

**FEMALE OLYMPIANS IN THE EARLY OLYMPIC GAMES (1900 – 1912) THROUGH  
THE MINUTES OF THE IOC SESSIONS, OFFICIAL REPORTS OF OLYMPIC GAMES, AND  
OTHER DOCUMENTS FOUND AT THE OLYMPIC MUSEUM  
A TRIBUTE**

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This paper aims to recover and review information related to the participation of female Olympians in the early Olympic Games before World War I, in a tribute to the very first women who defied their time by writing their names in the history of modern sport. As technology and communication systems evolved and women had already become part of the Olympic Games, those truly sports heroines became more visible after 1920. For methodological concerns, recognition of pioneer actions is also a category of historical and scientific research giving legitimacy to the scrutiny of the first modern female Olympians appearance.

Most of the information available about early women Olympians tends to be related to the number of women who earned medals, to the percentage of their participation in the Olympic Games, especially in relation to the participation of male athletes, and to the sports and events women contested. Very little has been published about these heroines in the history of sport due to the scarcity and paucity of information since women were not supposed to take part in competitive sport. Women did not belong to what was considered at the time the male world of sports. The little data that exist are scattered around in various primary and secondary sources, most of which not readily available to the researcher due to their location and the languages the information was recorded in. In addition, because of new methodologies of investigation and the overcoming of gender barriers, new numbers and names of women have been disclosed as research progresses. There is still a lot of controversy as for numbers, names and spellings. From all documents that have been found and analyzed, we have opted for the spelling of official reports as much as possible. This paper not only displays updated numbers of women athletes who participated in any kind of event in the Olympic Games from 1900 till 1912 based on official documents but also reveals the identities of many of these women through their names and the circumstances of their participation. When it was not

possible to retrieve their original names, the titles Mrs., Mme and Miss were used for gender identification as they appear in the Official Reports.

The official documents found at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland, indicate that **112** women Olympians competed in the Olympiads before World War I: **22** athletes in 1900 in Paris (France), **6** in 1904 in Saint Louis (United States), **36** in 1908 in London (England) and **48** in 1912 in Stockholm (Sweden). However, as information from other official sources is taken into consideration, the number of female Olympians goes up to **416** when including **3** other women who competed in the 1900 Paris Games but have not yet been acknowledged by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) ; **2** more women who competed in archery in 1904 (there were 8 and not 6 according to some other official sources) ; **7** women who competed in the 1906 Olympic Games in Athens - recognized only as Interim or Intercalated Games by the IOC - in addition to **8** women who contested two events in ice skating in 1908 and **268** female Olympians who took part in demonstrations, which were not competitions for medals, during the 1906, 1908 and 1912 Olympic Games. This paper also pays homage to the women athletes who wanted to participate in the Olympic Games but had their entries refused. They were not included in the total number of the participants as they did not compete in Olympic Games. These would-be-Olympians were **Stamata Revithi** in 1896 and **Helen Preece** in 1912. According to Tarassouleas (1997), who did research in the newspapers published in Greece in March and April of 1896, **Stamata Revithi** was an extremely poor Greek woman who wanted to participate in the Greek marathon of the 1896 Olympic Games because she thought she would win money to help support her starving baby. She went before the (organizing) Committee, but they used the excuse that the deadline had expired in order to dismiss her. Thus, still thinking about the money, which she would never receive, she ran 42 km in 5:30h on March 30<sup>th</sup> 1896, one day after the official marathon. **Helen Preece**, according to Tedder & Daniels (2000), was an outstanding British rider and just 15 years old. She applied to compete in the Modern Pentathlon at the Stockholm Games of 1912 (Lyberg, 1996). Although there were no rules or legislation about women's entries at that time, the Swedish Organizing Committee chose to accept Pierre de Coubertin's opinion and refused **Helen Preece's** application, saying it would be impossible to accept a woman competitor in that sport.

