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# Fearless and Fit: American Women of the Cold War

Heather J. Dahl

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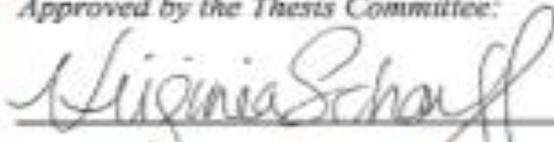
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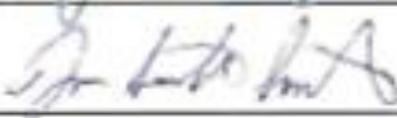


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**FEARLESS AND FIT:  
AMERICAN WOMEN OF THE COLD WAR**

**BY**

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THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts  
History**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May 2010**

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# FEARLESS AND FIT: AMERICAN WOMEN OF THE COLD WAR

by

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## ABSTRACT

During the Cold War, fitness concerns reached new heights. At the start of the Cold War, Americans became concerned that they were not fit enough to compete with the Soviets. Both governments encouraged citizens to become physically fit. The American government concerned itself with “soft” corporate men and physically unfit youth. The Soviet government continued to emphasize physical culture, as a natural byproduct of Communism. Though American society idealized women for feminine virtues, both women and men craved fitness and strength, offering an opportunity for women to circumvent the typical stereotypes of Cold War femininity. Some women participated in cultural exchange competitions and Olympic Games. The press focused on the unfeminine characteristics of Soviet women athletes, but found that Cold War victory required more than femininity. The United States needed improved athletic performances from American women to prevail in Cold War sports showdowns. Therefore, the Cold War, indirectly but profoundly, opened up new possibilities for women.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

The Cold War was a time of fear. Some of the fears were obvious: threat of nuclear annihilation as well as the spread of Communism, both abroad and within the United States. For a long time Cold War studies emphasized how fear propelled the decisions of nations from the end of World War II through the fall of the Berlin Wall. Soon historians also realized how stories of typical Americans confirmed the central place of fear in everyday decisions, as well as large-scale, political maneuvering. In addition, new approaches, and new evidence, offered a chance to examine the Cold War not just for the events that made the news. For example, the lens of gender proved a useful tool for understanding how political actions and rhetoric influenced and permeated society. Even though the Cold War was important for political and international events, the responses of average citizens to the age of anxiety provides a compelling story about the intersection of politics and life in American history.

Americans exaggerated the domestic fear of Communists among them. Communist labels fell on any abnormal members of society. Some Americans, who feared the label of Communist, embraced conformist lifestyles offered throughout the nations' suburban communities. In these communities, Americans felt protected from threats, nuclear and political, real and imagined. Americans embraced not only conformity, but also acceptable stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. "Soft" men or "burly" women represented nonconformity. Experiencing appropriate levels of fitness and competition became an integral part of defining citizenship during the Cold War.

At the start of the Cold War, Americans became concerned that they were not fit enough to compete with the Soviets. The government encouraged citizens to improve their physical fitness. The consumer economy provided opportunities and places for new fitness initiatives. Both women and men craved fitness and strength. New expectations from the government for physically fit citizens offered women opportunities to circumvent the typical stereotypes of Cold War femininity. Therefore, the Cold War, indirectly but profoundly, opened up new possibilities for women.

The United States feared the spread of Communism after World War II. The American government believed in the power of sport to fight the spread of communism and fought against Communism in both ideological and architectural arenas. In war-torn England, one English government official believed that building parks represented an effective strategy to stop the spread of communism. In 1948, when an American group helped to get the children out of the war rubble and streets in Britain, they built a series of parks. Sir Noel Curtis-Bennett, founder of the National Playing Field Association of Great Britain in 1948 said, "there can be no doubt that the complete failure alike of communism and authoritarianism to make headway in Great Britain is to be found in the fact, that our people. . . mingle freely in the fellowship of sports."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the British professed to these beliefs to access money for rebuilding. Perhaps the British really believed that the United States trusted in the power of sport to stop the spread of communism. These beliefs, however, demonstrated that British and American citizens believed that spaces for competitive sports contributed to the defeat of Communism.

