DOSB | WINNING WOMEN!

DOSB | 100 Years of Women’s Sports
Looking at the Past to Influence the Topical –
a Review of 100 Eventful
and Moving Years of Women’s Sports
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Foreword by Thomas Bach

The International Women’s Day started 100 years ago and, from its beginning up to now, it has been celebrated as a day which women utilize to stand up for their rights, for solidarity and justice, peace and universal respect for human beings and nations. The humanistic values, which are associated herewith, are not unfamiliar to sport. On the contrary, without these underlying values, it would not be possible to explain sport’s own success story nor would sport be able to fulfil its educational function. Fairness, tolerance, solidarity, justice, desire for peace as well as respect have served many generations of sportsmen and sportswomen as a basis of reference and a code of conduct. Discrimination based on race, religion or political belief is as much out of place in sport as any disadvantage or exclusion due to reasons of gender. Does this imply that the equality of rights and gender mainstreaming in sport were fast-selling topics? The scepticism of Pierre de Coubertin and numerous other persons of his own sex give us good reason to doubt this. The present documentation provides a great number of examples which confirm our doubts. However, this brochure also illustrates that, although women’s rights were sometimes very hard to achieve, sportswomen often became the trailblazers for other social areas. The review of the past leads to an ambivalent discernment. In some cases, it may cause amazement, in other cases an amused smile or astonishment. Above all, it illustrates that women are simply tops, and this is exactly where they belong: to the top. For this reason, the DOSB proclaimed 2009 the “Year of Women in Sport” and took many initiatives in support of that special dedication. It became a successful year. Nevertheless, it also manifested that sport must not only continue its efforts but even further intensify them in order to make women enthusiastic about sports. The aims of the International Women’s Day will go on being closely linked to the objectives of sport. Consequently, in support of the motto “Women to the Top”, the DOSB increasingly commits itself in favour of women in the executive bodies of sports clubs and federations. I wish you all, female and male recipients of the present publication, an exciting and informative time when you are reading this brochure.

Thomas Bach
President of the German Olympic Sports Confederation
Throughout all those decades, women ran against prejudices and prohibitions, they even ran secretly, played football fighting against mockery and even conquered the “old boys’ club”. The endeavours of women to catch up with men have been more than worth the trouble, after all. Meanwhile we can proudly look back to the exciting, some times odd but always courageous nature of the history of women’s sports, to the many well-known and unknown female and male heroes who made sport what it is today, exercising all their charm, chutzpah and ‘chief-of-staff’ knowledge. Now we are looking forward, with the same amount of courage, to a future of sport where women shall be co-acting, co-determining and become ‘co-winners’. After a successful year 2009, which had been dedicated to women in sport, the DOSB continues its commitment in favour of women in all executive bodies of sports clubs and federations, our trend-setting slogan being “Women to the Top!”

Ilse Ridder-Melchers
DOSB Vice President Women and Gender Equality
Looking at the Past to Influence the Topical – Professor Dr. Gertrud Pfister, a lecturer of sports sociology at Copenhagen University follows this leitmotiv in her passionate research work in the archives of this world (of sports). Some of her many findings are highlighted in this review of 100 years of women’s sports.

Professor Pfister, what impresses you regarding women when you look at the past 100 years of our history of sport?

Professor Dr. Gertrud Pfister: Women who participated in sporting activities or took over leading roles in sport showed courage. They took part in dangerous sports such as ski jumping or glider flying, thus disregarding norms and rules. They made uncomfortable demands and took the risk of making fools of themselves.
Turbulent women in turbulent times – what about today, does everything go smoothly now?

Unfortunately, in many respects, women are (still) seen as the other gender. They only play a minor part in the leading bodies of sport organizations worldwide. Female athletes are a minority at international sports events. The mass media show only little interest in women’s sports. And the big-income earners in sport are, with few exceptions, the men.

Why is it so important for us today to review the past and to take a look at the future?

