THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

VOL. XXXI ISSUED IN FEBRUARY 1950 No. 2

Copyright 1950 by The State Historical Society of Iowa

Beginnings of Girls' Basketball

Iowa is an enthusiastic basketball state. In high school and in college, in city industrial league and in professional circles, citizens of the Hawkeye State have demonstrated unbounded interest in this colorful sport. Crowds have packed the University of Iowa field house in numbers rivaling Madison Square Garden. On a lesser scale in size (but not in enthusiasm), high school and college gyms have resounded to the cheers and groans of frenzied fans. Nowhere has this excitement reached a higher pitch than in girls' basketball as it has been played in the Drake field house in Des Moines.

Basketball was invented by James Naismith in 1892 as a boys' and men's game. Several women coaches quickly saw possibilities of adapting it for girls. After trying for several years to play by modified boys' rules, the women held a meeting in 1899, and appointed a committee to draw up appropriate rules for girls. An outgrowth of this committee was the National Committee on Wo-

men's Basketball, a sub-committee of the Women's Athletic Section of the American Physical Education Association.

Dubuque was probably the earliest Iowa high school to introduce girls' basketball. In its initial issue in 1898 the Dubuque High School *Echo* recorded the first known girls' basketball played in Dubuque, and probably in Iowa. According to the *Echo*: "Miss Helen McKinnon, '99 and Miss Agnes Martin, '99 were participants in the only basket ball game played in Dubuque in which both teams were composed exclusively of young ladies. Miss McKinnon made several fine plays during the evening, but it fell to Miss Martin to make scores. She threw three baskets from the field during the progress of the game, and was heartily applauded by the spectators for the cleverness with which she threw them. The baskets thrown by her were the only ones thrown by her team. Although the opposite team was composed of five players and theirs of but four, they won the game."

In January, 1901, the *Echo* declared that the girls' athletic class was meeting at the Y.M.C.A. every Saturday afternoon. There were four organized basketball teams and two games were being played each week.

Both the *Echo* and the Dubuque *Telegraph-Herald* felt the girls were making good progress. On December 12, 1901, the *Telegraph-Herald* declared:

Romp and Shout and Cry "O Dear"
When the Ball Goes Into the Basket

Basket ball, a rollicking game that upbuilds the sinews and gives health and grace is the latest pastime of a number of Dubuque young women. Once or twice a week they assemble in the Y. M. C. A. gymnasium and romp and run and jump and shout in their pursuit of the inflated sphere. The game is as healthful as it is enjoyable and the many peals of laughter may be heard afar as the feminine onslaughts are made up and down the "gym" floor.

The members of the basket ball team are selected from Prof. Pierson's young women's physical culture class. They have been indulging in the sport for several weeks and they enjoy it immensely, not to say anything about the benefit they derive physically. Speaking of the work of the young women at basket ball play, Prof. Pierson says that they catch the spirit of the game more easily than their masculine friends. They are quick on their feet, are not inclined to scrimmages, and depend much on strategy. When they began to play the game first, says Prof. Pierson, the young women were easily exhausted — they couldn't run and they became "winded" in a few minutes. Now they "hold out" almost as well as men. . . . The teams (there are several of them) are composed of Dubuque's most prominent young women. Each team meets several times a week and spends an hour or so in the rare sport. When the players come forth from the "gym" there is a flush of health upon their cheeks and brightness in their eyes.

The young women have costumes for the game. They are of the bloomer pattern and are made to reckon with harshest treatment for the distance between basket ball and foot ball is not so very great. Basket ball is of course much the gentler game, but it is still a dangerous play for persons who are not athletic and dislike to be bumped.

For the next several years neither girls' nor boys' basketball seems to have been played at Dubuque high school due to the lack of a gymnasium and equipment. Then, in 1910, the *Echo* records:

"For a number of seasons the girls have tried to interest the school in basket ball. Teams have been well organized but the student body failed to give sufficient support. This year the fever seemed to be catching, and a bright foundation has been laid for future basket ball. In their games the girls proved themselves to be of superior mettle. Perhaps the most prominent feature in their playing was team support. Their fast, skillful work, and brilliant plays told on their less formidable opponents."

The Dubuque girls beat Manchester in 1910 by a score of 50 to 6 and crushed the Dubuque Alumni 44 to 4. Only one game was played in 1911 because there was no gymnasium. Genuine regret was expressed that the girls were able to play only one game in which the Blues defeated the Reds 5 to 3.