Although Baron Pierre de Coubertin, IOC founder and President from 1896 to 1925, was against the participation of women in competitive sport, the IOC had no control of the 1900, 1904 and 1908 Olympic Games as they happened during expositions that had their own organizers. The 1900 Olympic Games took place in Paris during the World Exhibit and received the name of International Games (Jeux Internationaux, as it appears extensively in the newspapers of that time) lasting from May 14 to October 28. The 1904 Olympic Games took place in Saint Louis, Missouri, United States during the Louisiana Purchase International Exposition from July 1 to November 23. In 1906, Greece organized their second edition of the

Olympic Games (the first one had taken place in 1896), which was not recognized by Coubertin and became later the Intercalated Olympic Games, from April 22 to May 2, a very short edition of the Olympic Games. The 1908 Olympiad, organized by the British Olympic Council [occurred] culminated with the Games occurred during the Franco-British Exhibition in London from April 27 to October 31. The 1912 Olympic Games, organized by the Swedish Olympic Committee and held in Stockholm, from May 5 to July 27, was not attached to any exhibition.

### **1900 Olympic Games Paris**

The official information of the IOC shows that 22 women competed in the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris: 7 in lawn tennis, 10 in golf, 3 in croquet, 1 in equestrian sports and 1 in yachting. However, 3 women have not yet been acknowledged by the IOC: 2 in ballooning (sport later on not considered Olympic by the IOC), and another 1 in equestrian. In ballooning, **Mme. Maison** competed with her husband in the distance and endurance discipline for top balloonists in Paris on 9<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> October, sailing for 11.38 hours and covering 650 km from Paris to reach Keulroth, in Silesia, arriving in fourth (Daniels & Tedder, 2000) and **Mme. Lemaire** sailed with her husband towards Juchmès in the very first distance event (Drevon, 2000). **Mlle Moulin** participated in the equestrian event (Drevon, 2000), but was not placed.

In Paris 1900, yachting was an 'open' sport, with men and women competing together. **Hélène Barby (U.S.)**, later Countess de Pourtalès (Lyberg, 1996), was the very first woman Olympic medalist in a mixed event, and, by participating on May 22<sup>nd</sup> the very first female Olympian. She was able to sail on the river Seine, on the Franco-Swiss 'Lerina' with her husband to win her first race, followed by another victory on 23<sup>rd</sup> June and a second place on 25<sup>th</sup> June – two Olympic gold medals and a silver (Daniels & Tedder, 2000; Drevon, 2000).

In equestrian sport, **Elvira Guerra** competed for France on her own horse, Libertin, in the Chevaux de Salle (Hacks and Hunter Combined) event on May 31<sup>st</sup>, though she was not placed.

Three French women competed in croquet on 28<sup>th</sup> June in two events against men: **Madame Filleaul Brohy**, **Marie Ohnier** and **Madame Déprès**. However, according to Mallon (1995), neither **Madame Filleaul Brohy** nor **Marie Ohnier** progressed to the second round and **Madame Déprès** did not finish the event.

Lawn tennis was the sport with the most available information. In spite of the small number of women competing, only 6, the standard was high with all the top international players competing, including British Wimbledon champion **Charlotte Cooper**, the U.S. champion, **Marion Jones**, and the leading players in Europe: **Hélène Prévost** of France and **Hedwiga Rosenbaumova** of Bohemia. The event took place between July 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> at the Île du Puteaux Club in the middle of the River Seine, ironically the same club the sportman

Pierre de Coubertin used to play his games. **Charlotte Cooper** was the very first Olympic gold in a women-only event. She also won the mixed doubles tide with her male partner of Great Britain, making her a double gold medal winner. Lawn tennis had two events: singles and mixed doubles. In singles the champion was **Charlotte Cooper** (Great Britain); 2<sup>nd</sup> place, **Hélène Prévost** (France), and 3<sup>rd</sup> place, **Marion Jones** (U.S.) and **Hedwiga Rosenbaumová** (Bohemia). In the mixed doubles event, the champions were: **Charlotte Cooper** (Great Britain) and male partner; 2<sup>nd</sup> place, **Hélène Prévost** (France) and male partner, and 3<sup>rd</sup> place, **Marion Jones** (U.S.) and male partner together with **Hedwiga Rosenbaumová** (Bohemia) and male partner.

