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SPORT HISTORY

From Field Days to Olympic Gold: How Black Women Revitalized Track and Field in the United States

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Abstract

The sport of track and field in the United States has a storied but tumultuous past, especially in women's collegiate athletics. In the late 19th century, it was enjoyed by women at elite colleges in the form of a "field day," but would have trouble surpassing that level, among middle class Whites especially. This hurdle in large part was due to the prevailing ideas at the time regarding what was acceptable physical activity for women, which was inextricably tied to the norms of White hegemonic femininity. Female physical educators reinforced these norms with the creation of "play days." The abandonment of the sport by Whites in the early part of the 20th century opened a window for African American (Black) women at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to step to the line. They pushed the boundaries of acceptable femininity, redefining their place as Black women in a time in which others would rather they stay on the margins of society. The purpose of this study was to understand the student-athlete experience for women during the 1950s and 1960s as it related to society's views on femininity and gender roles at the time. A second purpose was to examine the factors that allowed for the acceptance of women's track and field for Black women at HBCUs while it was considered an improper

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activity for Whites. During the research of Black women athletes at HBCUs in the 1950s and 1960s, the researchers paid specific attention to scholarships, travel to competitions, and the perceived value of these female athletes to their respective institutions. The researchers used an archival retrieval method to gather historical data from Internet resources. The student-athlete experience for the TSU Tigerbelles in the 1950s and 1960s was a different experience than what athletes experience today.

Today, women participate professionally and as amateurs in practically every major sport. As the skill level of competition has improved over the years, so has the public's view of women's sport. The public perception of women's sports has changed, but it has done so slowly over the years. In the modern era of sport, women's power and skill in competition are celebrated—they are viewed as athletes first, not just "ladies." The following quote by Daley exemplifies the public opinion regarding female athletes in the 1950s and 1960s:

> It just doesn't seem right to watch a female leap clumsily over the bars, throw the weights awkwardly or scamper over a track in unladylike fashion. They lose all their daintiness and appeal. Besides, the Paris couturiers add to the woman's attractiveness much better than do the designers of track suits, even skimpy ones. (Daley, 1960, p. 20)

As the quote indicates, at this time female athletes were still being judged as ladies during athletic events, rather than as true athletes with dedication and skill. Western mainstream media and popular culture primarily define the current ideal body type. For women specifically, it is characterized as being tall, thin, and well-toned.

The Beginning of Women's Physical Education

Since the early part of women's higher education, physical education has been a required component of the curriculum for women. Students at Mount Holyoke College were required to walk a mile a day, as early as 1837 (Tricard, 1996). About 20 years later, this requirement was upped to a half hour of physical activity daily, preferably outside. By the late 19th century, walking clubs started popping up at colleges and universities across the United States. Walking as

an activity for women could not be engendered, because it was an activity that was essential to normal human life and functioning. It was also a cost-effective activity for universities to offer women, because it required no equipment or uniform, no coaching, no rules, and no facility. Eventually, women took walking a step further, making it competitive. This "walking mania" captured the attention of the United States for a time as a spectacle, even allowing women to earn prize money for their efforts. But after 1880, reports of walking competitions were scarce, along with any other type of report of women's athletics. This in large part was due to the popularity of sports that took place inside gymnasiums, basketball and gymnastics being chief among them.

The first field day appeared at Vassar College in 1896, where four events were contested: the 100-yard dash, running broad jump, running high jump, and the 220-yard dash. For this day, there was no training of any kind prior to the competition. The public reacted to this field day with patronizing esteem because at the time this type of activity was far outside the realm of acceptable activity for women. In the following years, efforts were made to keep the date of the field day secret to keep the press away, which further discouraged the efforts of the students. The field day at Vassar College was truly for the students; the prying eyes of the public were not invited, nor were the discouraging words of the press. Vassar continued its field days uninterrupted for 40 years, which spurred similar field days at other institutions.

