

# **Breaking Barriers: Women's Basketball Documents**

**By Brian Sheehy**

**History Department Coordinator**

**North Andover High School**



**Found: Schlesinger Library Sally Fox Collection**

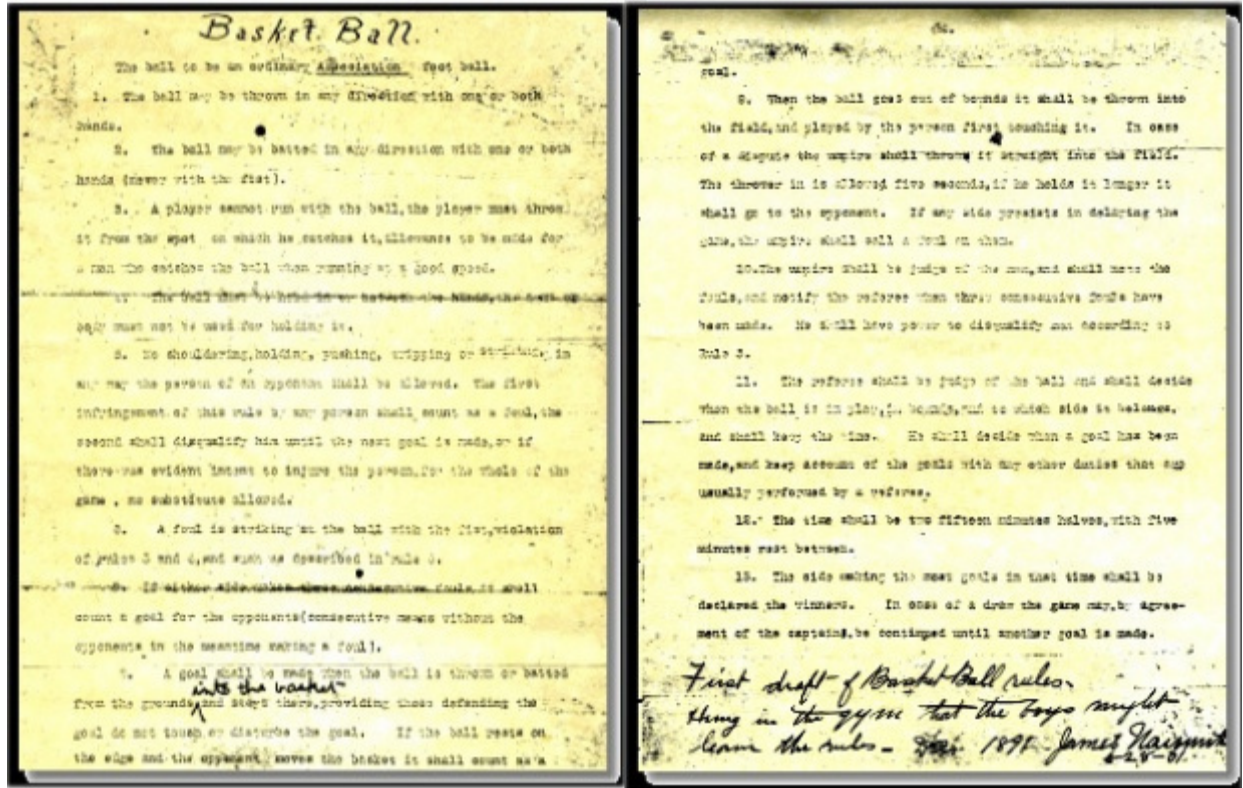
Subseries E. Basketball, 1896-1924, 1995 (#9.26-9.27, 10FB.4, 12F+B.2, SD.2). Collection of Sally Fox, 1575-2005 (inclusive), 1860-1929 (bulk), MC 638; Vt-182. Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/ead/c/sch01175c00335/catalog>

**Grade Level: 8-12**

## **Background**

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries women had a much different role in society than they do today. Women were expected to raise children, take care of the household, and not question the male figures in their lives. Women were expected to act in a respectable, “ladylike” way. Women were advised against participation in athletics by men and doctors due to their “frail” bodies and “weak demeanor.” Furthermore, the competitive attributes that came out while participating in sport were deemed “unladylike” by society.

In December of 1891, James Naismith developed 13 original rules for the sport of basketball.