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<sup>1</sup> "US Aid Proposed for English Youth: Sports Field Built and Owned by Americans Suggested as Good-Will Gesture." *New York Times*, June 8, 1948; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 27.

The construction of parks created a façade of national security. In the larger Cold War context, the Soviet Union and the United States believed in the power of sports to create national security and pride.

Both the United States and the Soviet Union realized that tangible proof of superiority quelled most of their respective Cold War fears. As a result, “everything from Third World governments to kitchen appliances, to sport became part of a Cold War international contest ... to prove the superiority of capitalism or communism.”<sup>2</sup> Fitness levels and sport achievements of the citizens were among the most visible and measurable methods to demonstrate superiority. Both superpowers wanted to prove that fitness intrinsically accompanied their respective government system. As members of the Cold War and a booming consumer economy, Americans believed that consumerism symbolized a prosperous country, rather than a material deprived Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> Fitness symbolized strength both literally and metaphorically. Sport contests offered a place to prove Cold War fitness rhetoric. As an added bonus, sport competitions allowed the United States and the Soviet Union to battle the adversary directly. Though fitness represented an important symbol of citizen superiority, victory represented national superiority.

More importantly, sport, and fitness in general, assuaged the domestic unease with increased, corporate lifestyles. Most fears of the Cold War reflected a level of moral discomfort. Slothful, soft Americans felt guilty. According to political theorist,

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 130.

<sup>3</sup> Lizabeth Cohen *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 8.

Daniel Bell, during the 1950s, foreign policy was an ideological issue and “an ideological issue was equated with a moral issue and the attacks on communism were made with all the compulsive moral fervor which was possible because of the equation of communism with sin.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, even if average Americans could not understand the complexities of ideology or the details of foreign policy, they could understand that sinful behaviors and nonconformity, equated to sleeping with the enemy. Cold War and gender historian, K.A. Cuordileone furthered Bell’s point by adding that as anticommunist fervor increased, Americans blamed more social ills on communism.<sup>5</sup> Cold War rhetoric throughout the 1950s also made the moral connection between fitness and politics, though no president made the point more eloquently than John F. Kennedy did. As President-Elect, Kennedy wrote an article to Americans in *Sports Illustrated*. In that article he explained that “if we are to retain this freedom, for ourselves and for generations to come, then we must also be willing to work for the physical toughness on which the courage and intelligence and skill of man so largely depends.”<sup>6</sup> In this article, titled “The Soft American,” Kennedy made clear that the ease of modern life lead Americans away from fitness. He believed that only fit citizens might fight the evils of modern life and be ready to fight for democracy. Two years later, Kennedy wrote another article for *Sports Illustrated*. This article, “The Vigor We Need,” continued his earlier themes. In this informal address to the American people, he

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 120.

<sup>5</sup> K. A. Cuordileone, “‘Politics in an Age of Anxiety’: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960.” *The Journal of American History* 87 (2000): 522-526.

<sup>6</sup> John F. Kennedy, “The Soft American” *Sports Illustrated*, December 26, 1960 at <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1134750/index.htm>, accessed 02/06/2010.

reminded the people that our own history “vividly demonstrates the truth of the belief that physical vigor and health are essential accompaniments to the qualities of intellect and spirit on which a nation is built.”<sup>7</sup> Kennedy believed fitness was vital because he saw national strength as a function of the collective strength of individual citizens. If Americans grew “soft” that represented both the failure of democracy and capitalism. Put simply, “soft” Americans lost to the Communists, both figuratively and literally.

Men, alone, did not bear the responsibilities of fitness and morality. American women were key figures in creating homes and keeping families safe from the sin of communism. Women participated in fitness and sport activities throughout the Cold War. The government expected women, in fact, to be responsible for family fitness and be domestic role models. The Cold War, by itself, heightened gender awareness; and sport and fitness further contextualized terms like *masculine* and *feminine*.<sup>8</sup> Logically, if fitness became an important domestic issue during the Cold War, women, who were in charge of the family, would be central to fitness goal setting. Yet women needed to remain ladies “through and through,” especially women athletes.<sup>9</sup> Stories of fitness and sport for women often accompanied descriptions of women’s married and domestic lives.