Women's Movements in the 1840s

Leading up to the Civil War, attitudes regarding women's physical education were quite favorable, in part because of the momentum building in the women's movement. The industrial revolution saw women and housewives with more time to spend on activities outside the home. The industrial revolution caused factories to begin encompassing many female duties such as "spinning and weaving" (Donnaway, n.d., para. 5). With this excess time, women began taking an interest in social work. Women created safe spaces for other women in need, created charity schools, and began taking an avid interest in the abolition movement. This newfound interest in social issues led to a desire for equal rights, which prompted Elizabeth Stanton and Lucretia Mott's first women's rights convention, which

was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1948. The efforts of Stanton, Mott, and Susan B. Anthony paid off in 1860 when New York passed a law recognizing the rights of widows, women's property rights, and women's parental rights (Donnaway, n.d.). This progress was halted with the onset of the Civil War, and concern shifted to abolition. After the Civil War, women were forced to take a back seat to the cause of Black male suffrage.

Physical Education in the 19th Century

Physical education for women and girls was seen as a means of staving off health problems, specifically spinal issues that were common in inactive individuals during the 19th century (Park, 1978). Leading researchers of the time also advocated against the wearing of restrictive clothing such as corsets for women and girls during this time for similar reasons. In previous years, men had led the charge for women's physical education. However, with a newfound interest in social issues and their own rights, female physical educators began to advocate for the athleticism of their fellow women. Female physical educators viewed competitive sport as a force of corruption, because they felt that men's sports had suffered a moral crisis from intercollegiate competition. Thus, it was of great concern to them that women's physical education avoid the perceived pitfalls that men had encountered. Before, women's activity was focused on movement for the development of healthy bones and organs and was seen as a way to combat spinal issues. During this time, the tenets of acceptable women's physical education shifted to focus on play for play's sake and emphasized inclusion of all women, regardless of physical ability or skill. Earlier sport offerings for women were centered on Victorian era country club sports. These sports had the most appeal to upper class Whites, in part because most of them required expensive equipment to play. These sports typically included tennis, croquet, and golf.

At the turn of the century, there was an influx of immigrants into the United States. Most of these immigrants came from countries in Europe such as Poland, Germany, and Ireland. The sport of track and field enjoyed more popularity in Europe, and these immigrants brought their zeal for the sport with them. Soon thereafter, industrial leagues were formulating across the country to provide opportunities for these new Americans to participate in an activity that re-

minded them of their home. To keep up with the surge in popularity of industrial leagues, female physical educators scrambled to come up with an answer that would help them avoid the advent of collegiate sport for women and the ethical pitfalls inherent therein. Their answer was the play day (Guttmann, 1991). Social conventions of the time stated that female educators should oversee the education of other women, especially when the physical body was concerned. The play day was born as a way to give women the opportunity for physical activity and sport, free from competition. For these play days, teams were mixed between institutions, no score was kept, there was no formal practice or coaching, and there was always a social aspect added to the day, usually a dance or tea. There is no arguing that these opportunities for women were better than nothing, but they served to reinforce Victorian era stereotypes regarding what women were fit to do and what activities were suitable for a lady.

