen in

the prior segmented, stationary game. Additionally, players could now snatch the ball from an opponent without acquiring a foul. Slowly women were beginning to be allowed to become more physical and competitive.

The Department of Physical Education for Women continued to sponsor and promote women’s athletics on campus. The dedicated faculty of twelve assisted the students



in finding new and expansive avenues for female athletes. Edna Munro as Director of the Department oversaw the expansion of the intramural program, development of Play Days, and the creation of the new athletic focus group Women's Recreational Association, the successor of W.A.A. She helped lead the emancipated female athletes in their search for less restrictive outfits, game rules, and access to athletic competition. She would be followed by a string of empowering women who helped usher in the era of sponsored extramural teams and inclusion in the Athletic Department. One of these women was Dr. Anita Aldrich who served as the Chair of the Department beginning in 1964 (later she would become the first woman to serve on the Athletics Committee and eventually chair the committee). Dr. Aldrich strongly advocated for the development of women's athletics and the expansion of the extramural program. Joined by Leanne Grotke who served as coordinator of intramural and extramural women's sports beginning in 1967, Aldrich and Grotke pushed for more funding for women's basketball team.

During their time in the department, 70% of female students at Indiana University participated in athletics through the Women's Recreational Association and positive attitudes toward women in sport had set in motion a women's sport revolution. The Indiana Daily Student described in an article entitled "WRA for the active girl" how every woman on campus whether she was athletically experienced or not could find a place within the association as an athlete. The intramurals served as the basic and simplified program played just for fun. The extramural or intercollegiate competition allowed for more skilled and competitive women to have opportunities to represent their school and play a faster paced, competitive game. The first extramural team was coached by Dr. Kay Burrus of the Department of Physical Education for Women. Joining the Department in 1961, she became the head coach and only coach for the two extramural teams of basketball and field hockey. The extramural competition was not limited to the Department sponsored team. The Indiana Univer-



sity Nurse's Team competed in the competitions in Indianapolis at the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s. The 1960 Arbutus highlighted the Nurse's Basketball team's competition:

In spite of their busy schedules of classes and ward duty, student nurses take time out for basketball. The Nurses Basketball Team this year aspired to regain the championship of the Indianapolis Schools of Nursing Basketball Tourney. The team lost the championship in 1959 for the first time since the beginning of the tournament. The players compete with other girls' teams in the area in addition to participating in the tournament.

They played teams such as Butler University, Indiana Central University, and Marion College in Indianapolis making the nurse's team one of the first extramural teams to represent Indiana University.

Although not sanctioned as an official team, these women became leaders for the future Hoosiers as they found competition outside of the intramural system.

Despite all the progress and support from faculty members like Aldrich and Grotke, women in athletics continued to fight the stigma of the "female jock" that unflatteringly characterized them as masculine, aggressive women with a chromosome imbalance. It is exemplified in the Honorable Judge John Clark Fitz-Gerald comment on female athletic competition: "Athletic competition builds character in our boys. We do not need that kind of character in our girls". In response to this comment, Leanne Grotke defended the female athletes' characters by saying: "I would assume the judge feels that the boys are so bad off that they need a character building program". Times were ripe for change, but stigma and resistance to full female participation in campus athletics still remained.

In addition to enduring these negative stereotypes, the female basketball athlete also had to figure out how to finance their ability to play basketball competitively. The funding for women's basketball or women's athletics in general was meager at Indiana. This forced Burrus's teams to sleep in teammates homes and be responsible for their own

transportation and food. Additionally, the women had to share uniforms amongst sports teams. Jill Forkner, a junior in 1969, was interviewed by the Indiana Daily Student for her stance on women's athletic equality on campus. She found the uniform situation of the female athletes embarrassing: "the girl athletes represent I.U. wherever they perform...It's very embarrassing for an I.U. team dressed in HPER [Health, Physical Education, and Recreation Department] uniforms to face brilliantly uniformed opposition".