American society assumed that athletic women, like many American women after World War II, returned to the home. Many suburban women groomed their

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<sup>7</sup> John F. Kennedy, “The Vigor We Need” *Sports Illustrated*, July, 16, 1962 at <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1074003/index.htm> accessed 02/06/2010

<sup>8</sup> Jean O’Reilly and Susan K. Cahn, Editors *Women and Sports in the United States: A Documentary Reader* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2007), 51.

<sup>9</sup> Sue Macy, *Winning Ways: A Photobiography of Women in Sports* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 102-103.

feminine qualities. Gender, or “the bundle of habits and expectations and behaviors that organize people and things according to ideas about the consequences of sexual bodies” became a static social construct during the Cold War.<sup>10</sup> An exact, unchanging notion of gender offered security to Cold War American citizens. Social expectations aside, American Cold War women did marry younger and have more children.<sup>11</sup> The government encouraged stable families, with a feminine mother, as smaller units of security and stability in this era of unease. The tensions of the Cold War “reinforced the heavily gendered themes of the experts. Some claimed that the family must stay strong for the battle against Communism.”<sup>12</sup> Immediately after World War II, this domestic ideology bolstered positive feelings of national security.<sup>13</sup>

The social-political nuances of the Cold War created contradictory attitudes toward women’s roles and abilities. Though the Cold War would not solve issues of equality in regards to women’s fitness and sports, this time-period did unexpectedly expand opportunities. The social constructs of gender during the Cold War could not change the reality of the gender-neutral nature of fitness and sport. Contrary to Cold War practice and rhetoric, “sports are games that require, nourish, and reward a variety of human qualities available to women and men.”<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, women of the Cold War learned that they could advance in competitive sport just as much as men did. As it turned out, the United States increasingly needed women to become competitive

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<sup>10</sup> Virginia Scharff, *Seeing Nature Through Gender* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), xiii.

<sup>11</sup> Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lines: American Women in the Twentieth-Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 147.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>13</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 100-101, 217, 225.

<sup>14</sup> O’Reilly and Cahn, 51.

athletes, or at least more competitive than the Soviet women. At the start of the Cold War American society attempted to contain women, especially women athletes, within rigid gender stereotypes. But ultimately, Cold War fears of losing to the Soviets forced the United States to complicate gender roles and allow women to excel at sports.

The American and Soviet people and governments began to notice women athletes during competitions, especially cultural exchanges. Cultural exchanges allowed for the United States and the Soviet Union to visit each other's country under the guise of friendship and sharing. After the death of Stalin in 1953, the Soviet Union reached out slowly to Western countries.<sup>15</sup> On January 27, 1958, Khrushchev and Eisenhower signed an agreement that set terms on "reciprocal exchanges of radio and television broadcasts, feature and documentary films, students and professors, artists and writers, scientists and agricultural experts, athletes, youth, and civic groups."<sup>16</sup> Eisenhower made US action possible through an Executive Order. By 1958, both countries desired to peer into the others but they also wanted to control the respective view. Both countries saw cultural exchanges primarily as an opportunity to regulate observations of their Cold War rival. In fact, Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles remained opposed to any Soviet-American cultural exchange agreement until he realized that exchanges allowed Soviet citizens to learn about the democratic world from the United States, rather than the Soviet government.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, Dulles believed that stimulating the Soviets' desires for consumer goods could undermine the Communist regime from the inside-

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<sup>15</sup> Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange & The Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain*. (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 153; Richmond, 15.

<sup>17</sup> Hixson, 108.

out.<sup>18</sup> Cultural exchanges provided direct contact and unofficial negotiation between two rival countries in a time of anxiety.