In 1914 the Dubuque girls beat East Dubuque decisively twice but lost both their games to Manchester by scores of 32 to 4 and 16 to 12. Thereafter girls' basketball was confined to interclass games.

Ottumwa appears to have started girls' basketball soon after Dubuque. Its high school magazine, the *Argus,* frequently carried pictures of all

the class teams as well as of the school team. Ottumwa was active in basketball from 1900 to 1923, playing surrounding towns, some of which, according to Superintendent Frank Douma, were mining communities that have since disappeared. A great deal of interclass rivalry was generated in those early days. The *Argus* records that the Junior girls defeated the Seniors in a "well fought basket ball game" on March 9, 1906. Pauline Messenger, Captain Jessie Graham, and Wanda Gee played the "fastest for the '06's" while Captain Leta Sutton and Emma Lewis "starred for the '07's."

In November, 1907, the *Argus* noted that the Ottumwa Girls' Basket Ball Association was entering its second year and needed student support to insure a successful season. "The girls are practicing steadily in the attic preparing for interclass basketball games, and for the team to represent the High School this year. There is plenty of good material and the indications are that we shall have a championship girls' team this year."

Over forty members were enrolled, about twenty-five of whom played on either the class teams or school team. Thus, on February 12, 1908, the Seniors defeated the Sophomores 15 to 3 and the Juniors humbled the Freshmen 32 to 3. Meanwhile, the high school team was praised for its "do-or-die spirit," considering the poor floor on which they played. Several games had been

scheduled by Coach Kelley. On February 8th twenty-five rooters accompanied the team to Washington. Although Ottumwa was defeated 31 to 9, everybody had a fine time, and both team and rooters were "quite royally entertained after the game." When the Washington girls came to Ottumwa they were trounced 26 to 14.

In 1909 the *Argus* hailed as an "overwhelming success" the first interscholastic game "played under girls' rules." Both class games and a regular schedule were arranged.

The first game after the Albia game was played out of town, at the "city" of Mystic. Handicapped by the low ceiling and not being able to bank the ball against the wall as the Mystic girls were, the Ottumwa team lost their first game of the season by the very close score of 16 to 15. Resolved to wipe out this defeat Ottumwa arranged a return game with Mystic to be played at Ottumwa. This game was decidedly a reverse of that played at the "city" of Mystic. The Ottumwa girls poured in the baskets until Mystic had no possible chance of winning.

Muscatine was equally enthusiastic about competitive athletics — for girls as well as for boys. On February 21, 1903, the Muscatine *Journal* lamented the poor facilities afforded its teams, which were actually no worse off than Dubuque or Ottumwa. Despite these handicaps, Muscatine amateur athletes had made "great progress" and by playing with the "very best teams" they had learned the "very best principles of athletics,

rather than to have been victors over inferior teams."

The following January a reorganization took place, and four teams were organized from the twenty-five girls who aspired to gain honors on the 1904 Muscatine high school girls' basketball team. The girls practiced in the new armory. According to the *Journal*:

"It is planned to have two series of games during the season. One of these will be 'behind closed doors,' and the other will be public. The series will constitute the regular contests for the championship of the school, and will determine over which aggregation the official colors shall be allowed to fly."

On February 16, 1904, the Muscatine *Journal* announced the girls would "dedicate" their new suits which were of a "different style" and "more attractive" in the game with Rock Island. The new suits, maroon colored and worn with white sweaters, did not, however, prevent a superior Rock Island team from winning by a score of 14 to 5 before a packed house at the Armory. Muscatine lost the return match at Rock Island by a score of 17 to 8.

The Company C girls won the first basketball contest ever won by a Muscatine girls' team when they defeated Washington Academy 11 to 8 at Muscatine. They then traveled to Washington and won by a score of 6 to 1.