On February 5, 1970, women began to play by the "men's rules" for the first time. While the change in women's rules finally bridged the divide between the men's and women's game the same cannot be said in regards to athletics budgets. The women's basketball team operated on a \$312.46 annual budget. It was paltry in comparison to the men's ample annual budget of \$1,862,011 which included scholarships, uniforms, salaries for coaches, transportation, lodging, and even per diem allowances to players. Dr. Burrus and other coaches of the women's teams did not receive direct compensation for their coaching duties. Instead, they were granted release time from their teaching duties. The entire Department of Physical Education for Women, all sixteen faculty members, made women's athletics possible by serving as game officials, referees, umpires, seamstresses, managers, and any other capacity the women's programs needed. Due to the perseverance and dedication of the Department of Physical Education for Women and women like Aldrich, Grotke, and Burrus, by the 1971 season, women's basketball officially had a squad competing on a varsity level with an official head coach. Although it was not supported by the Athletic Department, the beginning years as a varsity squad saw some of the best records Indiana Women's Basketball has ever seen.

Bea Gorton, a graduate student in Bloomington, became the first coach of the varsity team. Like the faculty members, Gorton did not receive a salary or monetary compensation for her time as head coach. Rather, it was one of three



on campus jobs she held as she worked to obtain her graduate degree. Under her direction, the women became the most accomplished Hoosier Women's Basketball team to date. In the first four years of varsity status, the team had an 81% winning percentage. Bea Gorton would finish with an overall record of 79-28 (.738) and to date is the fastest Indiana University Women's coach to reach 50 wins. The first four years also saw many tournament appearances including two Elite 8s (1972 and 1974) and an AIAW Final Four in 1973. Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, AIAW, hosted the tournament in 1973 which was the precursor to the NCAA in women's athletics. It was the 1973 championship game that convinced Tara VanDerveer of Indiana's potential. She was so taken with the team after watching the game, she transferred the next year. While the women's basketball team was permitted to use the newly opened Assembly Hall beginning in 1972, it would not be until 1974 that the team was included as branch of the Athletic Department despite the passage of Title IX.

With the official integration into the Athletic Department in 1974 and the gradual acceptance of Title IX by the university, the Indiana University Women's Basketball Team entered into the modern era of women's basketball. The excellence of the Indiana University Women's Basketball team dates back to the inception of the game itself. From the onset, women at Indiana have enthusiastically played the game with the same amount of Hoosier Hysteria as any of their male counterparts. As Dr. Naismith once said, "basketball really had its origin in Indiana, which remains the center of the sport". This statement could not ring more true for the story of the Indiana University Women's Basketball

Team. For over a century, Hoosier women have played in noxious and pillar-studded basement gyms; adapted to restrictions and limitations of basketball rules; persevered through public perception and opinion; shared homemade jerseys and carpooled to tournaments on their dime; and, practiced in Assembly Hall like the men. They exemplified Hoosier values and remained faithful despite wavering support. As pioneers in women's athletics and in basketball, these women epitomized Hoosier tradition and spirit and embodied the values of our fight song. They were never daunted, could not falter, and in the battle were tried and

true. Today and always, they are the glory of Ole IU. With gratitude for these women's efforts and determination, I salute the women before me.

Indiana we are all for you!



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Appendix

- Figure 1: Wylie Hall. Courtesy of IU Archives, P0020564
- Figure 2: Women's Gymnasium 1896. Arbutus 1896
- Figure 3: 1928 Women Playing Basketball. Arbutus 1928
- Figure 4: 1916 Monogram Winners. Courtesy of IU Archives, P0025536.
- Figure 5: Women's Basketball, March 1948. Courtesy of IU Archives, P0046007.
- Figure 6: HPER Group. Courtesy of IU Archives, P0049681.
- Figure 7: 1960 Nurse's Team. Arbutus 1960.
- Figure 8: 1972-1973 Women's Basketball Team. Courtesy of IU Archives, P0033031.
- Figure 9: Basketball 1975. Courtesy of IU Archives, P0029175.