Ten women contested the Olympic Golf competition on October 3<sup>rd</sup> in Paris: 4 American and 6 French women. According to the Official Report of the 1900 Olympic Games, the champion was **Margaret Abbott** (U.S.), 2<sup>nd</sup> place was **Pauline Whittier** (U.S.); 3<sup>rd</sup> place, **Daria Pratt** (U.S.); 4<sup>th</sup> place, **Mme Froment-Meurice** (France); 5<sup>th</sup> place, **Mme Henri Ridgway** (France), 6<sup>th</sup> **Mme Fournier-Sarlovèze** (France), 7<sup>th</sup> place, **Mary Abbott** (U.S.), 8<sup>th</sup> place **Baronne Fain** (France), 9<sup>th</sup> place **Mme Gelbert** (France) and 10<sup>th</sup> place **Mme A. Brun** (France)

#### **1904 Olympic Games Saint Louis**

Although the Olympic Games of 1904 had a large number of sporting events, women only competed in archery. Since it was very costly to send athletes overseas, needless to say female athletes, who had very little participation in competitive sport at that time, only 8 American women participated in two archery events with the following results according to Spalding's Official Almanac for 1905 as there was no Official Report for the Saint Louis Olympic Games. The Double National Round had **Lida Howell**, Cincinnati, as champion; 2<sup>nd</sup> place went to **Jessie Pollock**, Cincinnati; 3<sup>rd</sup> place to **Emma Cooke**, Washington, D.C.; 4<sup>th</sup> place to **Laura Woodruff**, Cincinnati, 5<sup>th</sup> place to **Mabel Taylor**, Cincinnati and 6<sup>th</sup> place to **L. Taylor**, Cincinnati. The Double Columbia Round also had **Lida Howell** as champion; **E. C. Coolen** in 2<sup>nd</sup> position; **Jessie Pollock** in 3<sup>rd</sup> place; **Laura Woodruff** in 4<sup>th</sup> place, **L. Taylor** in the 5<sup>th</sup> position and **Mabel Taylor** in the 6<sup>th</sup> position. The Ladies' Team Championship was the Cincinnati Archery Club winners: **Lida Howell**, **Jessie Pollock**, **Laura Woodruff**, and **Mabel Taylor**. In 2<sup>nd</sup> position came the Potomac Archers, from Washington, D.C.

#### **1906 Olympic Games Athens**

Although not recognized as official Olympic Games but as Intercalated Games, Intermediate Games, Interim Games, or almost IIIb Games by the IOC, the Second International Olympic Games in Athens (Lennartz, 2002) had the participation of 19 women Olympians with an innovation: sports demonstrations or displays in which participated 12 Danish women gymnasts (Trangback, 1996), whose names could not be retrieved. According to Cook, cited in Mallon (1999), the Danish girls gave 'the most pleasing exhibition', besides it

was the very first time women entered an Olympic stadium. However, the only sport women athletes contested was lawn tennis, which had two events: singles and mixed doubles, similarly to the Paris 1900 events. Seven women athletes from Greece and France competed and had the following results: in the singles event, **Esmee Simirioti** (Greece) was champion, followed by **Sophia Marinou** (Greece) in 2<sup>nd</sup> place and **Euphrosine Paspatis** (Greece) in 3<sup>rd</sup> position. The mixed doubles event had **Marie Decugis** (France) and male partner as champions; **Sophia Marinou** (Greece) and male partner in 2<sup>nd</sup> place and **Aspasia Matsa** (Greece) and male partner in 3<sup>rd</sup> position. Since these women were not international champions such as the French, the British or the Americans, their names are rarely mentioned in any research.