Both countries desired cultural exchanges as opportunities to flaunt the greatness of their citizens and the greatness of their societies. The American public supported the cultural exchanges, even while understanding the immediate political implications.<sup>19</sup> American and Soviet citizens enjoyed cultural sharing for entertainment and political reasons. Both countries wanted to display their best and brightest to the world as symbols of superiority. Government officials cared more about political and economic influence than friendship, good will or entertainment. Though cultural exchange participants might tell a different story, “national security planners ultimately discovered that cultural interaction offered an effective way to influence the evolution of the CP regimes. Through a process of gradual cultural infiltration Americans could begin to export the symbols, lifestyles, consumerism, and core political and economic values, of their society.”<sup>20</sup>

Sport competitions played an important role in the story of cultural exchange. Successful athletes proved the efficacy of American values. Athletes traveled not just between the Soviet Union and the United States, but also to smaller countries for “good will” trips. Spreading democracy became just a part of the game, for the good of sports. Yale Richmond, a retired Cold War diplomat and Cultural Officer in the US Foreign Service, posits that the ultimate collapse of the Communist regimes happened because

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>19</sup> Richmond, 19. For a discussion of using cultural exchange to decrease the impact related to armistices in Korea and Vietnam see “Thousands Study in Exchange Plan.” *New York Times*, April 8, 1955; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Hixson, xii.

of these contacts and exchanges with the West, which created Cold War victory at a fraction of the cost required for defense and intelligence aimed at the same objective.<sup>21</sup> Exchanges in the late 1950s and 1960s allowed athletes to learn more about people, and less about politics, than they expected. The United States used women athletes to export images of femininity, but soon discovered that the winning women of the Soviet Union impressed sportswriters far more than American lipstick and lace. Sport exchanges sped up the discussions of athletic abilities of women at a time when the United States, on the surface, idealized the domesticated dolls of the suburbs.

The Olympics created more opportunities for sporting competitions between the two Cold War rivals. The Olympics historically provided for play of foreign policy as much as sport. Often times a “journey towards a seat in the United Nations begins with an application for membership in the IOC.”<sup>22</sup> The Cold War world understood the political capital of sports, especially the Olympics. Historian Alfred E. Senn asserted that the “superpower rivalry gave the international athletic competition a sharp new edge.”<sup>23</sup> Most of the edgy politics took place in the Soviet-US showdown at the games, but part of it happened in the years leading up to, and in between, the games. Therefore, the Olympic Games provided opportunities to test and prove superiority to the world as well as foster good relations among smaller countries, before and after Olympic competition. Since formal agreements set the precedent that friendly exchanges included sharing, not official politics, the United States and the Soviet Union

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<sup>21</sup> Richmond, xiii.

<sup>22</sup> Barrie Houlihan, *Sports & International Politics* (New York: Harvester/ Wheatsheaf, 1994), 20.

<sup>23</sup> Alfred E. Senn, *Power, Politics, and the Olympic Games: A History of the Power Brokers, Events and Controversies that Shaped the Games* (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1999), 98.

could easily use sports to influence other countries without any real alarms.<sup>24</sup> The Soviet Union made effective use of sport as foreign policy, and laid out specific aims for securing sport supremacy, influencing neighbor countries, and maintaining the Soviet bloc.<sup>25</sup>

The political power of the Olympics definitely reached new levels when the Soviet Union first joined as a united team for the Helsinki summer games of 1952. The Soviets knew they could make an impressive showing. Thanks to their women athletes, they did. The United States' women struggled at these Olympic Games, especially in contrast to the Soviet women. Even before the Cold War, however, American women understood the importance of the Olympics for gaining attention. In some ways, the Olympic Games were more important for women, since they did not have as many collegiate or professional sport opportunities.<sup>26</sup> From previous Olympic experiences in the 1920s, American women athletes learned that "their prowess could be used to manufacture American national identities in the same way that men had."<sup>27</sup> Though the United States during the Cold War attempted to contain women with domestic roles, the genie was out of the bottle for women athletes. The United States government initially believed that exporting a national identity of superior feminine women athletes at the Olympics impressed the world. They soon realized, however, that winning required competitive women.

