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KIN 494

Illinois Athletics: Traditions & Transitions

Media Coverage of Women’s Tennis 1969-1973

or

A Mini Biography of Dr. Mary Hoke Slaughter

the Tennis Player/Coach

May 10, 2007
Our course content for this semester was centered on Illinois athletics, in my case women’s tennis from 1969-1973, and the media coverage it generated. Throughout the semester we have studied various theories and methodologies of history, archival research, and cultural studies, especially those involving the historiography and ethnography of sport. It is my hope that this paper will show that women’s tennis did exist at the University of Illinois prior to Title IX and the importance of the coach involved.

At this point, I think it is important to note that when contacting the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics, their response was that women’s tennis did not exist at the University of Illinois prior to 1975. When I then questioned how DIA honored the female athletes who competed prior to 1974 at the ceremony in 2003, I was referred to someone in Athletic Development by the Sports Information Director of Athletic Public Relations for women’s tennis (personal communication). He explained that all kinesiology (physical education for women) majors had been sent a ‘feeler’ letter to see if they had played sports while at the University, or knew anyone who had and asked them to spread the word that the University was looking for the female athletes. From those who responded, they invited the women athletes who came to campus and were honored by receiving a University athletic letter. The coach and the roster of names I obtained for this paper were all in attendance at this important event held November 22, 2003 in which over 200 alumnae were recognized (ALS, 2004). I have been able to locate only a partial team roster, and no schedule, news releases, statistics, etc. for the 1969-1973 time frame.

Mary Hoke Slaughter, Ph.D., began her career at the University in 1958 as a master’s degree student in the college of Physical Education. One year later she had received her degree, and was hired to teach activity courses in the Women’s Department of Physical Education. In 1960 she began working on her doctoral degree, advised by Dr. Laura Huelster while continuing to work
full time in the department. From 1968-1972, she also served as the manager and tennis professional at the Twin City Tennis Club in Champaign, taking a leave of absence from the University in 1971-1972 (Slaughter, 1971) to pursue that effort full time. It was her feeling that she would be contributing her services to the growth of tennis as a leisure time activity in Champaign-Urbana. Twin City was the first indoor, therefore first year round facility in this area. She returned to the University in the fall of 1972 with a full teaching load of eight activity courses. At this time the Men’s and Women’s Departments of Physical Education had merged into one.

In 1974, she began using her Ph.D., doing research in the Physical Fitness Research Laboratory in the Department of Physical Education (now Kinesiology and Community Health). Her research involved relating somatotype to body composition and physical performance in a variety of subpopulations and she published seven manuscripts between 1976 and 1980. The research culminated in the development of an objective method for assessing musculo-skeletal size in adults. In 1981, Dr. Slaughter was promoted to the rank of Associate Professor, when she switched her research emphasis toward the objective assessment of musculo-skeletal size in children and youth. In July 1980, Dr. Slaughter served as the chairman for the first ever session of papers in Kinanthropometry at the International Congress of Women and Sport (Ross, 1980).

While Dr. Slaughter was actively involved in her studies and teaching, she was also actively playing on the tennis circuit. In a personal conversation with former Department Head Alyce Cheska on May 3, 2007, she praised both Mary’s tennis and teaching skills, saying Dr. Slaughter was one of the best teachers we had during her time as Department Head. On June 29, 1965, Mary upset the top seeded player, Helen Perez in the first round of the Illinois state women’s tennis tournament (Chicago Tribune, 1965a). Mrs. Perez had represented the United States at Wimbledon in 1956 (Chicago Tribune, 1966b). On July 1, 1965, she won not only the Illinois State
Women’s tennis championship in singles, but also in doubles, teaming with Fan Brown (Chicago Tribune, 1965c). She usually spent summers in Virginia, but this year she had stayed at Illinois to work on her doctoral degree. The article in the Courier also mentions that she coaches and teaches tennis at the University (Champaign Courier, 1965). In a phone conversation with Mary on March 30, 2007, she relayed that she remembers playing actively on the tennis circuit from the ages of 13-21.