### **1908 Olympic Games London**

According to the IOC, 36 women athletes participated in the 1908 Olympic Games in London: 25 in archery, 10 in lawn tennis and 1 in sailing. However, this number goes up to **71** if the other participating women are included: 8 in ice skating, and 27 in demonstrations. As times were changing and sportswomen becoming more visible, the Swedish female swimmer **Ebba Gisico** and 6 Icelandic sportswomen were invited to give demonstrations of diving and swimming (The London Times [in] according to Leigh, 1974) while 20 Danish female athletes displayed gymnastics on the very first day of the London Games (Trangback, 1996), a very much appreciated event according to research done by Leigh (1974). Archery and lawn tennis for women were the most awaited events as they had already appeared in previous Olympic Games. The results for archery are the following: the National Round had **Sybil Fenton 'Queenie' Newall** (Great Britain) as champion; **Charlotte 'Lottie' Dod** (Great Britain) in 2<sup>nd</sup> place and **Beatrice Geraldine Hill-Lowe** (Great Britain) in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Lawn tennis had 10 participants in two singles events: the out-of-doors courts had **Dorothea Katherine Chambers** (Great Britain) as champion; **Penelope Dora Harvey Boothby** (Great Britain) in 2<sup>nd</sup> position; **Ruth Joan Winch** (Great Britain) in 3<sup>rd</sup> place; **Miss A. M. Morton** (Great Britain) in 4<sup>th</sup> position and **Angela Nora G. Greene** (Great Britain) in 5<sup>th</sup> place. The champion of singles in indoor courts was **Gwendoline Eastlake-Smith** (Great Britain), followed by **Angela Nora G. Greene** (Great Britain) in 2<sup>nd</sup> place and **Märtha Adlerstrahle** (Sweden) in 3<sup>rd</sup> position. The 1908 Olympic Games also introduced ice skating for women with the following results: in figure skating, the champion was **Florence 'Madge' Syers** (Great Britain); 2<sup>nd</sup> place was for **Else Rendschmidt** (Germany); 3<sup>rd</sup> place, **Dorothy Greenhough Smith** (Great Britain); 4<sup>th</sup> place, **Fröken Montgomery** (Sweden) and 5<sup>th</sup> place, **Miss Lycett** (Great Britain). In pair skating, the champions were **Anna Hübler** (Germany) and male partner; the 2<sup>nd</sup> place went to **Phyllis Johnson** (Great Britain) and male partner and the 3<sup>rd</sup> place was for **Florence 'Madge' Syers** (Great Britain) and male partner. Official IOC documents also show that **Frances Clytie Rivett-Carnac** of Great Britain crewed with her husband in the seven-meter

class aboard the 'Heroine' and won the Olympic gold medal. In addition, according to the official 1908 Olympic Games report, although not placed, the following women athletes became Olympians: (i) in archery **Mme K. Csery** (Hungary), **Mrs. G. W. Honeywill** (Great Britain), **Miss Hyde** (Great Britain), **Mrs. E. Leonard** (Great Britain), **Miss K. J. Mudge** (Great Britain), **Mrs. Priestley-Foster** (Great Britain), **Mrs. N. Robertson** (Great Britain), **Miss Thackwell** (Great Britain), **Miss Wadworth** (Great Britain), **Mrs. A. H. Wadworth** (Great Britain), **Miss Wood** (Great Britain), **Mrs. S. H. Armitage** (Great Britain), **Mrs. Bowen** (Great Britain), **Mrs. Buddam-Wheathan** (Great Britain), **Mrs. C. Cadman** (Great Britain), **Mrs. Rushton** (Great Britain), **Miss J. Vance** (Great Britain), **Mrs. L. Weedon** (Great Britain); (ii) in lawn tennis **Miss M. Coles** (Great Britain), **Mme C. Fenwick** (France), **Mrs. B. Hillyard** (Great Britain), **Miss V. M. Pinkney** (Great Britain), **Miss Pietrzikowski** (Austria), **Mrs. C. R. Sterry** (Great Britain), **Mrs. G. E. Smith** (Great Britain), **Mrs. E. Wallenberg** (Sweden); (iii) in ice skating, **Miss J. Herz** (Austria).

### **1912 Olympic Games Stockholm**

The Olympic Games that took place in Stockholm in 1912 had 57 women athletes contesting swimming and lawn tennis events, according to the IOC. However, the number goes up to 293 when the women athletes that gave demonstrations in gymnastics are included. At the same time that archery was deleted from the 1912 Games, swimming was introduced and brought with it a larger number of women competitors: 42 in only three events. The results were the following: in 100 meters, free style, the gold medal went to the champion **Sarah 'Fanny' Durack** (Australia); the silver medal went to **Wilhelmina Wylie** (Australia) and the bronze medal for **Jennie Fletcher** (Great Britain). The 400 meters team race (teams of 4) had as champions the female Olympians from Great Britain: **Isabella Mary Moore, Jennie Fletcher, Annie Speirs** and **Irene Steer**; 2<sup>nd</sup> place went for Germany: **Wally Dressel, Louise Otto, Hermine Stindt** and **Grete Rosenberg** and 3<sup>rd</sup> place for Austria: **Margarete Adler, Klara Milch, Josephine Sticker** and **Bertha Zahourek. Greta Johanson** (Sweden) was gold medalist in high plain diving; **Lisa Regnell** (Sweden) earned the silver medal and **Isabelle White** (Great Britain) won the bronze medal. Lawn tennis had 15 women athletes competing in four events. The results are as follows: (i) the gold medal in the singles out-of-doors courts went to champion **Marguerite Broquedis** (France); the silver medal to **Dora Köring** (Germany) and the bronze medal to **Mola Bjurstedt** (Norway); (ii) the mixed doubles in out-of-doors courts had **Dora Köring** (Germany) and male partner as champions; **Sigrid Fick** (Sweden) and male partner in 2<sup>nd</sup> position, and **Marguerite Broquedis** (France) and male partner in 3<sup>rd</sup> position; (iii) in the singles covered courts **Edith Hannam** (Great Britain) earned the gold medal; **Thora Castenschiold** (Denmark) won the silver medal and **Mabel Parton** (Great Britain) earned the bronze medal; (iv) the mixed doubles in covered courts had

