

“German Women’s Sports are on the March!” (August 1927)

Abstract

Appearing in the official publication of Germany’s national track and field association, the article “German Women’s Sports are on the March!” opened by trumpeting the growing numbers of women who were competing in track and field. The article focused primarily on refuting the lingering myths and misinformation that continued to circulate around women’s sports in the 1920s, despite the success of such events as the Women’s Sports Festival that Berlin’s renowned Sports Club Charlottenburg had recently hosted.

Critics of women’s competitive sports had long targeted track and field, in particular, for purportedly damaging women’s joints and nervous systems. Opponents further alleged that vigorous physical activity “masculinized” women’s bodies and psyches, making them less attractive and more envious of others’ successes. The principal concern of these critics, however, was that female athletes were jeopardizing their physical ability and emotional desire to bear children at a time when officials were expressing growing concern over Germany’s population, which they viewed as a key barometer of national strength.

By featuring the signatures of many of Germany’s leading female athletes as well as a panorama photo of them, the two-page layout assumed a petition- or manifesto-like quality. Among the signatories was Lina Batschauer, who won the gold medal in the very first Olympic competition for women in the 800 meters at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, as well as the twin sisters Ilse and Rose Drieling, who comprised half of a 4x100-meter relay team that set a German record in 1927 that was subsequently recognized as a world record for that event. It stood for only a short period of time, however, before another German women’s relay team, which included yet another signatory of this article, broke it. The International Women’s Sports Federation had only just allowed Germany to join in 1926, and the country’s athletes had already established themselves as some of the most successful ones in the sport.

Source

German Women’s Sports are on the March!

With his successful women’s sports festival of the Sports Club Charlottenburg, Dr. Bergmann helped a movement get on its feet that is sadly still being fought on many sides. Like with everything new, opponents emerge in this case against a good cause, as well, and though they will be disproven by reality, they are temporarily disruptive.

German’s women’s sports are marching on. The young women and girls will naturally participate in competitions, too, for these are an integral part of sportsmanship and lend the necessary motivation for the physical activity. The leaders of the German sport association for athletics, and, of course, also the German gymnastics association, like those for university sports, will certainly keep the planning of these competitions at a level which promises the best utility for health.

What do the opponents of women’s sports say? They claim that the bodies and nervous systems are thereby damaged. The bones and joints are more delicate than those of men and thus cannot endure the same strain. Sport makes masculine, robbing women of grace and beauty. Their character is ruined, jealousy is aroused towards those who are better.

Even when such opinions are expressed by scientists and gynecologists, they mean nothing, for there are ten times as many experts who think otherwise, and because practice has long since taught otherwise in its results.

Most young girls today have a job, and eight to ten hours of sedentary work in the office or strenuous, consistent work in a factory, with its inevitable tension in entire body, stress to the organs, constant full exertion of the nervous system, represent exertions of an entirely different dimension than those of sought-out, controlled athletic exercises.

The arguments opponents of women's sports wield today were brought decades ago in reference to men's sports. Remember the terrible fear of athlete's heart. Even during the war, a doctor warned men about running further than two hundred meters. Poor theoretician, you were so wrong.

It is often overlooked that all sports activities today occur under the supervision of experts, often even practitioners of sports medicine. Certainly no one from the medical association for physical education will undertake to condemn women's sports. Leading sports doctors, however, sat in the bleachers at the women's sports festival, smiling over the welcome upsurge in such a good cause.

Among the circles of progressive sport clubs, the verdict has long since been spoken regarding the benefits of athletics for women's health. This athletic movement will continue gaining ground.

It is absurd to suggest that sports masculinize women's bodies. Such opinions come from the green table^[1] or from bespectacled aunts. The opposite is the case. It is the toil of hard work that makes masculine. The woman does sports to ease the tension, and to retain her femininity, her grace. Running, jumping and throwing, tennis, golf, archery—these disciplines that the German sport associations categorize as athletics are the best conceivable exercises, which effectively include a woman's muscles, organs and nerves, making them supple and shaping the harmonious contours of the entire body.

Certainly sport makes women attractive. Beauty is a flexible term. Chorus girls who fill the pubs today and coffee girls who spend precious afternoons behind their teapots due to an antiquated tradition, will certainly be surpassed in beauty by athletic girls, if only because of the athletes' obvious good health and tanned skin.

The German woman should do sports, should learn to fight, should form an opinion about the necessities of modern life, so that she might be a good companion to the man of this new era, and in order that she learns and experiences for herself how to raise her sons to be German men who can bring a better future to this impoverished land. Pale women behind coffee pots are not up to this task.

NOTES

[1] There is a German proverb that refers to something having been decided "at the green table." A reference to the green table coverings often used for formal negotiations in earlier times, it suggests that the decision was made by judges or bureaucrats with little practical experience.

Source: „Deutscher Frauensport marschier!“, *Sport und Sonne*, Nr. 8, August 1927.

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