Looking back at the past shows us that nothing is a matter of course nor is it unchangeable. This also applies to current sport ideologies and practices, which we usually do not question because we consider them to be self-evident and “natural”. However, especially throughout the past decades, there have been so many changes in sport and also in women’s sport – regarding the different sports or the age of sportswomen, for example. Who would have thought twenty years ago that female boxing was an attractive sporting event or that 80-year-old women can establish records in the marathon. The review of the past gives us the certainty that sport will substantially change in the future, as well.
1910 to 1920
The Moral Corset of Femininity

On the Victory Rostrum: Morality and Propriety

To do or not to do gymnastics – 100 years ago, this was mainly a question of decency. For several decades, women had already been allowed to practise gymnastics, however, only in the context of a better health and within the framework of strict morality rules. This means: jumping or straddling the legs was forbidden, physical exertion or performance disapproved of. Apparatus gymnastics was disputed with some controversial views. Only callisthenics and round dance-like gymnastics, which required little strength and few skills, were tolerated, the supreme maxim being “the head of a female gymnast has to be up, the legs down and decently close together, as needed to fullfil the terms of proper behaviour”.

Femininity was the kea aim. This meant in the main gracefulness and charm, rather than the threat of masculinization. Men’s ways of doing gymnastics would only make women built like a man and less desirable. Making a show of the female body in public, even taking part in competitions? Taboo! As late as in 1913 women were allowed to participate in the main programme of the German Gymnastics Festival in Leipzig, however, just on the periphery of the men’s contests: 62,572 male gymnasts were celebrated as ‘real men’ and ‘brave fighters’, as compared with 1,200 female gymnasts who were given the chance to show their skills. In those days, gymnastics festivals were spectacular events for men, influenced by (pre)military training activities.
Skirt Revolt: Who Wears the Trousers in Sport?

Long trousers plus a short dress was the outfit of girls who practised gymnastics in the 19th century. Women were ordered to wear a long skirt. Everything which was not possible to do in this outfit, was merely not allowed. To shorten the skirt and show some leg? Morally unthinkable. So, a trouser, eventually? A scandal, only masculine women or easy-going Muses would wear such kind of clothes! The dictate of sport fashion called for femininity – men wanted to go on wearing their trousers, after all, in the true sense of the word. Notwithstanding, at the beginning of the 20th century, more and more sportswomen rebelled, protesting against the annoying (and even dangerous) skirt handicap and demanding more freedom of movement. Female cyclists were the first to opt for knickerbockers, female skiers and athletes followed, and shortly before Word War I, even brash daughters of upper-middle class families practised gymnastics, wearing short trousers.

Kicking “light“: Handball is Football for Women

In 1917, the game of handball was invented in Berlin to serve as a kind of harmless “football replacement sport”. Since football was considered too physically demanding with excessive body contact for girls, Max Heiser, the head instructor of gymnastics, developed that sport as a new variant of already existing ball games. In comparison with football, handball was pretty “tame”, the playing field and the goals were smaller, the regulations were eased, fighting and body contact were forbidden. There you are, – a new sport was born!
Liberated Spirit of the Time: A Mania for Slenderness Followed the Stayed Mania

After World War I, during the ‘Roaring Twenties’, there was a spirit of adventure in the air. The “New Woman” represented a self-assured type of female – having civil rights, a university study place, a job and an unconventional approach to sexual morals. While in the past the female body had to be hidden in a modest way, in the new era it could be presented slim, sun-tanned and athletic: pert bobbed hair instead of hair severely tied back in a bun, short dresses instead of a stiff corset. A mania for slenderness followed the stayed mania as something of the past decades, the new mantra for the beauty ideal of the Twenties being “Diet plus Sports”.

In the sports clubs of the Republic of Weimar, more than one million women kept themselves fit by ways of gymnastics, physical exercise and sports. The “Mensendiecken” was the latest rage, gymnastics according to Bess Mensendieck, with strengthening and stretching exercises to shape the modern woman in the context of the desired form. In magazines, novels and films, women such as Marlene Dietrich typified the notion of the new androgyne female. In this way, the “sport girl” could move towards the young sport heroine with sex appeal. Sport was regarded as the scene of emancipation, the sports ground as an important marriage market. However, that spirit of the time was confronted with heavy protests by the mainstream population: the good manners and medical objections had to serve as counter-arguments and the access to most sports continued to be denied to women.
Olympic Games of Women: Female Track and Field Athletes Began an Upward Trend

For a long time, the endeavour for better athletic results had been taboo for female athletes. Athletics and competitions were considered to be classical domains of male athletes. The International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) and the IOC refused to admit women’s athletics to the Olympic programme. For this reason, in 1921, French women founded their own association, the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI) in order to establish a lobby for women’s sports. They were successful. One of the first international competitions were the Olympic Games of Women where, every four years between 1922 and 1934, female athletes were the focal point. Due to this pressure, the executive bodies of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the IAAF, which were composed by men, could not help but to very reluctantly admit female athletes to the Olympic ‘old boys club’, too.

