



Playing The Game: Sports and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914

Kathleen McCrone

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In England, the latter years of the nineteenth century were a period of rapid and profound change in the role of women in sports. Kathleen McCrone describes this transformation and the social changes it helped to bring about.

Since women's entry into sports was chiefly a consequence of the campaign for better female education, *Playing the Game* begins with an account of sports at the Oxbridge women's colleges, at the girls' public schools, and at the new women's physical training colleges. It then looks at specific team sports such as hockey, lacrosse, and cricket as well as at such individual sports as tennis, golf, and cycling. Other chapters treat the medical attitudes and prejudices toward women's participation in sports and the role of sports in changing female dress.

The author concludes that by 1914 women in sports had managed only to gain a degree of approval by accommodating to the social pressures demanding a preservation of femininity, and thus they were still constrained by traditional gender divisions. But in sports women also had found a way of challenging existing social mores; the very existence of sportswomen denied the stultifying Victorian ideals of womanhood and the notions of feminine weakness and fragility. By providing women with an opportunity to compete, to be physically active, and to strive for excellence, sports contributed to their sense of increased independence and capability.

Based upon a thorough canvass of primary and secondary materials, this study fills a gap in the history of women, of sport, and of education.

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