As coach of the women’s intramural tennis team, Dr. Slaughter said that they arranged most of the matches themselves, there was not an athletic association that arranged matches for the women. During the 1960s the biggest match was held at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois. I have been unable to find any information out about this match, but will continue to keep looking. Also, Tony Clements of Campus Recreation here on Campus scheduled a match each July that the women competed in. Unfortunately, with IMPE undergoing renovations at this time, he was not able to grant me access to those records so that I could incorporate the information into this paper. Her recollection of media coverage is that the Chicago and Champaign newspapers covered both her and the women’s teams’ matches, but the University newspaper did not. I was able to find the Chicago Tribune articles about Mary, but am still looking for the News-Gazette articles about her and the team.

October 20-22, 1961 Mary, attended the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (AAHPER, 1961) -United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA, 1961) joint committee seminar at Ohio State University, only 25 (Huelster, 1961) participants were chosen to attend this prestigious seminar. The purpose of the workshop was to consider the best methods and procedures for the development of tennis in schools and colleges in America. Only individuals who were thought to have something of national significance to contribute were
invited to attend. As part of this workshop, Dr. Slaughter was a contributing author of the book “Tennis Group Instruction”.

The book begins very simply by stating that “tennis is a fine game” (Tennis Group Instruction, 1963, p. 7). The introduction goes on to describe how easy it is to set up a game, how it can be enjoyed by all ages, is a great physical activity and has rules that are recognized around the world. In later chapters, it describes the traditional tennis clothing; “a clean white T-shirt or polo shirt, white shorts or trousers, low-cut white sneakers, and clean white wool socks” (Tennis Group Instructions, 1963, p. 48), how different from the players of today some of whom design their own clothing. The book also tells how important it is to know the rules before you begin playing the game and the etiquette that should be followed while on the court, something as important today as it was then.

At the time the book was written, AAHPER had already been in existence for 78 years, bringing together all of those in fields of education related to physical education. The Association at that time was divided into seven special interest groups, each responsible for publishing and keeping current rule books and teaching strategies on various sports. Today, it is divided into five research consortiums with subgroups in each area. One of the aspirations AAHPER listed in the book was that improving the instruction of tennis would be their contribution to the game with the anticipation that by skillfully introducing tennis during their school years, students would become tennis enthusiasts for life. Dr. Slaughter truly had this lifelong love for the game, as she only recently quit playing on a regular basis.

In March 1966, Dr. Slaughter was among a group of 20 invited clinicians to Colorado Springs, Colorado by the Lifetime Sports Foundation, the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation and the National Education Association to participate in a
tennis workshop culminating in the booklet “Ideas for Tennis Instruction”. She was granted the title Master Clinician at the completion of this workshop (Lifetime Sports Foundation, 1966).

Some other interesting facts about Dr. Slaughter: in June 14-16, 1966 a workshop in tennis was held for teachers, college students, and other adults interested in these activities for girls here at the University, taught by Dr. Slaughter (Physical Education News, 1966). In fall 1968 she was an academic adviser, extramural sport director, and a member of one dept committee (Huelster archives). And in 2002, Dr. Slaughter was appointed to the Provost’s Committee on Retention (Inside Illinois, 2002). After almost 30 years of service to the University, Dr. Slaughter retired, and applied for and was granted professor emerita status on 05/21/97.

But one of the most interesting facts of all is that Mary was the first woman to letter in any sport at the University of Virginia and the first to officially participate for a Virginia athletic team – in 1954. She played on the men’s tennis team since there was no women’s team. In 1959, 1961 and 1963 the United Lawn Tennis Association crowned her the Virginia State Women’s Champion (Virginia, 1999). Quite an achievement two decades before Title IX was signed into legislation. I think it shows how truly talented she was at the game.