Consequently, in 1928, for the first time female athletes could enter the Olympic stadium to participate in the running competitions of 100 metres, 4 x 100 metres, 800 metres, as well as in high jumping and discus throwing. Lina Radke-Batschauer won the first German gold medal of a woman, ever since the beginning of the Olympic Games in 1896, in the 800 metre contest, serving as a symbol for the up-and-coming women’s athletics in Germany. Two 800 metre female runners produced an éclat when they went down to the ground, exhausted, after passing the finishing line. This resulted in the argument that middle distance running was too arduous for women. Thus, the 800 metre women’s contest was taken off the Olympic programme and did not re-appear until the year 1960.
The First Female Football Players: 
From a Newspaper Advertisment 
to the Media’s Laughingstock

A simple newspaper advertisement resulted in a historic moment in German women’s football: At the beginning of 1930, the football enthusiast Charlotte (‘Lotte’) Specht advertised in the Frankfurter Nachrichten that she was looking for female players for this daring sport. As a football pioneer, her credo was: “What men can do, we can do it, as well”. A courageous statement in times, when football playing women were mocked as viragos, however, crowned by success: She got 35 female fellow players to found the first women’s football club. The training took place in Sachsenhausen and, due to the lack of other female teams, matches were played against men’s teams, or the two female club teams played against each other.

The 1st German Ladies Football Club (1. DDFC) attracted the attention of the media, however, not in terms of positive headlines. There was a hail of mockery and scorn. The German Football Federation (DFB) denied its support. Spectators showed hostility towards the female players, newspapers spoke of a scandal, the general public reacted with indignation. Fatal consequence: the parents of the players forbade their daughters to play football, the team started shrinking, one year later, the club dissolved itself and was never re-activated. As late as 40 years after the foundation of the 1. DDFC shall the DFB be ready to give women’s football its blessing.
The Woman as a Mother: Retrogression to the 19th Century

Under the rule of National Socialism, the human body and sport were given a new importance. Along the lines of the prevailing ideology, physical education and exercise were intended to be brought into line and, above all, to serve the ruling power. Sports associations and clubs were dissolved. Against more or less resistance, the sport of men ought to be reduced to premilitary training, gymnastics of women should exclusively serve motherhood and preserve the capability of childbearing. What about the new role of women, which had been so hard to achieve? Catapulted back to the previous century!

Olympics 1936: (Women’s) Sport is Used as a Propaganda Show of the National Socialists

Although the National Socialists subordinated the sport of women to the mother role, they promoted women’s top-level sports in order to not only self-congratulate on medals won by men but also on the sporting success of women. And what would be more appropriate than the Olympic Games in Berlin, in 1936, to demonstrate the alleged superiority of the NS system to the general public of the world? Hence, Germany had the strongest female team in track and field, but also in terms of total numbers and results. The questionable ‘return on investment’ was that German sportswomen won 13 out of 45 medals. Germany finished far ahead of all other nations on the medal ranking list – last but by no means least, thanks to the women.
Looking for Improvisation Talents:  
Gymnastics  
between Piles of Rubble

After the end of World War II, sport was almost no factor in women’s every-day life. In the period of post-war confusion, women were frequently sole breadwinners and had to fight for the survival of their families, against lack of food and housing shortage. Nevertheless, there was one sport which mobilized the masses: in August 1945, the first friendly matches already started to be played in the big cities every Sunday – but, again, only men kicked the ball, women were only admitted as spectators.