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<sup>24</sup> Houlihan, 203.

<sup>25</sup> James Riordan, "Soviet Sport and Soviet Foreign Policy" *Soviet Studies* 25 ((1974): 323-343, 326-340.

<sup>26</sup> Dyreson, Mark, "Icons of Liberty or Objects of Desire? American Women Olympians and the Politics of Consumption." *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38 (2003): 435-460, 441.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

Since fitness rhetoric intertwined with Cold War fears, fitness programs and opportunities for all citizens, increased throughout the country. Ultimately, the federal government created initiatives to encourage, regulate, and assess fitness levels of American schoolchildren. The US government initially viewed fitness as both a personal responsibility and right of free citizens. As such, women joined fitness ventures as role models for the whole family. In addition, fitness and sport offered women a way to maintain youth and beauty. Fewer competitive sports opportunities existed for women during the Cold War, compared to women of the previous generation. An emphasis on fitness, rather than sport, complemented Cold War domestic rhetoric. Professional women athletes that emerged in the Cold War found the press more interested in their personal lives and feminine charms than in their athletic endeavors. To rationalize their athletic endeavors, the press accentuated their domestic qualities. Athletic women might otherwise upset the feminine stereotypes that offered Cold War security. Men competed in sports as logical places for corporate men to play out capitalism, though this analysis did not create opportunities for women.

Sport competitions, especially the Olympics, offered direct competition for the Cold War rivals. The Olympics also provided propaganda opportunities for both the Soviet Union and the United States. When the Soviet Union applied to join the Olympics of 1952 as the unified team of the U.S.S.R., the American media reported sports as political and military commentary. The Summer Olympics of 1952, 1956, and 1960 provide opportunities to monitor changes in women athletes from the United States and the Soviet Union. The summer Olympics offered track and field, described as an

unfeminine sport during the Cold War. Track and field captured the attention of both countries but Americans did not generally find it an appropriate sport for women. Changes in track and field for women athletes between 1952 and 1960 exemplified the accommodations and contradictions Americans and Soviets embraced in order to emerge victorious in Cold War showdowns. Although the Americans women won fewer medals than the Soviets, the American women emerged as strong athletic contenders for the first time in 1960, as demonstrated by the increased number of gold medals. Overall Olympic victory for the United States and the Soviet Union increasingly depended on women medalists.

		Olympic Medal Counts 1952-1960 Summer Games			
		GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTALS
Helsinki 1952	US	40	19	17	76
	women	3	1	4	8
	USSR	22	30	19	71
	women	6	10	5	21
Melbourne 1956	US	32	25	17	74
	women	4	6	4	14
	USSR	37	29	32	98
	women	7	6	6	19
Rome 1960	US	34	21	16	71
	women	7	2	1	10
	USSR	43	29	31	103
	women	14	7	7	28

In the Olympics and the cultural exchange competitions, both countries discovered that they needed the women. The Americans initially felt content to notice the superior beauty of American women and the “Amazonian” features of the Soviet

<sup>28</sup> Data compiled from "International Olympic Committee" International Olympic Committee. [http://www.olympic.org/uk/index\\_uk.asp](http://www.olympic.org/uk/index_uk.asp) (accessed December 7, 2008).

factory girls. The Soviets continued to accept the powerful women on their teams because it allowed them to claim overall victory. In both exchange meets and the Olympics, the Soviets claimed victory from combined scores and the Americans claimed victory from the men's scores. If the Soviets wanted admiration for superior citizens and athletes, they needed to make sure their women were not the only reason. Likewise, if the United States wanted respect for superior women athletes, they needed to be comfortable with contradictions.