For the proper middle class Victorian lady, the matters in the home were always to be considered above all other concerns; a woman's value was based on her viability as a wife and a mother. In the late 19th century, doctors worried that women had a limited amount of energy that they could expend in a lifetime and thought that energy should be used to birth healthy children. For this reason, physical activity was not endorsed for females, except within acceptable middle to upper class frameworks. These frameworks approved of sports such as croquet, half-court basketball, and archery. However, they did not allow for the more masculine sports such as track and field. The inherent nature of track and field is competitive; results can easily be compared between other competitors. This competitive aspect was not a virtue that a proper lady would pursue. Additionally, the events in track and field represented measures of power and speed that were uncharacteristic for women of the time. Acceptable movements for ladies consisted of graceful, fluid-like movements; the sprints, throws, and jumps of track and field were too rigorous for a true lady. Add to this that track and field was not considered normal, and it was classed as a working class sport; no specialized equipment was needed to participate that would preclude the working class people from participation. Because of this, track enjoyed popularity among the immigrant populations that made up the industrial workforce.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) began cropping up all over the country following the end of the Civil War. These colleges and universities dedicated to the education of African Americans and former slaves started small. Marybeth Gasman, an HBCU historian, describes the first small, all Black colleges: "They started in church basements, they started in old schoolhouses, they started in peoples homes" (Freemark, 2015, para. 9). HBCUs have humble roots, yet the idea of all Black colleges began to take off. The early 20th century was dubbed the golden age of Black colleges. With Southerners unwilling to desegregate their schools, HBCUs such as Tuskegee attracted the brightest Black students and professors. These two groups were unable to find desegregated universities willing to welcome Black students and professors, making the HBCUs their only option. HBCUs were training and educating the majority of the "nation's black doctors, lawyers, dentists, teachers and other professionals" (Freemark, 2015, para. 14). In 1976, the enrollment of females at HBCUs was 117,944, as opposed to 104,669 males (Redd, 1998). These numbers show that females were reaping the benefits HBCUs had to offer, just as much as their male counterparts.

Two historically Black colleges enjoyed a great deal of success between 1930 and 1970: the Tuskegee Institute and Tennessee Agriculture & Industrial State University (Tennessee A & I; later known as Tennessee State University, TSU). Carter-Francique and Richardson (2015) described the climate at HBCUs between 1954 and 1968 as safe zones for Black women to express themselves fearlessly. Historically, Black colleges made it part of their mission to advocate for uplift and racial solidarity; part of this reached over into the realm of women's athletics. The conceptions of White womanhood were limited in scope, but Black women did not see themselves through such a narrow lens. Black womanhood included characteristics such as resiliency, strength, righteousness, community engagement, and commitment to family—all of which were embraced by HBCUs.

The purpose of this study was to understand the student-athlete experience for women during the 1950s and 1960s as it related to scholarships, travel to competitions, and their perceived value to their respective institutions. A second purpose was to examine the

factors that allowed for the acceptance of women's track and field for Black women at HBCUs, while it was considered an improper activity for White women.

Method

Research

Historical research was conducted to find information on the HBCUs student-athlete experience in the sport of track and field. For this study, a descriptive research design was followed because historical data provided information about the topic. Guided by previous historical research, social learning theory, and researcher observations, the researchers developed a data collection protocol. Using an archival retrieval method, the researchers gathered historical data from Internet resources. The researchers first sought out electronic media guides and biographies from the college athletic department sport information website. If the data were not obtainable directly from the school's athletic department website, both online newspaper articles and college reference websites were used. The research was not focused on any one journal or database; many search terms were used to find information about the questions that were posed. Additionally, Google Scholar and even YouTube were used to find primary and secondary sources. The website database of *The New York Times* was used to search for sports reports from the time period, a few of which required a fee for access. The following terms were used in the search: *Tuskegee, Tennessee State University, Tigerettes, Tigerbelles, track and field, Black women athletes, AAU, women physical education,* and *Black womanhood.* The researchers' university institutional review board approved all of the procedures.

Data Analysis

Interpretation of historical studies includes attentiveness to themes, terms, descriptions, idioms, cultures, and relationships that build upon or illuminate theories. All data were prepared and downloaded into the qualitative software NVivo 10. Data analysis was facilitated by reading and rereading. The content analysis included response review, identification of themes, and classification of responses according to the identified themes, thereby giving voice to the viewpoints expressed regarding the emergence of women's track

and field at HBCU. The researchers discussed and co-constructed the themes. To establish reliability, three coders completed an intercoder reliability assessment according to accepted practice and coded a sample of 10% of the qualitative data. Intercoder reliability was determined via kappa analyses ranging from .80 to 1.00 for all variables, well above the standard threshold (.70) for acceptance.