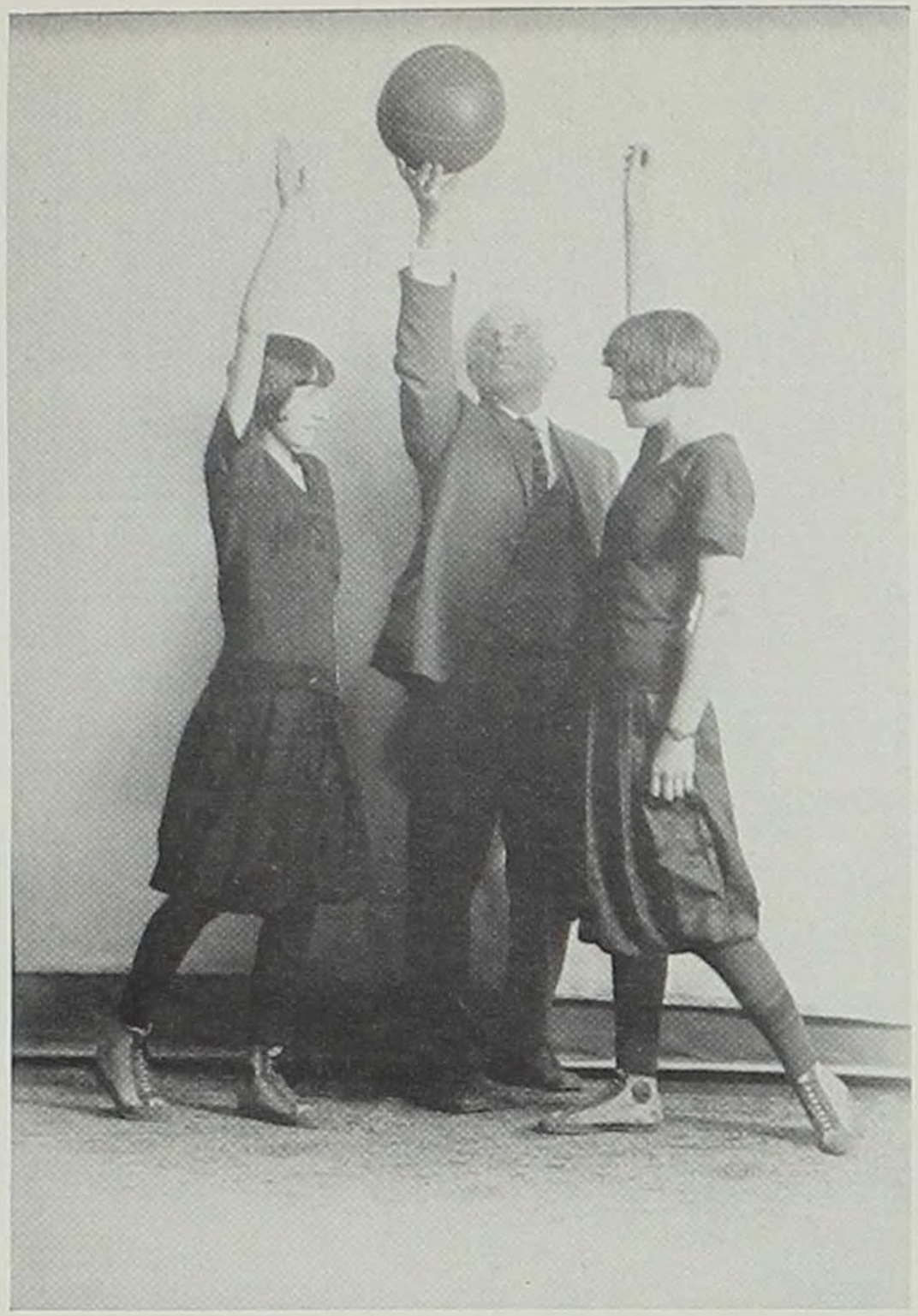
Muscatine was not so fortunate in their contest with the Davenport alumnae girls, losing a "faultlessly" played game by a score of 10 to 5. Smarting at this defeat, the Company C girls prepared to "annihilate" the Davenport high school alumnae in a "fierce game" to be played at Davenport. According to the Muscatine editor:

> The fair soldiers of this city, veterans of two battles this year, are studying the basket ball manual of arms with grim earnestness. Flank movements galore will be studied out, and the plan of battle thoroughly gone over, before advancing in force to the pitched battle which is scheduled for them.
>
> The laws of nations will be strictly observed during this coming conflict, all scratching and slugging will be barred. All other teams in Davenport are expected to declare strict neutrality during the contest.