By 1960, the world of sport and fitness changed. The United States brought women athletic contenders to the Olympics. John F. Kennedy, both in person, and in politics, offered a heightened awareness of masculinity and fitness. He wrote publicly to Americans about the direct connection between physical vigor and political vitality. The pressure to be fit and competitive intensified. The desire to create Olympic athletes led to conversations about making American colleges, not private organizations and clubs, the training grounds for future Olympians. The Olympic Development Committee ultimately favored the NCAA over the AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) as the source of unofficial feeder programs for the Olympics. The Olympic Development Committee, the United States government, and many individual Americans, argued for opportunities for women. The ODC never intended to advocate for, nor create, social or athletic equity for women, but they did want to win the Cold War Olympics. In the end, opportunities for women did improve and athletic women emerged as Olympic contenders. Indirectly, the Cold War created the need for women to be more than just stereotypical wives and mothers.

American society changed during the Cold War, though the government attempted to contain and restrain women's behaviors and identities. Women athletes made rapid gains from 1950 to 1972. Rather than denying the changes that affected women athletes during the Cold War, a more useful approach to understand that progress is to examine the myriad ways in which the United States rationalized and accommodated changing roles of women and the improved abilities of women athletes. Increased consumerism, opportunities for fitness and competition, and, ironically, rigid Cold War gender roles for women, lead to changes for women in sports. By the time Title IX passed in 1972, impressive women athletes proved the need for equal access and opportunity.

## Chapter 2 Early Cold War Fitness Rhetoric

Individual citizens and the American and Soviet governments made fitness and sport constant themes of the Cold War. The superpower rivalry added to the intensity of fitness comparisons and sport competitions. For both countries, a fit citizenry reflected a viable nation. Inadequate physical capabilities of individual citizens added to Cold War anxiety. The American government attributed the perceived flabbiness of American citizens to fundamental problems created by corporate, spectator lifestyles.<sup>29</sup> American citizens of the Cold War desired security; if security for the nation resulted from a fit citizenry, most Americans wanted to do their part. As a result, women and men responded to these government fears and became fit.

For women, the Cold War offered departures and continuations from the past. As a national concern, new programs existed for women across the country. Many fitness experts, still purported that “programs for girls and women cannot be mere watered-down versions of those for men and boys... you’re dealing with a different human organism.”<sup>30</sup> Despite the presence of high profile women athletes from the 1920s to the 1950s, Cold War fitness experts posited that women should become involved in fitness in order to “feel better, look better, and have better children.”<sup>31</sup> Either way, women increasingly found new fitness opportunities. More importantly, they found justification and rationalization to improve their health and fitness in the

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<sup>29</sup> Pamela Grundy, “From Amazons to Glamazons” *The Journal of American History* 87(2000): 140.

<sup>30</sup> Bess Furman, “‘Fitness’ Program for Women Told” *New York Times (1857-Current file)*, March 23, 1945; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

Cold War. Expanded opportunities and government expectations inherently, and unintentionally, challenged the rigid gender roles of the Cold War.

Fitness for women ranged from beauty tips, to personal and family exercise, to physical education, to competitive sports. The ideal image of wife and mother expanded to include sports participation because a “suburban wife in her thirties or forties was expected to remain physically attractive, and sports were seen as one way to stay forever youthful.”<sup>32</sup> Even as the pressure to remain fit and youthful increased, domesticity, home, family, and marriage defined femininity, not athleticism.<sup>33</sup> Women, therefore, lived with contradictions and rationalizations. True, housewives flocked to YMCAs for “aids in good grooming” and to inspect new facilities like a “cabinet bath, exercycle, infra-red ray lamp, ultra-violet ray lamp, muscular stimulator, electric massager, salt glow bath, rest cots, and rowing machine.”<sup>34</sup> True, many experts defined competitive sports as masculine and believed that women’s “sports might endanger their reproductive organs.”<sup>35</sup> Yet clubs and government programs invited female participation. Americans embraced the suburban ideal of fit and beautiful women, but only to a point. In the short-term, the Cold War created new places and opportunities for women’s fitness and sport. In the long-term women positioned themselves to make arguments about access and equality.

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<sup>32</sup> Allen Guttman, *Women’s Sports: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 190.

<sup>33</sup> Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women’s Sport* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 161-162.

<sup>34</sup> “Health-O-Rama Seen As New Type of Show” *Atlanta Daily World* February 1, 1942; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *Atlanta Daily World*, 3; “YMCA Open House for Women Sunday”. *Atlanta Daily World*, November 25, 1951; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *Atlanta Daily World*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Guttman, 190.

Objectification of women athletes before the 1950s made it easy to absorb women's fitness and sport into the rhetoric of Cold War security. During the 1920s, women found increased opportunities to join competitive sports, though with clear gender limitations. In the 1920s and 1930s, sports were an "endeavor that had been central to women's earlier movement toward personal emancipation."<sup>36</sup> Women became athletes because it represented political and social change for women. The mere existence of women athletes in this 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment world did not solve issues of restrictive gender roles or equality because "as women's sports boomed during the 1920s, American culture transformed female athletes into icons of liberty [and] objects of desire."<sup>37</sup> High profile women athletes knew their fame resulted as much from their athletic feats as for their feminine marketability. This reality shaped "modern ideas about women as citizens, as athletes, and as commodities."<sup>38</sup> The 1920s set a clear precedent for Cold War women athletes: gain strength, but maintain desirability. At the start of the Cold War, many elements existed which shaped the ambiguous gender roles: commodification of women, fitness programs aimed specifically at women, and amateur and professional women athletes.

Some competitive opportunities declined in the Cold War as fitness opportunities expanded. In addition, a growing national fitness identity replaced local and community sports options for women. Many rural southern communities experienced vibrant girls' basketball programs from 1920-1950 but "during the late

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<sup>36</sup> Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 285.

<sup>37</sup> Mark Dyreson, *Making the American Team: Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience* (Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1998), 438.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 438.

1950s and early 1960s.... high school women were barred from competing in statewide tournaments, some schools cut their women's varsities entirely, and many teams that remained had their games relegated to weekday afternoons."<sup>39</sup> Cold War society not only restricted the role of women, but it also codified gender expectations across the country. National fitness programs replaced regional oddities. Girls and women saw their competitive sports sidelined and replaced with fitness classes and cheerleading. The Cold War restricted and changed women's fitness and sports opportunities, even while creating new ones. Women who persisted as athletes in this new gender-aware era challenged American's comfort level.

Amateur and professional women athletes further tested the contradictions of Cold War gender roles. In 1950, of the 10,230 professional athletes in the United States, five percent were women.<sup>40</sup> Though professional women athletes existed before the Cold War, these women increasingly found the media interested in their personal lives and feminine qualities. Amateur athletes faced the same scrutiny. When the women Olympic athletes of 1948 moved into their housing at Wimbledon, the press did not report on their chances of athletic success or training secrets. Instead, *The New York Times* said the women were disappointed with their mirrors because they "would like to have a few full-length mirrors to be able to straighten the seams of our stockings."<sup>41</sup> Even Babe Didrikson Zaharias did not escape scrutiny. After winning a British women's amateur golf championship, the newspaper spent a disproportionate amount of time

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<sup>39</sup> Grundy, 113-114

<sup>40</sup> Kathryn Jay, *More than Just a Game: Sports in American Life Since 194.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 55.

<sup>41</sup> "Women Athletes in Olympic Home" *New York Times*, July 13, 1948; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 24.

evaluating Babe's femininity. This article described her as "the Texas tomboy whose Amazonian feats have been amazing Americans for the past fifteen years... is the kind of woman who would pass up a new dress to buy a set of golf clubs."<sup>42</sup> There was a sort of good-natured humor in these descriptions of Zaharias. She got away with her unfeminine behaviors partly because she was phenomenal, and partly because she had a husband, and mostly because she achieved her feats before the Cold War changed the rules of the game. Most of the other high profile athletes needed the press. At least some did not seem to mind the objectification as models of feminine desirability.