Results and Discussion

There is a dearth of scholarly information explaining the student-athlete experience of Black track and field athletes at HBCUs.

Student-Athlete Experience

Tigerettes Coach Cleve Abbott and Tigerbelles Coach Ed Temple came to prominence before the NCAA established a stranglehold on all of collegiate sport. While several organizations sought to reign in and scale back women's collegiate sport, these legends were busy creating a dynasty. This accomplishment is even more impressive at a time when women's sports, especially track and field, were on the margins of American culture. Though the number varies from source to source, Coach Temple's budget for his women's track and field program ranged from $150 to $350 ("Ed Temple," n.d.). Even in 1954, when Coach Temple took over as head women's coach at TSU, this was not much to go on considering the expenses involved in running a program, no matter how small it started out. The operating expenses for TSU's women's track team in 2015 was better at $110,591 ("Tennessee State University," 2015).

Because so few other schools competed in women's track and field at this time, competitive opportunities for Black women's track and field athletes were limited. These competitive opportunities usually consisted of one or two meets a season: the Tuskegee Relays and the AAU National Championship. Being in Alabama, the Tuskegee Relays was not a large financial burden on the program, but the AAU Championship meets were held all over the country at this time. The meet was held in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1954; in Ponca City, Oklahoma, in 1955; in Washington, D.C., in 1956; and in Shaker Heights, Ohio, in 1957 (Tricard, 1996). Going to these meets required extensive travel for the Tigerbelles, usually done by station wagon because the budget did not allow for a chartered bus. During the time of Alice Coachman at the Tuskegee Institute, travel to competi-

tion was done by automobile and the athletes took food with them in the car because of limited chances to stop for food (Lansbury, 2014).

Traveling to competitions in the segregated South presented its own problems. Coach Temple had come to TSU from Pennsylvania, so the culture shock was a bit more pronounced for him, as well as for his girls who came to TSU from Northern states (Hargett, 2015). Coach Temple and his girls avoided stopping in small towns to search for facilities for "coloreds" and instead would pull off to the side of the road and go to the bathroom in wooded areas or in fields. For these same reasons, stopping to eat at a restaurant was also an issue. Despite these roadblocks, the Tigerbelles managed to persevere, winning their first AAU National Championship in 1955. Coachman recounted that in her days as a Tigerette at the Tuskegee Institute, there were no fancy hotels on road trips. Coachman and her teammates used the "Tuskegee Machine," a network of alumni around the country that would allow them to stay in their homes on track trips.

One of the objections that female physical educators had to women's collegiate sport was that it would suffer the ethical crisis of men's sport. This fear of ethical crisis affected scholarships. At the time, there were no scholarships for female athletes, and Coach Temple needed something to entice these women to run for him at TSU, especially given that the majority of them came from limited means. He ingeniously came up with a work–study program for his best athletes, in which they would work in TSU's post office in exchange for free tuition. This was the only way many of these girls had a chance at an education. Today, thanks in large part to Title IX, 18 full scholarships are available to NCAA Division I female athletes in the sport of track and field.

Coach Cleve Abbott of Tuskegee and Coach Temple had a summer running program that they used as a recruiting tool. At the time, there were few interscholastic opportunities for Black students to compete against each other, but the Tuskegee Relays included senior and junior divisions of their events. This provided an ideal opportunity for Coach Temple, and Coach Abbott before him, to recruit athletes from the Tuskegee Relays. He would then invite the athletes to his summer program, which was intensive and regimented. Coach Temple would make his girls train three times a day during this sum-

mer program, and most of his athletes said that it was a brutal schedule to follow. However, most of the athletes still came to TSU when it was time to start college. The closest that current sport can come to Coach Temple's summer running program is to hold a summer camp or clinic, which would be comparable to Temple's program. The main difference, however, is that Coach Temple and Coach Abbott recruited athletes to their summer program; the NCAA does not allow coaches to do that anymore. Another major point of differentiation between HBCUs at this time and now is that students such as Coachman were allowed to transfer to HBCUs such as Tuskegee Institute as high school seniors. This gave coaches more time to work with these pupils.