Some headlines from the Daily Illini in 1970-1971 included the following:

- Shortage of women PE teachers
- Women underpaid and underrepresented at the university
- Vietnam War
- Kent State Riots
- 05/07/1970 riots on campus, people complaining because postage is going up to 8 cents
- 08/06/1970 ROTC goes COED
- Nixon president
- US Olympic trials in gymnastics held at Huff gym 11-18 to 11-20/1971

The first two headlines could just as easily be from today’s paper. There is still a shortage of PE teachers nationwide, and this University is still one of the top schools for educating the teachers. Women on campus are still underpaid and under-represented, see the Daily Illini of May
4, 2007 and the article on this very subject. Vietnam is now Iraq, and yes we all wish it would end. Kent State Riots are currently overshadowed by the tragedy at Virginia Tech where a lone gunman shot and killed over 30 people for no apparent reason. I am not aware of any riots recently on campus, but there are frequent rallies held for various causes, one of the most recent being a Stop the Hate rally. Postage goes up May 14, 2007 to 41 cents, making the 8 cents of 1970 seem quite reasonable. And even though ROTC went coed back in 1970, men are still thought to be physically more powerful than women and women are not held to the same physical standards as the men. Richard Nixon would later resign as president, but today is remembered for doing many great things as well as some not so great ones.

Signed into law June 23, 1972 by President Richard M. Nixon, Title IX states that "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."(Sigelman and Wahlbeck, 1999). The key here is that the gender composition of the school and the gender composition of the athletic programs are to be similar in participation opportunities. According to this article it is more likely for a small school without a football team to be in compliance with Title IX. Schools with a smaller proportion of female athletes and with a larger pool of financial resources aimed towards the females and with a small athletic program overall have the best chance of complying with the regulations. At this point I would love to go into the implementation of Title IX at the University of Illinois based on the Huelster papers, but it is not within the scope of this paper since it was not implemented until 1975, and will have to be saved for another time.

The Division of Intramurals formed within the College of Physical Education in 1962. Prior to this the men’s intramural program was under the Athletic Association. Women’s
Intramurals were houses under the Department of Physical Education for Women (Silver Anniversary, 1982).

Women’s Intercollegiate Sports Association

Mary Ann Bender was Coordinator of the Women’s Extramural Sports Association at the University of Illinois prior to Title IX. In the Huelster Papers, I discovered her proposal for a Women’s Intercollegiate Sports Association for the University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign; I would like to give some of those highlights here:

First, it would be housed in the College of Physical Education, in the Department of Physical Education with the Director of the Program responsible to the Head of the Department of Physical Education. How far removed this is now, housed in the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics.

WISA was to be developed in two phases, beginning in August 1973 with the program in the Department of Physical Education. Phase two would begin in January 1976 with a complete re-evaluation of the program including the administrative structure, purpose of the program, finances and the available facilities. Phase two would have WISA become a separate entity within the College of Physical Education. Men’s and women’s practice times and meet times for gymnastics, swimming and track and field would coincide to help reduce costs. Scholarships would be awarded based on athletic ability as well as academic achievement.

The purpose of WISA was to allow undergraduate women to compete in supervised and coached individual and team sports, to allow those with the most advanced physical skills in a particular sport to compete, to allow students involvement in planning and administration of a sports programs and to provide opportunities to meet with other college women both on and off the University of Illinois campus.
Ms. Bender requested that the Association be adequately staffed and funded with dedicated professional personnel to coach the sports and office space be allotted for these same coaches.

Medical care including a physical examination should be available to the participants as it is to the Men’s Program.

One source of funding for the program would be the general University budget.

Publicity and public relations should be handled so that all women students are aware of WISA and what it does, as well as conveying this information to the local community, the state and the nation.

Mary Ann Bender was named the Director of WISA (Illio, 1974).

On February 28, 1974, Cecil N. Coleman, Director of Athletics sent a memo to the Chancellor stating that the Athletic Association would be accepting responsibility for funding women’s intercollegiate athletics as well as modifying facilities and providing tuition waivers effective with the 1974-1975 academic year (Coleman, 1974).

From the Huelster Archives:

The headline for a Daily Illini article for November 1973 reads “Illinois tennis team needs girls for practice help”. Unfortunately, they were wanting women to be ‘ball girls’ while the men’s team practices for which they will receive a free tennis lesson from a handsome tennis player (Metcalf, 1973). There is still no mention of a women’s team.

Current Results in the Illinois Alumni News state that the tennis team (meaning women’s) has lost only one meet in four years. The accompanying article titled “They’re Out to Win” goes on to say how the women’s sports at the University were cut from nine to five in 1973 due to funding. During this time membership also shifted from the Women’s Extramural Sports Association to the Women’s Intercollegiate Sports Association which provides at least a minimal
amount of money for travel (Rowan, 1973). The budget for the year was $4,500 for women’s athletics. The men’s Athletic Association budget for the same year was $2.3 million dollars (French, 1973).