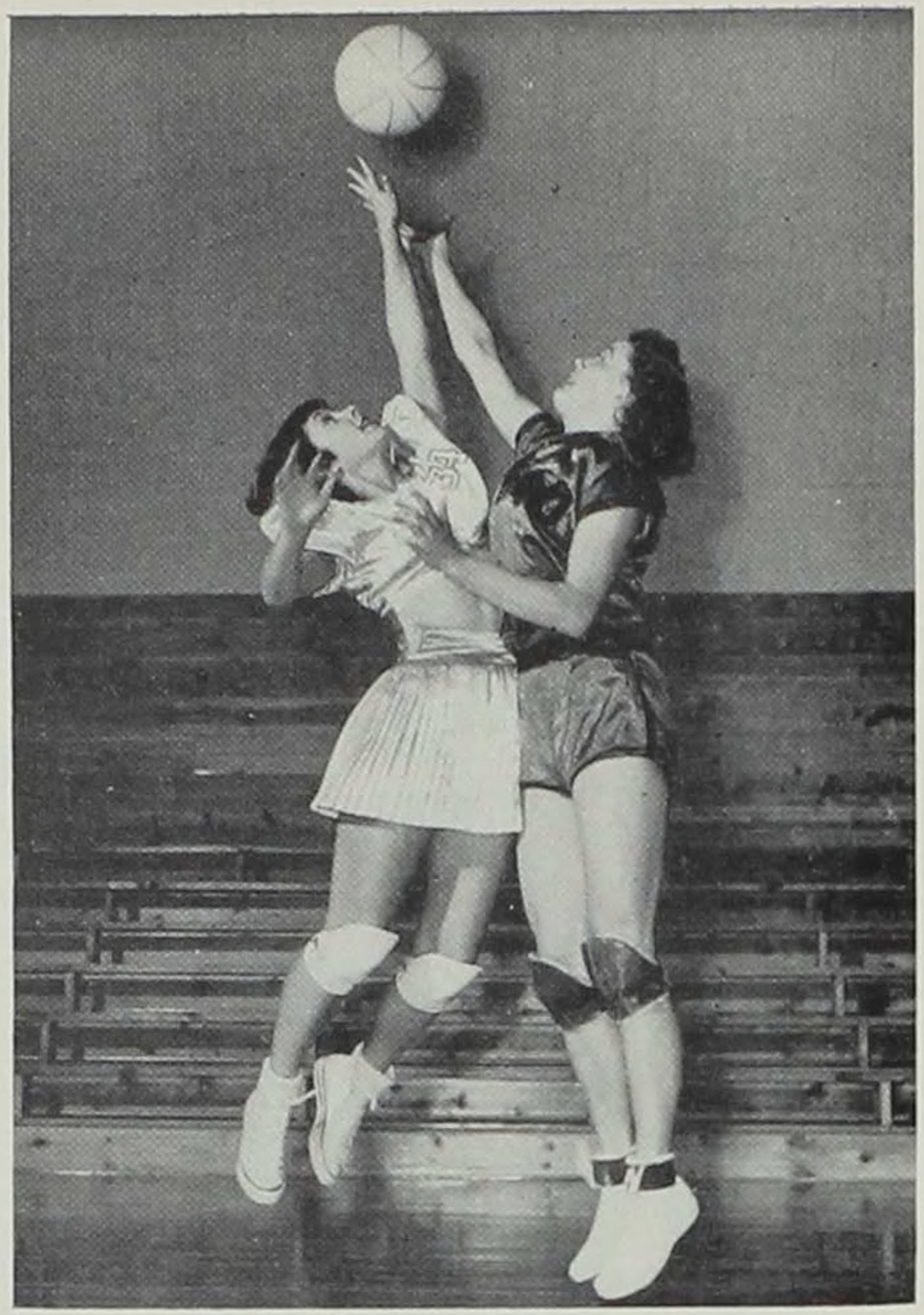
Although the year the first girls' basketball game was played in Davenport is not known, the same pattern of interclass games and contests with outside teams was followed as at Dubuque or Ottumwa. The following schedule was recorded by the Davenport High School *Blackhawk* in 1908:

Davenport	14	West Liberty	25
Davenport	13	Lyons	19
Davenport	17	Augustana College	3
Davenport	27	Lyons	6
Davenport	14	West Liberty	12

The enthusiasm for girls' basketball at Davenport by 1909 is revealed by the fifty candidates



OLD TIME JUMP BALL
John W. Agans, Referee
Mystic Girls Jump



1950 UNIFORMS AND JUMP
Eleanor Mencke (Hartley)
Mona Van Steenbergen (Prairie City)

NUMA - 1941 STATE CHAMPIONS



GIRL'S BASKETBALL BANQUET, CENTERVILLE, IOWA, MARCH 24, 1941.

Presented to Mr & Mrs P. H. Jarman

CENTERVILLE - QUARTERFINALS



SEYMOUR - CONSOLATION



FAMOUS TEAMS AND THEIR FAMOUS COACHES

John King (Numa); Lauren Ewing (Centerville); P. H. Jarman (Seymour)

who presented themselves for interclass teams. In 1920 the *Blackhawk* noted that the girls had gone in heavily for basketball and had exhibited "unusually brilliant" playing. "It is interesting to notice that the girls are becoming more enthusiastic over sports every year. This denotes the versatility of the American girl. She is such an all around sport, good in athletics and good in her studies, that no matter when or what the 'acid test' proves to be, her resourceful mind usually finds the right way out of the difficulty. We give our heartiest congratulations to the Girls' Basketball Team."