Acceptance of Track and Field at HBCUs

The first president of Tennessee A & I, William Hale, enforced a fairly conservative environment on his students, staff, and faculty as a contrast to the ambitious and rigorous academic environment provided. Students were required to attend university church services and work an institutional job for 2 hours each day (Lovett, 2005). All parties had to obey a curfew and refrain from involvement in political activities. These demands might seem formulated by a man who wished to exercise ultimate control over others, but the reality was more that President Hale wanted to ensure the success and survival of his institution during a time in history that was challenging, racially and economically, by decreasing the likelihood that someone affiliated with the university might cause strife.

Hale was not eager to endorse sports for Tennessee A & I, in large part because of his very small budget that precluded the adoption of the major sport of the day, men's football. Also, Hale opposed intercollegiate sport to avoid some of the negative press of the day pertaining to recruiting practices, injuries of athletes, and other ethical and moral quagmires that developed from intercollegiate competition in football. However, Hale was willing to endorse and support athletic teams and physical education for Tennessee A & I because it fit in with his endorsement of "Muscular Christianity." President Hale was able to accomplish three goals by providing intercollegiate sports at Tennessee A & I: recruitment of students, creation of school pride and unity (which produced alumni who could donate), and

finally, these athletic contests served as a diversion for students to keep them on campus where they were safe (Miller, 2002).

Hale's successor, Walter S. Davis, was ambitious about promoting athletics at Tennessee A & I, but his addition of women's track and field likely reaped the most rewards for the university, by this time known simply as TSU. The primary motivation for Davis' addition of men and women's track and field was the structure of their championships, which had not adopted or embraced segregated competition at the highest levels of the sport. Where the sports of basketball and football had been forced to have limited competitive opportunities because of segregation, track and field would be an opportunity for TSU to truly let the world see how good it was, because no athletes would be limited to only compete against their race. This would present an ideal opportunity for Davis to change perceptions across the country about Black athletes. These contests would prove to be culturally liberating for Blacks, especially in the Jim Crow South (Hodge, Harrison, Burden, & Dixson, 2008; Wiggins & Miller, 2003).

In effect, TSU's status as an HBCU insulated the Tigerbelles from undue scrutiny that they would have likely encountered outside the campus nest. The early adoption of conservative values and norms by President Hale also likely played a part in the acceptance of women's track for the world beyond TSU. Students were made to conform to norms and values that they might not have otherwise held, which made them appear "safe" when they were presented to the outside world. The Tigerbelles coach, Temple, also had a strict code of conduct that the Tigerbelles were to follow to be a part of his team.

Much like the first president of TSU, Coach Temple required curfews for his athletes, forbid them from riding in cars, required strict decorum outside of training and competition, and had no tolerance for tardiness. Coach Temple was often fond of telling his recruits, "There's the right way, the wrong way, and Coach Temple's way" ("Ed Temple," n.d., Coach Temples Way section, para. 1). Willye White was an athlete of Coach Temple's who had more trouble following the rules than most and was kicked off the team because she, in her own words, "was too much of a free spirit for that" (Lipsyte, 1993, para. 12).