When starting the research for this paper I had hoped to find media coverage of women’s tennis at the University of Illinois from 1969-1973. Finding little to no coverage, I turned to other sources to see what I could find about media coverage of women’s sports in general. In MediaSport, published in 1998, Kinkema and Harris discuss how even now women’s sports do not get the coverage that men’s sports do (p. 38). Even when women’s sports are being covered, the woman’s role as a wife or mother is emphasized over her role as an athlete. The female athlete is evaluated more by how her physical characteristics relate to the norm of femininity than by her prowess in her chosen athletic field, “little girls and sweethearts sell” (p95). The amount of time spent covering women’s sports is quite small compared to the time spent covering men’s athletics. It does depend somewhat on the sport however; as basketball and tennis receive more coverage than other women’s sports.

Creedon states the obvious: sports sells newspapers (MediaSport, p. 89.), if the desired demographic group will not be watching the sport, the sport will not be covered, advertisers will only place ads for their products in newspapers or on television shows that will result in sales. If the fans are there, the coverage will follow. She also goes on to describe the reporter who has to cover women’s sports as being the one with the entry level position, one just breaking into the business, with little prestige. Women breaking into sports journalism want to cover men’s sports since that can lead to greater success as a reporter.

Kane and Lenskyi look at the coverage from the gender side. How much of the coverage of women’s athletics is based on the sport and how much is geared towards the athletes body? If the
woman is a lesbian, will the public no longer want to watch her compete? Would we really rather hear about Florence Griffith-Joyner’s fingernails than the speed of her race? Would the products advertised during an event fail to sell if the athlete wore more clothes? Is Anna Kournikova a great tennis player, or is it just sex appeal that sells the products? These are all issues that need to be considered, but not necessarily within the scope of this particular paper. And Duncan and Messner discuss how the female athletes are often times posed in soft-core pornographic positions that highlight them as sex objects, not as athletes. Women are more often photographed in posed shots that have nothing to do with their sports than in action shots while engaged in their sports. Men are more often photographed while in action. This again sends the message that women are valued for their appearance, not their athleticism.

Conclusions

Sports are more entwined now with culture than at any other time in history.

Dr. Slaughter was a great tennis player. Living in Illinois may have hurt her chances for playing on a larger scale, but to our advantage, it allowed her to be chosen to co-author books on tennis that are as relevant today as they were when they were written 30 years ago. Tennis is a universal sport, the rules are the same around the world and learning the etiquette and playing by the rules instills a sense of achievement in the player that he/she will not soon lose. She is now living back in Virginia near where she grew up and near her family. Her sport of choice is now golf which is not quite as taxing on the body as is tennis. I wish her many more years to enjoy the sport and thank her for the time and insight she was able to give me in writing this paper. As you can see, the title changed as I got further into the project.

I began my project in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign looking for information about the women’s tennis team from 1969-1973. I knew that Dr. Slaughter had been
the coach during that time period and had been told by another member of our office staff that she could put me in touch with one of the players from that same period. The Huelster Papers gave me some information on the tennis program, and some other places to look, most of which became dead ends. I then decided to focus my archival research on Dr. Slaughter, and found what I thought was some fascinating information, and I left out her research!

I did contact the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics, and was either told information did not exist or that they would get it to me (I am still waiting on some letters that they told me they would send me in early April). The Urbana Public Library was of great assistance is searching for the newspaper articles about Mary’s tennis days, but unable to help me find any about the University tennis team. The History, Philosophy, and Newspaper Library here at the University of Illinois was unable to help me locate any articles in the Daily Illini or News Gazette for the 1969-1973 time frame about the University Women’s Tennis Team. Little had been written (or I was unable to locate it) in scholarly journals or books about media coverage of women’s sports back in 1973, so I tried for more recent articles. I found some good articles, some of which refer back to the beginning of Title IX and the coverage or lack there of. Athletic Development did call me with a partial team roster. I tried contacting those women that had emails available, but had no responses.

