

Champions by Choice: The Long Climb to the Top

Legacy of Woman Suffrage in Washington State

This series was created to honor and celebrate the contributions made by women in Washington state to advance suffrage and equal rights over the past 100 years. This program will run in The Sunday Seattle Times from October 31 – December 5, 2010.

CHAPTER 3:

Ready! Set! Go! Women Athletes Take the Starting Line

After women won the right to vote 100 years ago, they were able to weigh in on many issues that affected personal freedoms and equal rights. Yet even after many advancements in employment and politics, women discovered that they were still second-class citizens when it came to sports. Where school athletic programs existed for women, these programs often took a backseat to those for men.

In 1972, two important laws decreed that women deserved an equal share of public resources, including funding and access to facilities. First, Title IX – a federal law that mandated gender equity for any federally-funded educational program or activity – was passed. And in Washington, an Equal Rights Amendment was added to the state constitution. But it wasn't until seven years later, when Washington State University track athlete Karen (née Blair) Troianello and Coach Sue Durrant sued the university, that true statewide reform (and increased funding) for women athletes in public four-year universities was enforced.

Troianello, Durrant and many women in Washington state history have been advocates for women's right to compete as equals and models for women's success as athletes. Their hard work and persistence has paved the way for many highly respected female athletes to succeed in a world that has historically been dominated by their male counterparts.



Hazel Wolf. Photo courtesy of University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, POR764.

Hazel Wolf was born in British Columbia in 1898 and lived to be 102 years old. She is well known as an advocate for the protection of the wilderness, wetlands and wildlife in the Northwest, as well as for the rights of workers, women and minorities. Wolf's activism began when she was a young girl. She was an athlete and a natural leader – so when the principal of her elementary school told her girls could not play basketball, she organized a girls' basketball program herself. Later, her program evolved into a citywide basketball league for women.



The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) team Seattle Storm is owned by four local businesswomen. The Storm was purchased in 2008 for \$10 million and became the second franchise in the 14-team WNBA to be owned exclusively by women.

Time to think! Can you think of other local female athletes that you admire? How might their success have been affected by the influence of women like Hazel Wolf and Helene Madison? Can you think of other sites in your community that have been named for influential women?

Helene Madison serves as an inspiration for young women to work hard and dream big. She began swimming as a small child in Seattle Park Department classes at Green Lake. Her natural talent was recognized by Washington Athletic Club (WAC) coach Ray Daughters, who encouraged Madison to swim competitively. By the time she was 15 years old, she had broken 117 United States and world records and qualified to swim at the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles. She won three gold medals and returned home to a ticker-tape parade. Shortly after her success at the Olympics, Madison performed a swimming routine for her hometown fans. As a result, she lost her amateur standing, and while her former teammates competed in the Berlin Olympics, Madison worked at the Green Lake hot-dog stand. The swimming pool at the WAC was renamed in honor of one of their most famous swimmers.



Helene Madison, 1930. Photo courtesy of Seattle P-I Collection, MOHAI.

HistoryLink.org, the free online encyclopedia of Washington state history, is a valuable resource for additional information on Hazel Wolf (see essay #8794), Helene Madison (see essay #293) and other women featured in this series. HistoryLink.org currently features nearly 6,000 essays on historical events and people, with more added each week. See the website's Advanced Search page (<http://historylink.org/Index.cfm?DisplayPage=search.cfm>) to look up essays by number, date or topic and learn more about the women who shaped the history of Washington state.