**Edith Hannam** (Great Britain) and male partner as champions; **Helen Aitchison** (Great Britain) and male partner in 2<sup>nd</sup> place and **Sigrid Fick** (Sweden) and male partner in 3<sup>rd</sup> position. The success of gymnastics demonstrations that had started in Athens 1906 and repeated in London in 1908 also took place in Stockholm with a much larger number of women athletes: **236**. There were 148 gymnasts from Denmark, 18 from Finland, 48 from Norway, 48 from Sweden (letter from Lyberg to Leigh, 1974, pg. 122), whose names are still to be retrieved.

The Official Report of the Stockholm Olympic Games lists the following women who although not placed also became Olympians. Swimming had **E. H. Andersson** (Sweden), **S.A.M. Andersson** (Sweden), **E. Björklund** (Sweden), **Greta Carlsson** (Sweden), **Daisy Curwen** (Great Britain), **E.M. Edström** (Sweden), **E.D. Eklund** (Sweden), **Mme Guttenstein** (Belgium), **Sonja Jonsson** (Sweden), **T.M. Järvi** (Finland), **Regina Kari** (Finland), **P. Kellner** (Austria), **Mary Langford** (Great Britain), **K. Lundgren** (Sweden), **B. Moore** (Great Britain), **Dagmar Nilsson** (Sweden), **Aagot Normann** (Norway), **Elsa Regnell** (Sweden), **I. M. White** (Great Britain), **M. E. Adlerz** (Sweden), **Hanny Kellner** (Austria), **A. V. Larsson** (Sweden), **Vera Thulin** (Sweden). Lawn tennis had **E. Amheim** (Sweden), **E. Brusewitz** (Sweden), **M. Cederschöld** (Sweden), **A. Holmström** (Sweden), **M. Bjurstedt** (Norway), and **Ebba Hay** (Sweden).

As society started to change and accept better the idea that women were also able to do sports so rose the number of women Olympians not only in competitions but also in the demonstration events that later became official Olympic sports for women. But it was a long way before women were finally accepted as athletes with the same rights as men.

During the first period of the development of the women's program, 1896-1912, before World War I, women moved from the shadows of occasional participation to official acceptance by the IOC in 2 sports in 1912: lawn tennis and swimming. The circumstances that favored the participation of women in golf and tennis tournaments in the second Olympics (1900) and in an archery tournament in St Louis (1904), sports which were socially acceptable for women, led to the competitions in lawn tennis and archery events in the 1908 London Games for women athletes. By the 5<sup>th</sup> official Olympiad in Stockholm in 1912, according to IOC records, 113 women from more than 10 countries had pioneered in international sport competition and established themselves as part of the Modern Olympic Games, which initially would not favor women's participation, according to words of the founder. However, if all participating women are included, **416** had taken part in the Olympic Games of 1900, 1904, 1906, 1908 and 1912.

It is [interesting] significant to notice that at the same time that scholars and non-academic observers were looking for names of women who 'participated' unofficially or 'almost' participated in the early Olympic Games, names of true Olympians, women who indeed participated in the Games, have been forgotten. As the 1906 Games are still not considered official Olympic Games by the IOC, the tendency seems for [scholars] researchers to overlook

the names of women who were not 'internationally' known. The question behind this possibility refers the reductionism and even prejudice often found among sport historians when analyzing evidences of emancipation for sport minorities matters, as depicted earlier by DaCosta (2001).

Finally, [B] by displaying all the names possible to be retrieved of the **416** female Olympians who participated in competitions and demonstrations in the Olympic Games from 1900 until 1912, this paper pays a tribute to those who so much devoted themselves to competitive sport and who paved the road for future female participation and equality in sports.

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