My fellow office staff failed to come through with the player contact, but did allow me access to the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health, Kinesiology Program Archives, and I was also able to access the Applied Health Sciences Archives searching for information on Dr. Slaughter. I would love to have another semester to work on this project and at least attempt to follow through on this list of people/places that I feel I should have looked at or contacted.

Following is a list of names and what information I would have liked to looked/asked for:
Karol Kahrs: the first women’s Athletic Director after implementation of Title IX. What can she tell me about the program before she was hired? Where are the records? How does she remember the women’s tennis team? How does she remember Dr. Slaughter? Does she remember any of the players that I was able to find the names of? What does she remember about the implementation of Title IX? Does she have a roster with other names? Does she have any memorabilia of the team that she would be willing to share with me for a project of this type? Does she have the letters sent out by the University in 2003 and would she be willing to share them with me along with her memories of the November 2003 event?

AAHPER: an in depth comparison of their organization before and after Title IX and the resulting changes, as well as any information they may have on Dr. Slaughter

AAPKE: a description of the program in the 60’s as well as now and any information they may have on Dr. Slaughter

USLTA: information on Dr. Slaughter

Magazine: The Olympian: media coverage on women’s tennis prior to Title IX

Metro Women’s Sports News: first paper exclusively for women in sports: Did they cover women’s tennis at the University level during the time frame of this paper?

Magazine: womenSports: Did they cover women’s tennis at the University level during the time frame of this paper?

Christian Science Monitor: Did they cover women’s tennis at the University level during the time frame of this paper? Did they have information on Dr. Slaughter? What information did they relate on Title IX?

AIAW: what is it and how would it relate to this paper

“Illinois Women’s athletics death near? Chicago tribune press service. October 29, ____1973???: what exactly did the article say?

Alyce Cheska: how does she remember the women’s tennis team? How does she remember Dr. Slaughter? Does she remember any of the players that I was able to find the names of? Does she remember any players that I do not have on my list? What does she remember about the implementation of Title IX? Does she have other suggestions as to where to look for information?

Peggy Pruitt: how does she remember the women’s tennis team? How does she remember Dr. Slaughter? Does she remember any of the players that I was able to find the names of? What does she remember about the implementation of Title IX?

News Gazette: Did they cover women’s tennis at the University and I was just unable to locate the articles given my time constraints this semester? Did they cover Mary
Slaughter’s tennis accomplishments and I was just unable to locate the articles given my time constraints this semester?

Jack Gropel: how does he remember the women’s tennis team? How does he remember Dr. Slaughter? Does he remember any of the players that I was able to find the names of? What does he remember about the implementation of Title IX? What can he tell me about media coverage of women’s tennis from 1969-1973?

Sarah Kelley: What files would she be able to allow me access to that would further my research towards my goal

Kathy Hahn: would she be able to help me locate information if Sarah Kelley granted me access to the files?

Mary Ann Bender: coordinator of women’s extramural sports association. How does she remember the women’s tennis team? How does she remember Dr. Slaughter? Does she remember any of the players that I was able to find the names of? What does she remember about the implementation of Title IX? How long was she Director of WISA?

Millikin University: Do they have records of the matches between the University of Illinois and Millikin University. Dr. Slaughter recalls the biggest match of the year being held at Millikin. Is there anyone left there that remembers the matches or has memorabilia they would be willing to share?

And now, the team roster that I was able to obtain and the questions I would love to ask them:

Deborah Clements Blanks:
Barbara Bryngelson Moore
Marcia Seaton
Joyce Veverka Parisi
Corinne Botterbusch
Jean Snuggs
Alice Stevens Kay
Claudia Oleson Richards

How do you remember the women’s tennis team? How do you remember Dr. Slaughter? Do you remember any of the players that I was able to find the names of? Do you have a roster with other names? Do you have any memorabilia of the team that you would be willing to share with me for a project of this type? Do you have the letters sent out by the University in 2003 and would you be willing to share them with me along with your memories of the November 2003 event?

I was also given the names Bonnie Grabenhoffer and Laura Kiedaisch but I was not able to match them to names of participants at the 2003 event. Could they possibly be Bonita Snyders Franke or Laura Biggs who are on the list?
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