It is well documented from interviews with many of Coach Temple's athletes, and from the man himself, that he demanded that

his athletes present themselves as ladies above all their other roles (athlete, student, etc.). Coach Temple is often quoted as having said, "I don't want oxes; I want foxes" (Hargett, 2007). He also had specific guidelines for how he expected his girls to present themselves for interviews postrace: "I want you to wipe your face, comb your hair and put some lipstick on so you look presentable when someone interviews you" (Hargett, 2007). Additionally, Coach Temple was also adept at promoting the femininity of his athletes to the press when he was interviewed about them. In one resource, Tigerbelle Barbara Jones was described as "attractive, charming and effervescent" (Lansbury, 2014, p. 133). The popular ladies attire for the day consisted of dresses with gloves and a hat, and Coach Temple required that his athletes keep a dress cleaned and pressed to be ready for public appearances or travel (Lansbury, 2014). The beauty norms of White women dictated how the Tigerbelles were to look if they hoped to be accepted in to the culture of the time. This is evident in the ads that ran in *Ebony Magazine* alongside articles about the success of the Tigerbelles in the 1950s and 1960s. These ads ranged from skin lightener to cookware. Coach Temple and the TSU Tigerbelles successfully used the norms of White hegemonic femininity to their advantage to spur the popularity of women's track and field. This became even more obvious when publications of the time began to tout participation and competition in track and field as a means of staying trim and attractive to the opposite sex. One knows that femininity has gone to the lighter side of the racial spectrum when talk about how woman can diminish her size and increase her frailty begins.

Leading up to the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome, there was a flood of sports reporting, much of it decrying the role of women at the Games. Writers such as William Barry Furlong still espoused the views that some sports ruined the typical perception of the female body and temperament (Pieper, 2016). Opinions such as Furlong's almost always had to do with what White, middle class society defined as beautiful. Participation in these fringe sports would ruin their position as a conduit for male pleasure.

It also helped the image of American women's track and field to be competing against the Russians during the Cold War. The Russians conveniently provided the public with an "other" to focus their attentions on instead of these young Black women competing in track

and field. The federations of the United States and Russia organized a series of dual meets to take place. The American men's team could make quick work of the Russian men's team, but the United States women had more difficulty, even with Wilma Rudolph leading the women's team. The Russians were the new muscle Molls and proved to be a formidable opponent for the young ladies of the U.S. team. The credo of "ladies first, track girls second," coupled by the societal norms of the time, came back to bite Coach Temple; women were not staying in the sport long enough to be competitive with the Russians, because they were out getting husbands, and the sport lacked ample competitive opportunities for women at the time. It then became the patriotic duty of men to not date or wed these women so that a strong team could be built for the 1964 Olympic Games. Through these efforts and the sprinting prowess of Rudolph, European meet organizers began to open their competitions to women.

Rudolph's spectacular 1960 Rome Olympic Games performance was the catalyst for these new thoughts about women's track and field. In the Rome Olympic Games, Rudolph won a stunning three gold medals and solidified the view that track and field could be a sport for feminine ladies. By the time Rudolph won those medals, she had been indoctrinated into the Coach Temple Way for 5 years and was always sure that she presented the impeccable image of a lady on and off the track. After Rudolph broke the record in the 200-meter dash in the preliminaries in Rome, her teammate Barbara Jones rushed out to give her a comb to make sure her hair looked good before she gave an interview (Lansbury, 2014). The Italian press in Rome loved Rudolph, giving her the nickname of "La Gazzella Nera" or "The Black Gazelle." Although this nickname implies a certain level of femininity and grace, it also reinforces stereotypes of Blacks as being animalistic. This categorization of Black athletes with animals trivializes their talent and determination to better themselves and promote their race through athletics and instead reinforces the stereotypes.

The stereotypes surrounding Black women were sometimes reinforced by their participation and success in athletics. Their history as slaves disqualified them from the hegemonic feminine ideal of the delicate damsel. The main caricatures used to justify the participation and success of Black women in sport are Mammy and Jezebel.

Black female athletes suffer the Mammy caricature because of their ability to bear a high amount of physical labor and suffer the Jezebel caricature because of the sexual deviance that vigorous physical activity was thought to create, at that time (Cahn, 1995).