Little was known about basketball in those early days. When Oscar Longstreth was asked to coach girls' basketball at Muscatine he lined the girls up in football formation. Longstreth soon learned his mistake and he and the girls then "faithfully" studied boys' basketball rules. Then a set of girls' rules was received which had been adopted by the National Committee on Women's Basketball. However, when Muscatine challenged Rock Island to play basketball by girls' rules, the Rock Island coach wired that they were unable to do so and the teams consequently played boys' rules with shorter halves. Muscatine played well in the first half, but the girls tired during the second half and Rock Island won 11 to 5.

The uniforms in vogue prior to 1926 were pleated black bloomers with white or colored mid-

dies and long dark ties. Full length black stockings were always worn. The Ottumwa girls wore black tennis slippers in 1905 but heavier tennis shoes gradually came into use. The girls' suits were generally homemade and there was frequently a wide variety in color and style. Thus, in 1910, the eight girls on the Ottumwa high school team had completely different outfits. The Allerton team of 1925 wore different shoes and stockings but they all had one thing in common — bright colored stocking caps with white pompoms. Mrs. A. R. Tipton, who played on the Muscatine high school team in 1904, recalls that the "first official uniforms were of maroon wool, long sleeves and high neck with turn over collar and a flowing black tie. The bloomers were made as full as it was possible to pleat and stitch the material — and further than that some of the parents insisted on a full skirt over the bloomers. Long black cotton stockings and tennis shoes completed the costume." Dressed in white middies, the Earlville girls in 1917 beat such teams as Epworth, Manchester, Independence, Monticello, Delhi, and Greeley.

In 1920 the first annual Iowa high school girls' basketball tournament was held in Des Moines. Twenty-seven Iowa teams accepted Drake University's invitation and entered the tournament and twenty-four actually sent their teams — Afton, Albia, Attica, Audubon, Churdan, College

Springs, Correctionville, Dallas Center, Fertile, Fonda, Garner, Hampton, Hiteman, Linn Grove, Lohrville, Mingo, Mount Ayr, Nevada, Norwalk, Radcliffe, Renwick, Sheffield, Valley Junction, and Waukee.

Many of these schools had financial difficulties in making the trip. Among these was Correctionville, a team that had gone undefeated for three years, playing as many as 23 games a season, including tournament games. Naturally Correctionville wanted to enter the tournament but the school would not finance the trip, so the businessmen and fans gave donations enough to send the team to Des Moines.

Their faith was well founded. On March 14, 1920, the Des Moines *Sunday Register* announced that Correctionville defeated Nevada 11 to 4 to make the Woodbury County girls state champions. Tournament play had begun Friday morning and by Saturday noon only Audubon, Correctionville, and Nevada remained undefeated. Nevada drew the bye thus forcing Audubon to play Correctionville at 2:30 P. M. Correctionville beat Audubon and after a half-hour rest defeated Nevada for the girls' championship.

The second annual Drake University high school girls' basketball tournament at Des Moines saw Audubon trounce the Ottumwa sextet 21 to 11. After 1921 the state meeting was moved from town to town. Audubon defeated Cresco 10 to 3

at Iowa Falls in 1922 and vanquished Mallard 18 to 11 on their own home floor at Audubon in 1923. Audubon won its fourth straight state championship in 1924 when they beat Iowa Falls 21 to 20 in three extra periods at Iowa Falls.

Just as girls' basketball seemed to be well entrenched in Iowa high school athletic curriculums, the Iowa High School Athletic Association dropped the game from its program. The growing popularity of boys' basketball with its attendant crowded gymnasium facilities was one important factor in ejecting girls' basketball. The ever-recurring arguments as to whether such a strenuous competitive game might be harmful to the girls from the standpoint of health, as well as morals, was also debated with considerable heat. The whole gamut of arguments involving intramural versus interscholastic competitive sports was discussed by citizens, educators, and students.

The big city schools led the movement to restrict girls' basketball to interclass games. The smaller towns (and they were the ones who had participated in the invitational tournaments between 1920 and 1926) determined to follow the interscholastic program in vogue before 1926. It would take real leadership and drive to do this, but subsequent events proved that such leadership was available.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN