

WOMEN IN THE NIRSA

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The research for this article combines available written materials regarding the history of women within the NIRSA with verbal interviews with both men and women who are a part of the history and with the author's recollections from being a member of the NIRSA since 1972. The paper will deal not only with the facts, dates, places and faces, it will also present memories, opinions and attitudes of a number of people who played a role in women's history. The author felt it important to talk to women who were pioneers in the politics of women and the NIRSA, and men who were there and remembered the early years, men who led the campaign to include women in the membership after women were dropped in 1959. There have been many women, as well as men, who have contributed in a positive way to the transition from the all male NIA to the integrated NIRSA of today. Space does not permit including everyone who contributed. Conference programs proved to be useful and James S. Clarke's **Challenge and Change: A History of the Development of the National Intramural Recreational Sports Association, 1950-76** was a valuable resource.

Early History of Women in the NIA

In **Challenge and Change**, Clarke iterates that William Wasson organized a meeting of 20 individuals at Dillard University in New Orleans in 1950, which led to the founding of the NIA. Listed among the pioneers in the field and of the NIA were three women: Annette H. Akins, Dimples Lee and Juanita G. Pierce. Dimples Lee served as recording secretary of the NIA in 1950-51. In 1952, the name of the organization was changed from the National Intramural

Association, to the National Intramural and Recreation Association for Men and Women. Sonny Rooker wrote in "Historical Review of Women in the National Intramural Association" that a constitutional revision was made in 1959 which eliminated women from the membership. At the eleventh annual conference, held in 1960 at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, women were excluded for the first time since the organization was founded in 1950 (Clarke).

In talking with a number of men who were active in the NIA at the time, this question was asked: Why did the men decide to drop women from the membership? A number of men, including founder William Wasson, said they just didn't know why this vote occurred. The author spoke with several other men with theories as to why it happened. David Matthews (1992), joined the NIA in 1955, and served as President in 1963 and 1964: "There were, perhaps, a hard core of men who thought that men and women should have separate organizations. Women's programming was seen as secondary to men's programs." A.A. "Sonny" Rooker (1972): "The NIA was a strong, close knit group and some didn't want to lose a good thing." Rooker joined the NIA in 1962 and served as President in 1967. Ben McGuire (1992), who joined the NIA in 1965 stated: "It was a men's association not to be opened up to women. There was little recognition of women's programs, which were separate from men's programs." Chuck Schelsky (1992) joined the NIA in 1959 and served as President during 1975: "It was a typical male organization of the times. There was a nucleus of old timers who wanted to keep the organization male." James Peterson joined the NIA in 1967 and served as Vice-President in 1975-76. Peterson (1992) remembers that one faction of the NIA was "the old boys' club, a restricted fraternity to be con-

tinued."

William Manning joined the NIA as an undergraduate in 1966 and served as President of the NIRSA in 1978. When asked why women were excluded from the NIA he said that he could only guess that "it was a hard group to break into, not open to change, and a male bastion with fraternal behaviors." Manning speculated that by keeping the organization male they were able to be more "free and crazy."

The Campaign to Include Women in the Membership

Sonny Rooker wrote that after 1959, women were not mentioned again until 1966, when a proposed constitutional change would have granted membership to women. The measure at the 17th Annual Conference in Norman, Oklahoma, received only six affirmative votes. The next vote was taken at the 21st annual meeting at the Air Force Academy (1970) with a majority favoring the admission of women. Rooker recalls that a party was held by the opposition the night before the vote to gather support to defeat the measure. Needing a two-thirds vote to pass, the amendment lost by eleven votes.

During the 1960's, efforts were made by certain individual males to include women in the conferences. Sonny Rooker remembers that Pat Mueller invited a woman professional from his campus to be a guest in the late sixties, hoping to influence the vote for women's membership. When women were invited as guests, they were there as spectators not as participants. Women were invited to be guest speakers off and on during these years. Carolyn Hewatt (1992) of the University of Texas, Austin, was invited to speak by Sonny Rooker, on several occasions; however, Carolyn refused to speak to an organization in which she was

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denied membership until the point in time in 1971, when she agreed to join Carol Harding as a speaker at a conference where the attitude toward women seemed to be changing.

The Growing Need for Change

There were male leaders who, all along, had promoted the membership of women as a priority. Among those often mentioned were George Haniford, Sonny Rooker and Pat Mueller. These men were joined by a younger group of male professionals who were very concerned about the issue of women members. Bill Manning (1992) refers to getting together with Jim Peterson and other young professional men to formulate a plan of action following the defeat of the amendment in 1970. Manning reports that men were outraged by the vote and appalled at the emotion, behavior and arguments used by those wishing to exclude women. Peterson (1992) felt the issue to be a matter of fairness. He knew that women had a lot to contribute and that the NIA needed them to become the organization that it was capable of becoming.

There was concern for women colleagues who could not benefit from the NIA. It was difficult for women to get jobs and there was no opportunity for women's ideas to be heard. Bill Manning (1992) stated that in order for the organization to move forward and become a viable and respected national organization in higher education, it would be necessary to represent all students. Richard Mull felt that women had an individual right to be a part of the intramural system and believed that there was a wrong which should be righted. He felt compassion about the issue and took a pro-activist stance. Ben McGuire was one of the group of progressive young men who felt it critical to have women as equal members. Sonny Rooker expected that bringing women into the NIA would help to bring the separate men's and women's programs together on campuses. At the University of California-Berkeley, Manning was already running co-ed programs and believed that bringing women into the NIA would foster more co-ed programming on campuses. David Matthews (1992) believed that there

was a need to bring the women into the organization in order to comply with federal laws being passed and to prove that we were people of principle. There was no other organization meeting the professional needs of women in collegiate intramural recreational sport.

The Turning Point

Groundwork was carefully laid to pave the way to an affirmative vote for women at the 22nd annual conference in Blacksburg, Virginia in 1971. The male leadership, as well as the young male professionals interested in the issue, worked hard. Sonny Rooker has said that the battles were hard fought and that those men leading the fight often took a whipping. Part of the plan to influence the vote was an invitation to two highly respected women leaders, Carolyn Hewatt and Carol Harding, to speak to the membership in Blacksburg.

Harding and Hewatt accepted the invitation and wrote letters back and forth from Michigan to Texas planning the approach to be used. They were given the topic "A Woman's View of Men's Intramurals." They had to figure ways to deliver a message for women within the context of this topic. Harding (1971) spoke to the need to integrate men's and women's programs and stated that "criticism, fear and sexism must disappear." She noted that "more and more women are working in intramural sport and we realize this organization knows the most and has the most experience in our area of interest." She concluded with the hope that it would not become necessary to begin a NIA for women. Hewatt donned rose colored glasses to emphasize her view of men's intramurals and the NIA.

Both Hewatt and Harding deserve a great deal of credit for representing all women at this crucial moment in history. Before the close of the conference in Blacksburg, women were voted into full membership in the NIA by a vote of 121 to 35. The following year, in 1972, women were invited to attend the national conference at the University of Illinois and to become members. The invitation was spread by word of mouth and only 29 women attended. The conference program listed seven women presenting pro-

grams.

Integration of the NIA

In 1973, the conference was held in Tampa. This writer remembers an early session on women's intramurals with a panel presentation. There were 21 women in this meeting where the sharing of ideas was a great experience. There were seven women on the program, and eight women attended an impromptu women's luncheon which we scheduled ourselves. At the annual banquet, the sports trophies for the annual NIA tournaments were awarded. It was the last year that the Studley Award, the biggest trophy of them all, was presented at the annual conference.

At Tempe, Arizona in 1974, women became more involved. Carolyn Hewatt was nominated for President and women began to take note of the politics of the NIA. Women saw no special effort being made to make them feel welcome and included. Sexism in programs was rampant. Some women began to speak to changes which needed to be made. There were also some men who saw the need for more professionalism and better behavior of male members. Following this conference, this writer mailed a survey to all known women members, 45 in number, concerning women's issues. It was evident that we needed to talk about common concerns. This could be considered the first women's network. The women's issues were taken up in a buzz session, led by this writer, in New Orleans in 1975.

The conference in New Orleans was another turning point for women. For the first time, there was an attempt by the Executive Committee to make the organization more relevant for women. President Chuck Schelsky invited Hazel Varner, who had spoken out for women, to come to the conference early to meet with the Executive Committee. Varner suggested a ten point program which included: developing an affirmative action plan for women, encouraging more women to participate on programs and on committees, conducting a study of the field which would include salary and position comparisons of men and women, planning more professional programs

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and placing a woman on the Executive Committee, until one could be successfully elected.

The week in New Orleans was very frustrating and difficult as we negotiated the list. The affirmative action committee was approved, appointed and given the task of developing a plan. A study of the field was not to become a reality until 1986 and negotiations to appoint a woman to the Executive Committee failed. President Schelsky said that the board would be willing to appoint a woman; however, while the men's expenses would be paid by the NIA for the mid-year meeting, a woman would have to pay her own expense. To Varner, it was not a matter of money but a matter of principle. She turned down the offer saying the appointment would need to require equal treatment for men and women.

Carol Harding ran for Vice-President, Region I, opposing Jim Peterson. Peterson won the election and finding he could not complete his term, recommended that a woman, Lynne Heyliger, be appointed to fulfill his term. Heyliger served on the board in 1976-77.

Another event at the New Orleans Conference, the Opening General Session on Title IX, created rumblings and discontent in the audience. When the speaker from HEW cancelled at the last moment, a panel of men and women was assembled to cover Title IX. Carol Harding and Hazel Varner were asked and agreed to join the panel. Varner placed a call to HEW in Washington to prepare for the presentation while Harding was prepared with facts and figures concerning inequity for women participants on campuses. Both women were very aware of the laws and saw an opportunity to educate the uninformed. Apparently this was very new information to many in the audience and some men felt threatened. While men felt threatened, young women in their first jobs also became scared. This created tension between men and women, and also between some women. The next few years brought stressful times in the NIRSA as well as at all levels of sport for women.

Prior to the New Orleans conference, Bill Thompson, President-elect, asked Hazel Varner to arrange a

panel to present a program on "Women's Introspection." Varner invited Patti Holmes, Toi Jamison, Marcia Hammond and Carol Harding to be on this panel. Harding (1976), whose paper was published in **Intramural Administration: Theory and Practice**, spoke on: "Women's Intamurals: Issues and Direction" and Varner's paper, also published in the same text, was on "Sexism, Discrimination and the Laws." These were controversial issues in 1975. It must be remembered that these were times of turmoil on campuses: men's and women's physical education programs were merging, women's athletics had emerged and were asking for their fair share of the resources and other formerly separate national organizations were in the process of integrating.

During the years to come, Harding and Varner would be treated differently by much of the population of the NIRSA due to views expressed in New Orleans. Fortunately, we were strong professionals; we were sure of ourselves and our goals. Anyone who is involved in real social change does not expect, and does not get, the rewards of that change. We know that we played a role in making the NIRSA a better organization. We also know that the experience was painful. Kathy Bayless (1992), a 20 year member of the NIRSA, notes that the NIRSA was a microcosm of society and that we could expect to have our share of male chauvinists as well as our share of leaders who wanted women as equal members.

Following New Orleans, the next few years saw changes in the organization and changes for women. Men, as well as other women, presented programs on affirmative action and other topics related to women. The subject became acceptable. In Chicago, a women's breakfast was held to promote networking. This preceded the women's luncheons which were held over the next several years. As the organization became more integrated, it soon seemed unnecessary to have separate meetings for women.

NIRSA politics began to change when in 1981, ten years after women were admitted, Patti Homes became the first woman elected to a national office, serving as Vice President of

Region I from 1981-82. It was a landmark day in 1985 when Mary Daniels became President-Elect and served as President in 1986. Mary was followed by Judi Bryant, who became President in 1990. The third woman president, now in office, is Janet Gong. Between 1981 and 1992, eleven elections were won by women. In addition to the women already named, the women elected to Vice-President were Sandy Vaughn, Sue Ivie and Dixie Bennett. Janet Gong, Mary Daniels and Judi Bryant also served as Regional Vice-Presidents. The NIRSA Honor Award was first presented to a woman, Mary Daniels, in 1991. Patti Homes received the Honor Award in 1992.

The Value of Women to NIRSA

Several men and women were asked to respond to a question concerning the value of women to the NIRSA. It was agreed that the NIRSA became a better, more professional organization. Manning stated that there have been extraordinarily talented women who brought a different view to the organization allowing us to move in new directions. Kathy Bayless (1992) said women brought new perspectives and diverse programming. Judi Bryant (1992) believes women raised the standards of presentation and expected others to do the same. Women served as models, preparing good handouts and making a very positive contribution. Many women have published in and edited the NIRSA Journal and the proceedings. One hundred sixty-one women currently serve on committees (39.6% of all committee members). Women have made important contributions to the educational materials of the NIRSA and significant research has been conducted by several women. There are 462 women members of the NIRSA (34.4% of the total membership). This year 420 women attended the National Conference in Reno (34.1% of all attenders) and 88 women participated as program presenters.

Summary

As in society as a whole, there still exists some gender bias in the organization as displayed in sexist language and attitudes. Carol

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Harding would hope to see a commitment to gender equity. This writer would like to think that qualified women could more easily be elected to office when running against men. During the past twenty years, only four women, opposing men, have been elected. Bill Manning (1992) believes that the NIRSA has moved in exciting directions and is continuing to meet the challenge. He would have preferred that leadership roles be more accessible to women earlier. Jim Peterson (1992) believes that "the heartache and sacrifice of those who made the integration happen should be appreciated."

On the whole, as expressed by Judi Bryant (1992), women feel good about the NIRSA. She states, "Compared to other organizations, the NIRSA is remarkably open to the contributions of women." The women who have been continuous members

of the NIRSA for the full 20 years, Kathy Bayless, Karla Rice and this writer, are all proud to have been involved.

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