## [Original Rules](#)

Women started to play basketball almost immediately after Naismith invented the game. Women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries faced many barriers and limitations in their pursuit of participation in the sport of basketball.

Using the documents below, decide whether or not you think that women's participation in early basketball continued to limit women's participation in sports or liberated women to break the barriers that limited their participation and push for equality.

Document 1: *Judge Magazine* May 20, 1922.



**Things to Think About**

As you look at this source think about how the women are dressed. What are the women doing? Do their actions seem limited due to any physical limitations based on their gender? How might the girl stepping over the other girl be controversial?

**Document 2:** Women Basketball Players 1924. Photo by E Eicha who photographed African American cultural life in Harlem. Found: Schlesinger Library Sally Fox Collection Subseries E. Basketball, 1896-1924, 1995 (#9.26-9.27, 10FB.4, 12F+B.2, SD.2). Collection of Sally Fox, 1575-2005 (inclusive), 1860-1929 (bulk), MC 638; Vt-182. Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/ead/c/sch01175c00335/catalog>



**Things to Think About**

How does this image break barriers? What opportunities did women have to participate in sports in the 1920s? What opportunities did African Americans have to participate in sports in the 1920s?

### Document 3

December 16, 1899, Saturday - *The San Francisco Call*

**FACULTY AT STANFORD  
ABOLISHES BASKET-BALL**

**Considers That the Game Is Too Se-  
vere a Physical Strain on the  
Young Women.**

**STANFORD UNIVERSITY, Dec. 15.—**  
The faculty athletic committee at a meet-  
ing held last night passed a ruling virtu-  
ally abolishing the game of basket-ball  
when played by young ladies of the uni-  
versity. The rule forbids any intercolle-  
giate contest between the young women  
which requires team work, and further  
provides that all contests must be played  
on the home campus. It is not intended  
that the game of tennis should come with-  
in this rule.

The reasons given by the faculty ath-  
letic committee for placing such restric-  
tions upon women's athletics is that the  
physical strain upon the young women is  
too great.

The committee is composed of Profes-  
sors Kellogg, Branner, Richardson, Guido  
Marx and Dr. Wood.

### Things to Think About

What types of barriers did the women at Stanford face in playing basketball? Who do you think made up the faculty athletic committee?

**Document 4:** *The New York Times* November 17, 1895.

“Girls’ football,” as the popular basket ball is called by patronizing college students of the stronger sex, is, although shorn of some of the rougher features that make the former a menace to life and limb, not precisely a drawing-room performance. It is usually played in colleges for women between the juniors and the sophomores in the gymnasium and in gymnasium dress. There are intense excitement, shrill feminine screams and hurrahs, waving of class banners, and encouragement of favorite players. The agility and strength displayed at a recent contest were remarkable, and spoke highly for the development of the new woman.

Text:

“Girls’ football,” as the popular basketball is called by patronizing college students of the stronger sex, is, although shorn of some of the rougher features that make the former a menace to life and limb, not precisely a drawing-room performance. It is usually played in colleges for women between the juniors and the sophomores in the gymnasium and in gymnasium dress.

There are intense excitement, shrill feminine screams and hurrahs, waving of class banners, and encouragement of favorite players. The agility and strength displayed at a recent contest were remarkable, and spoke highly for the development of the new woman.

### **Things to Think About**

What were the expectations of women in the time period, and how did playing basketball challenge those expectations? What barriers were women breaking down by playing basketball? What does the author mean by “the new woman?”

Document 5: *The New York Times* October 11, 1903.

upon.

### BASKET BALL DENOUNCED.

Wellesley College Representative Says  
Physical and Moral Effects on  
Girls Are Bad.

*Special to The New York Times.*

BOSTON, Oct. 10.—Miss Lucille Eaton Hill of Wellesley College startled the New England Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools by a spirited attack on basket ball.

As the Chairmah of a committee of the Boston Physical Education Society, rather than as a representative of Wellesley, she pressed her attack on the game from every approach.

Basket ball, she said, should be stopped absolutely so far as girls under the college age is concerned, and it should be admitted only tentatively, and under professional supervision, to a place among the sports open to women of a new age. The physical effects upon young girls at a critical period of their growth into womanhood, the chances of permanent injury to beauty and health, the evil influence of such excitement upon the emotional and nervous feminine nature, and the tendency to unsex the player—for she declared that the competitive game, with its traveling about, its exhibitions before mixed audiences, and its cultivation of the win-at-any-cost spirit, was not womanly, and made neither for character nor refinement—were all urged against the game for young girls.

For its vogue she blamed not so much those who revelled in play as the school boards and the Principals who permit and, in some cases, encourage it.

**Things to Think About**

What does Miss Lucille Eaton Hill think of basketball? Are you surprised by her opinion? Think about how the women who continued to play basketball broke barriers.

**Document 6:** *Oakland Tribune* April 10, 1896.

**BENEFIT BOOMERS.**

University Students Combine  
for the Field  
Day.

MANY TICKETS ARE TAKEN.

The Baseball Players Are  
Confident of Beating  
Stanford.

SOCIETY SHINES TONIGHT

The Swell Cotillion to Be  
Given in Elaborate  
Style.

BERKELEY, April 10.—At the meeting of the students yesterday afternoon, the proposed eastern trip and its expenses were discussed. The big benefit Field Day to be held in San Francisco on May 21, was the subject of a little speech from Manager Friend Col. Edwards also made an enthusiastic address on athletic sports. At the close of the meeting tickets were given to the students in full. The basketball team took twenty-five, the football fifty, the "Occident" twenty-five and numerous others were taken. Most unfortunately the girls did not have the coveted "Big C" bestowed upon them at the meeting as it was originally announced it would be. The girls feel a little hurt about the matter, especially as the withholding of the "Big C" is entirely on account of one member of the athletic committee, who obstinately refuses to allow the girls to be honored with the emblem. He claims that basketball is not an established inter-collegiate game, therefore the girls are not entitled to the "Big C." There is no way of proving to him that it is an intercollegiate game, so the matter is temporarily settled. The girls are hoping that the objecting man will either be removed or resign.

BERKELEY, April 10—At the meeting of the students yesterday afternoon, the proposed eastern trip and its expenses were discussed.

The big benefit Field Day to be held on May 2d, was the subject of a little speech from manager Friend Col. Edwards also made an enthusiastic address on athletic sports.

At the close of the meeting tickets were given to the students to sell. The basketball team took twenty-five, the football, fifty, the "Occident" twenty-five and numerous others were taken.

Most unfortunately the girls did not have the coveted "Big C" bestowed upon them at the meeting as it was originally announced it would be.

The girls feel a little hurt about the matter, especially as the withholding of the "Big C" is entirely on account of one member of the athletic committee, who obstinately refuses to allow the girls to be honored with the emblem.

He claims that basketball is not an established inter-collegiate game, therefore the girls are not entitled to the "Big C." There is no way of proving to him that it is an intercollegiate game, so the matter is temporarily settled.

The girls are hoping that the objecting man will either be removed or resign.

**Things to Think About**

What barriers did the women's basketball team from the University of California face in 1896?  
What prevented them from being treated equally to the men?



**Document 7:** Ballard, Alice. “The Beneficial Effects of Basket Ball” Spalding's official basketball guide for women : containing the official rules revised for 1916-17.

Found <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=inu.30000097624278&view=1up&seq=111>

Pg 101-103.

**Things to Think About**

How does Alice Ballard feel about basketball? What does she describe as some of the benefits of basketball? What barriers did women break by playing basketball?

# GIRLS! NO MORE BASKET-BALL.

That's the Cry in the Women's Colleges Now Because of the Brutality Attending the Seemingly Harmless Game.

IT'S WORSE THAN FOOTBALL.

Serious Injuries Said Often to Follow the Strenuous Punching and Hair-Pulling Which Attend the "Mild" Athletic Exercise.

Basket-ball, the great athletic sport for women, has been placed under the ban. A wave of protest has arisen in various women's colleges.

The grounds for disapproval are that illness and deformities result from violent playing, and that when young women who have played the game in schools where a close watch has not been kept upon the progress of the sport enter college their physical condition is such as to render them unfit to cope with the routine of college life.

When basket-ball was invented ten years ago it was heralded as a sport which afforded plenty of opportunity for good, healthful exercise. It was especially recommended because it was devoid of rough features and yet thoroughly scientific.

Women who loved athletics plunged into basket-ball, and every college in the United States introduced the game for the benefit of the girl students.

Taken Up by High Schools.

Then high schools took it up. Students became enthusiastic. It was such fun, and it was such a close connection of football that the embryo new woman felt herself dignified by being allowed to throw aside conventionalities and appear in bloomers to indulge in the exciting sport of getting the pigskin into the wicker-baskets known as the goals.

And now come the awful blow which places it in the same class of brutality as football.

What football is to masculine athletics so is basket-ball to feminine sports. The warning cry of Miss Lucille Hill, director of physical training at Wellesley College, who has strongly objected to basket-ball for girls, has been echoed by numerous authorities in New York. Miss Hill asserts that the playing of basket-ball in secondary schools, without proper supervision, has resulted in students coming to Wellesley whose physical condition was pitiable. They came with dislocated joints and other marks showing the evil results of excessive playing.

A prominent educator and athlete who is opposed to basket-ball said:

moderation. The opportunities for brutality are powerful, and girls become so energetic in the sport that they forget all the principles of health and physical law. The tearing and pulling, the twisting and falling result most seriously and I have had case after case where a girl has been made an invalid through this immoderate sport. Basket-ball is not a good game for women. It is too rough. Women are too delicately constructed to be subjected to the rough mauling and pounding in basket-ball.

Not Watched in High School.

"In colleges the students may be properly watched when at play, but I know that many a young woman has started in college with impaired health simply because she has played basket-ball too recklessly in her high school sports."

The cry that basket-ball tends to make young women rough and sporty in their inclinations is also brought out strongly against the game. Miss Hill's plea before the Physical Education Society that action be taken against strenuous athletics in school life has met with general approval from educators who have been long waiting for a crusade against the game.

That girls have lost all control of themselves in basket-ball games was illustrated by the recent game at Derby, Conn., when girls struck each other in the face, tripped and threw one another, scratched faces, injured eyes and pulled out hair most ruthlessly. The game was between the Waterbury High School and the Boardman Training School and a general slugging match terminated it.

Devotees Rise in Protest.

In opposition to the protest against basket-ball comes an indignant volley from the other side and the crusade may be as interesting an encounter as the game itself.

On one side is ranged the athletic and physical training enthusiasts who maintain that basket-ball, whose aim and object is to toss a ball into a wicker basket, is the greatest physical exercise woman could find. On the other hand comes the crusaders who maintain that basket-ball has degenerated below the level of football, that it makes invalids of women, that it distorts their anatomy, inculcates in them a spirit of roughness and coarseness and that it is entirely too strenuous for the feminine constitution.

"The best way out of it," said a prominent doctor, "is for women to confine themselves to some less boisterous game and all trouble will be obviated."

## NORTH APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF CENSUS.

President Names Chief Statistician of Manufactures of the Bureau to Succeed Merriam.

WASHINGTON, March 17.—The President has tendered the position of Director of the Census to S. N. D. North, formerly chief statistician of manufactures of the Census Bureau, to succeed Director Merriam, resigned.

Mr. North has accepted and will enter upon his duties some time in May.

## SIGN THE PLEDGE

If You Will, but That Don't Cure Drunkenness!

Drunkenness is a disease and is so recognized by the medical profession. The diseased condition of the organs of the body and nerves of the stomach demands more than will-power to

to  
M  
su  
Ly  
(pat  
three  
flam  
cold  
criti  
E.  
whic  
ticed  
next  
trea  
am  
my  
MIL  
Any  
Fitt  
etab  
paid

What is the focus of this article? How does this article highlight the ways in which basketball allowed women to break barriers?

**Document 9:**

**1902 Ivory Soap Advertisement**

FRANK LESLIE'S POPULAR MONTHLY.

COPYRIGHT 1902 BY THE PROCTER & GAMBLE CO. CINCINNATI



**T**HE skin, when its 2,300,000 pores are opened by exercise, becomes extremely sensitive; still, at such times there is the greatest necessity for thorough cleansing with soap.

It will be noticed that there is no irritation from the abundant lather of Ivory Soap well rubbed in—the lather can be instantly washed off. Other soaps, greasy and not so well made, irritate and require repeated washings. Ivory Soap leaves only a feeling of perfect cleanness.

When writing to advertisers please mention FRANK LESLIE'S POPULAR MONTHLY.

**Things to Think About**

How does this advertisement break down barriers for women and their participation in sports?