

Celebrating Women's History & Careers

# Soaring Toward Equality in Sports

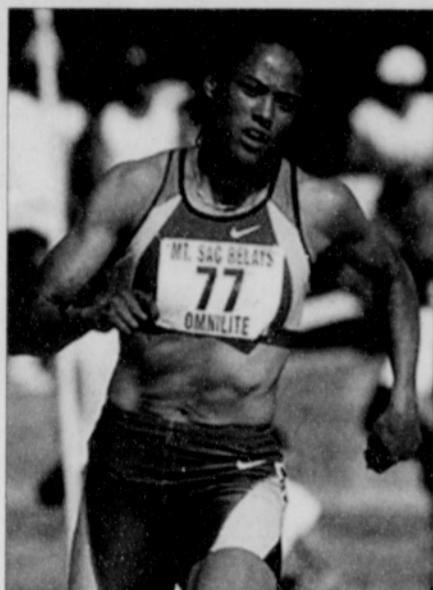
## Olympic inclusion followed struggle

In the 2000 Olympic Games, there were nearly two female athletes to every three male athletes and 44 percent of the events were open to women. Although there is still a gap to bridge until there will be equality between female and male athlete participation, the statistics are phenomenal when they are examined from a historical perspective.

In the 1890s, Baron Pierre de Coubertin of France proposed a revival of the Olympic Games. Although his goals were admirable, promoting the development of amateur sports and bringing together international athletes in the hopes of creating worldwide peace, he excluded women.

Coubertin and the members of the International Olympic Committee opposed women's participation and included them through claiming that their applause would be apart of the male athletes' awards ceremony.

Fortunately, the attitude of the IOC changed within a few years, but their mind-



Marion Jones is considered one of the greatest female athletes of all time. She won three gold medals and two bronze medals at the 2000 Summer Games in Sydney, Australia.



Florence Griffith Joyner (right) and Valerie Brisco-Hookes celebrate their 1-2 finish at the 1983 World Championships. Joyner later claimed the title of "fastest woman in the world" when she shattered records at the 1988 Olympics in Seoul.



Alice Coachman, clearing the high jump bar, became the first African American woman allowed to join the U.S. All-American Track and Field Team in 1946.

## First Gold Medal Winner

On the eve of the Civil Rights Movement, Alice Coachman was the first African American woman allowed to join the U.S. All-American Track and Field team in 1946.

Two years later, out of the 12 women at the U.S. Olympic Trials, she was one of the nine African American women.

By the last days of the 1948 London Games when Coachman competed in the high jump, only one American woman had earned a medal and it was a bronze. But after several jumps, Coachman set an Olympic record at five feet, six and 1/8 inches and won the only gold medal for the U.S. team and became the first African-American woman in U.S. Olympic history to win gold.

In the U.S. she was met with parades and a full scholarship to complete college. She later became a teacher.

set was not unusual for the time period. During the 19th Century, a common belief was that men were naturally aggressive and competitive and women were emotional and passive, making men better suited for strenuous exercise and sports. Doctors at the time argued that because of the amount of energy women expended on reproductive functions, minimal energy was left for physical, psychic or intellectual endeavors.

But near the turn of the century, many physicians decided that gentle forms of physical exercise in small doses could aid women's health and their ability to bear strong children. The main activities they were allowed to participate in were walking and a few recreational sports like croquet, archery, and skating. By the end of the century, a few middle and upper class women also participated in tennis and golf.

Around the same time, social changes

such as industrialization, urbanization, the women's reform movements, and an alteration of the restrictive clothing women wore brought more women into the leisure sports world, which led to their inclusion in competitive sports.

An American woman named Margaret Abbot is recognized as the first female American Olympian winner. Excluded from the 1896 Olympics, she was among 19 women who competed at the 1900 Games in Paris. She won the nine-hole golf tournament with a score of 47. For her prize she received a bowl of Old Saxon porcelain mounted in chiseled gold but due to the confusion at the Games, she never knew she was an Olympic champion. Only recent research has shown that the golf tournament was on the Olympic program. Golf was never played at the Olympics again.

Source: The National Women's History Museum.

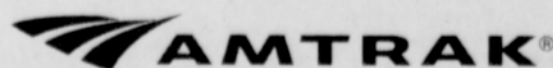


Wilma Rudolph captured the world's attention at the 1960 Olympics in Rome when she became the first woman to win three gold medals at one Olympiad.

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