However, female track and field athletes and handball players also resumed their training, shortly after. Most women preferred gymnastics or callisthenics. The problem was: gymnasiums and other indoor facilities were scarce, either destroyed or used for other purposes. Inventive genius and improvisation were in demand, such as in so many other areas of post-war life. In her book “Schritte” (Steps), Lisa Scheller, a PE and sports teacher described how she organized the first PE lesson with about 70 children and adults, girls and women: “A hall of a public house, creaking floor boards, garden chairs, straw mattresses to serve as mats; and the big boys used an old spring of a car to build a trampolin. A craftsman went from house to house, asking for some wood for the iron oven, when the cold season started.”
Clique in the Clubs:
Women Leave the Direction of Sport to Men

During the post-war era, male labour force was scarce – first of all, women were involved in re-constructing the cities and industries. Little by little, more and more (male) prisoners of war came home, ousted women from their places on the labour market and took over the usual command on jobs and families. Both, in society and in sport, was this process alike: from now on, men were once again in the lead of numerous foundations of clubs and associations, determining sport developments. However, many Regional Sports Confederations (LSB) had provided for a position for a female who would be entrusted with issues related to women in sport, but there was often a lack of female candidates because only a few women committed themselves to voluntary work or to a leading position.

The same also applied to the German Sports Confederation (DSB) (nowadays: German Olympic Sports Confederation, ‘DOSB’), which had been founded in 1950, where the decision-makers – on women and sport issues – were almost exclusively men. The more powerful a position, the less probable was it to find a woman on that place. In the first years of existence of the DSB, there was no female candidate for the elections of the Executive Board. Up to the year 1960, only one woman had made it to the leadership team – Grete Nordhoff was the Chairperson of the Women’s Committee.
Detrimental Sport: 
Medical Absurdities 
Legitimize Prohibitions

Incredible but true: Up until the Fifties, medical circles were the strongest opponents of women’s sports in putting forward abstruse arguments. Prejudices of medical literature of the Twenties and Thirties were taken over without further examining them. The list of alleged detrimental side-effects of sports was long, the cardinal point revolving about the capability of childbearing. Sportswomen were said to run the risk of a masculinized female body, atrophied organs of the lower part of the abdomen, a displacement of the uterus, too tight muscles of the pelvis floor or a pelvis which would be too narrow for childbirth. Moreover, sport would waste the limited energy reserves which any woman should save for motherhood, and modify the chemical composition of the body tissue. Psychologists attributed to women a lack of suitability for sports, lower intelligence, a poorer nervous system and a lack of willpower.

Physical exertion was said to be unfeminine and lacking in aesthetics, anyway, and heavy athletics and endurance sports to be meant for men, only. A female was not supposed to measure herself by the same standards as a man, since she was not as fit and less gifted. Those wild assertions were totally unfounded and scandalous because they deliberately not only ignored the findings of research work, which had proved the positive effects of sporting activities on women, as well, but also disregarded expert opinions of medical doctors in favour of sport. Unfortunately the myths – created mainly by men – continued to serve for many decades as a legitimization to prohibit women’s participation in numerous sports and competitions. Until the Fifties, almost all different sports still suffered from the general suspicion to be detrimental to the health of women.
Refractory Female Football Players Kick, Working on their Own Initiative – Are They Allowed to Do This?

A person can throw a ball like a girl but only kick a ball like a man. The act of kicking was said to be specifically male, and the act of non-kicking specifically female. Women should rather receive a ball since they were made for receiving, i.e. ‘conception’. The German Football Federation (DFB) repeatedly used this kind of questionable statements to prohibit football of women in the Fifties. The DFB instructions for the clubs were unmistakable: female teams and football fields for women were strictly forbidden. Thus, the female players practised unofficially within their leisure time and in professional teams, and played their own football matches and competitions. They even founded the West German Female Football Association as an independent organisation with 22 associated clubs, always playing against the background of ridicule from the general public. Are women allowed to play football?

Running Style Queen: Ursula Donath – Elegance after the Eclat

The elegance of this lady convinced even critical officials with regard to female running: Ursula Donath was one of the most successful middle distance runners of the Fifties. She was famous for her running style and established world and European records. Contrary to the spirit of the times, she was most self-confident. “When I started in 1951, we had the feeling that women could do each and everything.” In Rome, the GDR athlete won the Bronze medal in the 800 metre distance – the first Olympic female running contest after the 800 metre éclat in 1928.
1960 to 1970
Women Catch Up with Men – and Secretly Run Marathon

Membership Statistics:
Female Quota Victory versus Limitation of Sports Disciplines

For more than five decades, women have fought against absurd prohibitions to practise sports, from now on they shall increasingly mount the barricades of society to fight for gender equality, the effect of which also reached the gyms: According to DSB membership statistics, the increase in female members was significantly higher than the growth rate of male members. Within twenty years, the percentage of girls and women in DSB membership grew from 10 to 28 percent. While in 1950, when the DSB was founded, only 234,000 female members were active in sports clubs, their number increased to 2.2 million until 1970. However, in 1968, 30 percent of the sports clubs were still associations of men, only, or football clubs, i.e. without any sports activities open for girls and women. Nevertheless, the top four in club sports were gymnastics, track and field, swimming and tennis – all sports disciplines which had already established themselves as ladies’ sports for many decades. If physical strength, condition and body checks were requested, women were condemned to stay on the terraces or at the sidelines of the sports field. At the Olympic Games, women were not allowed to take part in any team sport, except volleyball. They continued to be excluded from rowing, cycling and judo, as well as numerous track and field disciplines and other sports.

Rare Double Success: Ingrid Krämer Becomes “Sportswoman of the Year” in East and West Germany

The East-West Double: In 1960, Ingrid Krämer became ‘Sportswoman of the Year’ not only in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) but also in the Federal Republic of Germany. At the Olympic Games in Rome, the GDR high and springboard diver won two gold medals for her 3 metre springboard diving and her 10 metre high diving results.
The First Female Marathon Champion: Attack In Front of the International Press

It was a stroke of genius which helped her to become the first official female champion of marathon running: On the registration form, Kathrine Virginia Switzer only wrote her initials ‘K.V’ in the box, which asked for her first name. It did not come to the minds of the organizers of the Boston Marathon of 1967 that there was a running female behind those initials. Otherwise, the athlete of the USA would not have been allowed to start in the marathon event. Her coach picked up her start number. As it was snowing before her start, in her training suit and with a cap on her head, she hardly attracted any attention. It was only after she had run two miles, when the sport director of the Boston Marathon realized that there was a lady running on the track – and he personally tried to take her start number away from her. Switzer’s boy friend, a football player, was able to counteract the attack, an action which had consequences: the attack on Switzer took place in front of the press bus, and the pictures of it went around the entire world.

The Boston Marathon has a specific attraction for women. One year before, there had already been another woman to sneak in the men’s race. Roberta Gibb ran, however, without having a start number and, thus, her performance was not considered in the classification. As late as in 1972, were women officially eligible to run the Boston Marathon. A few years earlier, the German Athletics Federation became the first association of the world to accept women as eligible for the marathon track. Since the Schwarzwaldmarathon (Black Forest Marathon), women have officially been allowed in Germany to take part in the race of 42,195 kilometres.
1970 to 1980

Liberated Bodies and ‘Padded Bras’

Female Revolutionaries:
Sportswomen
on the Territory of Men

The activities of the generation of 1968 changed a lot: Women became rebellious, claiming for gender equality and refusing to furthermore accept the male to be the measure of all things. Be it the fashion or life style, sexual behaviour or sport, in the Seventies freedom and liberated bodies were the concerns that counted. The stigma of the weak gender was out, the uni-sex look was in! In the course of breaking with previously valid conventional rules, the various myths related to the inferior physical capacity and fitness of female athletes, were questioned, as well.

Consequently, women conquered sporting territory of men, ran kilometre-long races in competitions, practised pole vault and competed for seconds and scores in biathlon. Notwithstanding, the softer recreational sports also kept booming, since most women preferred to take part in fitness programmes and gymnastics, physical exercise and walking, swimming and cycling. Rhythmic sport gymnastics established itself as a pure female sport.
Women’s Football: About Late Recognition and a Lack of Sensitivity

In terms of women’s football, the German Football Federation (DFB) was really slow on the uptake: Only when German female players took part in the World Cup Tournament in a country which was crazy about football, namely, ‘Bella Italia’, in 1970, and played against other nations before the eyes of the world public, female football finally became publicly presentable in Germany, too. In the meantime, separate football clubs for women had attracted attention and managed to get a playing field for themselves. 40 years after the first protests, women’s football finally got the official blessing of the Federation. Already one year after, the first group matches took place. 1974 was the year of the first German Championship, which the team of TuS Wörrstadt won against DJK Eintracht Erle by 4:0.

However, in the beginning women were only allowed to play if they complied with certain conditions which were intended to make ‘hard’ men’s sport easier. Due to their “weaker nature”, female players were ordered to take a six-months winter break, the ball was smaller and lighter, shoes with studs were forbidden. The match only lasted 70 minutes, and it took years, up to the year 1993, until it could be played for 90 minutes. But the prejudices did last in the minds for another couple of years. According to the Swiss Professor Gottfried Schönholzer, Chairman of the FIFA Medical Commission, “There are no or only unessential arguments against women’s football. Women are usually more motile and lighter-bodied. If they use more technical skills, football is not dangerous for them, either. In women’s football the breast disturbs rather than it causes danger. I would recommend that the ladies wear a thick padded brassiere.” Furthermore, the expert was of the opinion that women’s football was hardly likely to become a genuine team sport, because women, he said, “do not have as much sensitivity for team spirit as men”.
Almost One Century Later:  
the First Women  
in the IOC ‘Old Boys Club’

It took a full 87 years until the first woman was allowed to be right, with the rest of them, in that order of men which had been founded in 1984. In 1981, under the presidency of Juan Antonio Samaranch, the Fin Pirjo Häggmann, just 30 years of age, was appointed to the ‘old boys club’. Other barriers for women to overcome were also removed under the Spanish IOC President: in 2007, 15 out of a total of 113 active IOC members were female, the quota of sportswomen at Olympic Games was continuously increasing, and the Olympic Charter explicitly called for the promotion of women and gender equality.

Female Marathon Becomes an Olympic Sport: The Running Authority  
Dr. van Aaken Makes It Possible

Since the Fifties, there had been one strong male promoter of the kick-started female running movement: Dr. Ernst van Aaken. The sports physician and trainer was a convinced advocate of endurance running and demanded to also legitimize female competitions in long-distance races. During the past decades, medical doctors had still been unanimous in believing that women should run a maximum distance of 100 metres; and light cross-country running was also tolerated up to a duration of 15 minutes. Van Aaken was of a different opinion and requested his male and female athletes to cover a high number of kilometres in a daily cross-country run. In 1967, he smuggled two women in a marathon race at Waldniel. Anni Pede-Erdkamp achieved the third place in the total classification, running world record time in 3:07 hours, and is considered to be the first female marathon runner in Germany. In 1973, van Aaken organized the first unofficial Marathon World Championship of Women, a race of 100 miles for female athletes in 1983, and, thanks to his efforts, marathon also became an Olympic sport for women in 1984. The winning trio, Jean Benoit (USA), Grete Waitz (Norway) and Rosa Mota (Portugal), unfortunately he could not celebrate them personally. Van Aaken deceased four months before the first female marathon of the Olympic history took place.
East versus West: 
Model Sportswoman Katharina Witt Can Achieve Points Everywhere

The ‘Battle of the Carmens’ was fought at the Olympic Winter Games at Calgary in 1988, when the figure skaters Katharina Witt (GDR) and Debbie Thomas of the USA both had chosen the music of the opera ‘Carmen’ for their free skating presentation. The media reports made a ‘class conflict’ out of that competition, socialism versus capitalism. As a matter of fact, during the Cold War era, an unofficial armament race in sports had existed between the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany. Witt was able to decide the Carmen contest in favour of herself, and according to the Time magazine, the GDR model sportswoman was "the most beautiful face of socialism". Two Olympic, four World Championship and six European Championship gold medals later, the dominating figure skater of the Eighties made a brilliant start as a professional athlete and a producer of ice skating and TV shows. Thanks to her bright idea to have the amateur status re-attributed to her, Witt made her comeback at the Olympic Games in 1994. Meanwhile, she has become ‘the face’ of the Munich Olympic Bid for 2018. The German weekly Die ZEIT wrote: “With regard to the IOC, it is like in the past, on ice, she can really make the jury sit up and take notice – and then she waits to find out whether the gentlemen have liked it”. Witt’s reaction arrived promptly, via a statement in the (yellow press) newspaper BILD: “Only men can write this kind of thing”.

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1990 to 2000
Female World Champions, World Records and Winter Games

Four Times European Champions:
Female (National) Football Team
Becomes Established at International Level

German female players had been allowed to play matches as professionals at German regional and federal levels since 1999. During that period, the style of playing changed radically. Athletic, technical and tactical subtleties became increasingly characteristic of the way women played football. A national team had existed since 1982 and, at the international level, in the Nineties German women’s football really started rolling. At the European Football Championships of 1989, 1991, 1995 and 1997, the German female players won the title, while in 1991, at the first official World Championship in China, they achieved the 4th place. During that event, for the first time in a FIFA match, females were allowed to act as referees or linesmen. At the World Cup of 1995, the German National Team became Vice World Champion; and for the first time the final match was refereed by a woman. There is one person who has experienced this period of ‘climbing and reaccelerating’: the national player and record holder Silvia Neid. She is today the federal coach of the female national team, and she was recently honoured in a very special way: A Barbie doll named Silvia Neid saw the light of the day (in the toys’ world) on the occasion of the 2011 Women’s Football World Cup in Germany.

Barbie doll named Silvia Neid saw the light of the day (in the toys’ world) on the occasion of the 2011 Women’s Football World Cup in Germany.

More than a Lead by a Whisker:
Women versus Men

In the Nineties, the myth of a stronger performance capacity of men could easily be shelved. To prove this, it took Astrid Benöhr, the German ultra-athlete of triathlon, only 74 hours to make the fivefold triathlon distance in 1997. With this result, the exceptional athlete was clearly faster to finish first than the previous male world record holder, namely by 2:15 hours. In 1992, she duped once more her male competitors when she made the tenfold distance (38 km swimming, 1,800 km cycling and 422 km running) in a good 187 hours, remaining five hours below the previous best result of a man. In Ironman circles she has meanwhile gained another title

More than a Lead by a Whisker:
Women versus Men
as ‘the woman who comes in front of the men’. Modern sport-scientific know-how confirms: when it comes to performance which is related to extreme endurance, women have better physical pre-conditions and, thus, win by a whisker at the finishing line.

In Spite of a Noble Model Sportswoman, Ski Jumping Waits for the Olympic Blessing

The pioneer of ladies’ ski jumping is said to be a genuine countess: at Kitzbühl, in 1908, Paula von Lamberg, “wearing a long skirt and showing a perfect posture” reached a jump distance of, at that time, sensational 24 metres. The subsequent discussion about ski jumping women has not lost its agitating effects up to this day. In the Nineties, male officials still thundered against the significant impact of the landing which neither the female spine nor the womb was able to endure.

Since 1998, the successors of the countess have finally been officially allowed to take part in ski jumping. They compete in the FIS Ladies Grand Prix; and in 2009 they won their first title in a World Championship in Liberec. Nevertheless, the female ski jumpers have not been eligible for Olympic Games so far. The IOC turned down an application for admission of a ladies’ contest at the Olympic Winter Games in 2010, although ten female ski jumpers had filed a law suit for discrimination. In July 2011, the IOC will give or will not give its blessing for the Winter Games in 2014.
2000 to the Present
Everything Else but Offside – Women’s Sport in Focus

Women Are the Winners:
DOSB Makes Women’s Issues a Board Discussion

(Almost) a turning point: in 2009, the German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB) placed all activities under the female motto of the “Year of Women in Sport”. In this way, the DOSB advanced the promotion of girls and women to a very high position on its list of priorities. The activities, in particular: The DOSB General Assembly showed a self-critical approach in formulating the demand “Women to the Top”. It organized camps for leadership talents and granted financial support for mentoring and coaching programmes. The “Sports Weeks for Women”, which had already been organized every summer all over the country since 2007, tried to attract all kinds of female sports beginners and those who wanted to resume sporting activities, regardless of their age, by offering trial lessons, free of charge. Furthermore, the DOSB reinforced the action programme ‘Violence Against Women – Not with Us’, to give girls and women support by means of self-defence courses. Dr. Thomas Bach, DOSB President, and Ilse Ridder-Melchers, DOSB Vice President, responsible for Women and Gender Equality, stated in unison: “Women and Sport – a success story which we must jointly advance furthermore and, in this respect, we are counting on the support of everyone.”