> Their [White men's] racialized notion of the virile or mannish Black female athletes stemmed from a number of persistent historical myths: the linking of African American women's work history as slaves, their supposedly 'natural' brute strength and endurance inherited from their African origins, and the notion that vigorous or competitive sport masculinized women physically and sexually. (Vertinsky & Captain, 1998, p. 541)

The racial climate of Rudolph's time, coupled with the gender and class pressures placed on her, and others like her, demanded that a new space be created for Black female athletes. It became a vital characteristic for these women to maximize their gift to gain some control over who they were.

Once again, women's track and field, and the sport in general, has been placed back on the margins of American psyche and culture. This work gives an idea about the possible causes for this decline on the women's side in the 1920s, but it is doubtful that the current decline is related to the same factors. A separate inquiry would need to be made to investigate the decline in favorability of track and field for men at this time. Coaches in the sport of track and field often remark that on the men's side, its best athletes end up in either basketball or football because of the earnings potential versus track and field. Another factor is the attention paid to basketball and football versus track and field at the collegiate level. Additionally, the scholarship opportunities in football and basketball far outweigh those in track and field.

Limitations

This study has some primary limitations. By gathering historical data, the researchers were not able to capture directly several relative participation and coaching experience factors (e.g., mentorship, leadership skills, and social and political contexts) in the data. A number of factors limited the scope of this study, most notably

the time deadline, the principal researcher's 60–80-hour-per-week job, and the coauthors' growing interest in the subject area that led the researchers down rabbit hole after rabbit hole in search of more information. It is highly likely that rudimentary knowledge and understanding of historical research also hindered the process, as the secondary researcher lacked the understanding of the importance of visiting an archive or of how to search historical databases effectively. The limited library holdings of the principal researcher's university also limited the scope of this work.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study merits further inquiry with the implementation of Title IX and its effect on women's collegiate athletics and with the influence of the NCAA on the athletic teams at HBCUs. No longer the athletics powerhouses they once were, HBCUs have been mostly relegated to a second-class status within collegiate athletics. It would be an interesting case study to see how current TSU women's head coach, Chandra Cheeseborough, is managing her athletes, as she was one of Coach Temple's girls. To hear what she feels are the main roadblocks to TSU regaining its status in the women's track and field realm would be interesting as well.

The final aspect of this topic that merits further study is the acceptance of feminine norms among Black track and field athletes, as well as current public perceptions of the sport. Such analysis proves to be especially difficult considering that the role of the Black female athlete is unique, as she falls into three categories (of varying degrees at different times), all with their own baggage: Black, female, and classed (Vertinsky & Captain, 1998).

Conclusion

The TSU Tigerbelles and Tuskegee Institute Tigerettes occupy a special place in history, not only for their athletic achievements, but also for their contributions to the social discourse on the acceptance of Black female athletes in a "masculine" sport. The student-athlete experience for the TSU Tigerbelles in the 1950s and 1960s was a different experience than what athletes experience today. In the climate of racial strife of the Jim Crow South and the economic status of women's sports, the coaches and athletes of TSU had to make extreme sacrifices to compete in the sport they loved—track and field.

These talented young women exhibited the perseverance and resilience characteristic of their Black womanhood.

Alice Coachman of the Tuskegee Institute was the first Black woman to win an Olympic medal and was the only Black female medalist at the 1948 Summer Olympic Games in London, England. Barbara Jones of TSU is still the youngest woman to have ever won an Olympic medal at the tender age of 15. Willye White of TSU was the first American woman to compete in five consecutive Olympic Games. Tigerbelle Wilma Rudolph became the first American female athlete to win three gold medals in a single Olympic Games. Wyomia Tyus became the first athlete, male or female, to win consecutive Olympic gold medals in the 100-meter dash. Finally, Madeline Manning of TSU was the first American woman to win a gold medal in the 800-meter run (Binkley, Mitchell, & Mielnik, 2012). These women are just a part of the legacy left behind by these outstanding track and field programs. May their contributions to the sport and to the advancement of Black women not soon be forgotten.

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