A Woman Blowing the Whistle:
the First Female Referee in the (Male) Bundesliga (Federal Football Division)

In the DFB’s view, this news was worth holding a press conference for, after all. Since 2007, Bibiana Steinhaus has been the first woman to act as a referee in the Second Federal League of male players. Thus, in the light of the entire football cosmos, she is one of 2,186 female referees in Germany – as compared with 78,617 male referees in Germany. This made the headlines of the mass media, and the magazine STERN dedicated to her the title “Blondes Gift mit Pfiff”.)
Setting Out For New Dimensions:  
Female Football Players  
Roll Up the Field

We are Football World Champions! In 2003, a wave of euphoria rose high and higher throughout the whole country. This was not due to the fact that the male national football team had won the title. No, Germany celebrated the winning of the first title by the female football players. Finally, Birgit Prinz, Maren Meinert and their teammates were not only known to football insiders. Steffie Jones was another team member at that time and, at present, is the Chair of the Organizing Committee of the FIFA Women’s World Cup in Germany, in 2011. Nia Künzer has become a media star, thanks to her ‘golden goal’ in the final match against Sweden. The first German TV channel under public law ARD elected her goal the ‘Goal of the Year’. Nia Künzer is the first and, so far, only woman who was awarded this distinction. Everybody was happy to share her joy, including the DFB President, as well as the Federal President of Germany and the Federal Chancellor. Joseph Blatter was enthusiastic about “a culture of playing which has met the highest international standards” and expressed his conviction that women’s football had reached a “new dimension”. And in 2007? The German ladies’ football team won the title once again!

Meanwhile, the DFB also promotes the young and upcoming generation of female football players, supporting numerous projects under the motto “Football without Offside” which are aimed at facilitating the social integration of girls by means of football playing. Moreover, in 2010, a congress about football of girls and women was held in the light of the slogan “Everything but Offside”.
Interview of Ilse Ridder-Melchers
No Convention nor Corset Proved to Be Too Tight for Women

Mrs. Ilse Ridder-Melchers, is there a common theme going through the history of sportswomen?

We are not only looking back to 100 eventful and moving years of women’s sports, but on March 8, this year, we are also celebrating an anniversary: 100 years of existence of the International Women’s Day. Ilse Ridder-Melchers, DOSB Vice President, responsible for Women and Gender Equality, considers the past decades to have served as a training camp in view of reaching the social equality of women.

Whatever decade we are talking about, women have always been enthusiastic about sports. There has been no obstacle, no convention (and no corset), nor any prejudice too strong for them to overcome. They have conquered the different sports, step by step, breaking with limits and traditional role clichés. They were persistent, courageous, vigorous and some times even cunning, if they wanted to participate in competitions. During the past 100 years, sportswomen have considerably contributed to break down traditional barriers. In this way, sport had also begun to develop as a training camp for more social equality. Nowadays, women have captured practically all kinds of sports for themselves and have changed our way of looking at this development. As a matter of fact, women achieve top level performance results, they are excellent ambassadors for our country and role models for the upcoming generations of girls – performance-minded, self-assured, team-oriented.
And has the common theme entered the present?

It just continues to the present. Today, more than 10 million women and girls practise sports in our clubs. Football is the best example to illustrate a very fast development. The female enthusiasts of football playing have managed that the ball could not be snatched away from them. 40 years ago, they started an unbelievable catch-up race to conquer one of the last bulwarks of men. And they were successful: thanks to their extreme commitment, top-level results and team work, they have not only made themselves respected but also won the World Championship twice. So, who knows what is going to happen during the Women’s Football World Championship this summer…

You are one of the women who substantially influence today’s sport development – where are we going to?

There is a long list of positive effects: Sport keeps you healthy and fit, it strengthens your self-confidence, promotes social integration and participation. Club sport additionally furthers common interests and solidarity, team spirit as well as mutual acceptance of performance results, one’s own results and the results of others, irrespective of culture, sex, religion and political believes. For this reason, our motto is right: “Sport for All!”. I wish to see sports clubs which are open to all groups of the population and also offer attractive sports programmes to girls and women. In view of shaping the future, sport should achieve top-level results, as well, with regard to an equal participation of women and men. We need more women in leading positions in our clubs and federations, many female role models for the young generation, as well as a strong network to promote and support those women.
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