Whereas Zaharias defied Cold War ideals without serious reproach, other professional athletes emerging in the Cold War entered with a whole new set of rules. The treatment of women athletes in the press during the Cold War was a litmus test for the repressive treatment of women in general. One professional woman athlete, in particular, submitted to gender stereotypes. The press chose not to highlight truly accomplished women athletes, and allowed Gussie (Gorgeous Gussie) Moran to steal the show. She faded from historical significance as a tennis player, but during the 1950s, she was the best-known woman player, despite being "a competitor of secondary rank who attracted frontpage coverage because of the abbreviated skirts and lace-trimmed panties she wore at major tournaments."<sup>43</sup> Yes, lace-trimmed panties made her a regular in the press, despite her mediocre record. According to one source, her panties with lace fringe set Wimbledon "buzzing" – though she claimed she just asked her

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<sup>42</sup> "Buying Clubs Instead of a Dress Sent Mrs. Zaharias to Golf Fame." *New York Times*, June 13, 1947, *The New York Times*; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 18.

<sup>43</sup> Banner, 285.

designer to “make me look more feminine.”<sup>44</sup> When her lace panties grew old, she gained the attention of the press with her tumultuous engagement.<sup>45</sup> Gorgeous Gussie Moran provided an opportunity for the press to feminize women athletes. By focusing less on her victories and more on her personal life, the press made her a star, in the modern sense of the word, and a standard for women athletes. Though many serious women athletes competed before, during, and after the Cold War, during the early 1950s, women discovered that they drew attention for their feminine attributes almost more so than their physical feats. In fact, they needed, and used, the femininity to rationalize their athletic endeavors, especially when Cold War competition heated up.

Olympic competition consistently provided opportunities and justifications for serious preparation for American women athletes. As early as 1950, Patrick Kelley, an A.A.U. Chairman, called for a concerted effort by the local association to develop woman athletes here. He cited the poor performance of United States entries in women’s track and field events at the 1948 Olympic Games.<sup>46</sup> In 1950, most Americans preferred feminine and pretty, even if it meant Olympic losses. Gorgeous Gussie still made the news, not Olympic women. International rivalry and domestic unease about losing to the Soviets at sport, eventually combined to prove that the United States needed competitive women athletes.

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<sup>44</sup> “Gorgeous Gussie’s Lace-Fringed Panties No. 1 Attraction on Wimbledon’s Courts” *New York Times*, June 21, 1949; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 33.

<sup>45</sup> “Miss Moran Takes India Tennis Title” *New York Times*, January 25, 1950; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 42.

<sup>46</sup> “Asks Better Woman Athletes” *New York Times*, October 12, 1950; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 55.

Superior women proved to Americans that the United States was a better place than the Soviet Union. The fact that women did not need to toil at jobs but could enjoy the pleasures of creating a home and family echoed throughout Cold War rhetoric, as exemplified in the famous Nixon-Khrushchev “kitchen debates.”<sup>47</sup> The Soviet Union also held that a superior people reflected a superior government and used sports and its athletes as weapons in the ideological battles of the Cold War. The Kremlin discovered that sport was “a way to demonstrate the superiority of socialist culture over that of the decadent west.”<sup>48</sup> The Soviets publicized the athletic feats of its citizens throughout the world.

Americans reacted to early news of Soviet athletic prowess with mixed opinions. Through the press, the American public learned about the Soviet Union’s All-Union Committee for Physical Culture & Sports Activities in the early 1950s.<sup>49</sup> Reports of Soviet fitness and athletic feats increased American anxieties and suspicions. While reviewing the Soviet embassy newsletter, *Christian Science Monitor* reporter, Neal Stanford, conceded that the “latest issue talks of the physical prowess of Soviet athletes – and it certainly paints an impressive picture of Soviet muscle men.”<sup>50</sup> Though Stanford believed in the ability of the Soviets, he questioned their methods. He explained that the Soviets forced “sports into a totalitarian strait jacket” and implied that a “Soviet

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<sup>47</sup> Ashbrook Center. "The Kitchen Debate, 1959." TeachingAmericanHistory.org -- Free Seminars and Summer Institutes for Social Studies Teachers. <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=176> (accessed February 4, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> John E. Findling and Kimberly D. Pelle *Encyclopedia of The Modern Olympic Movement*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 140.

<sup>49</sup> Harry Schwartz, “Stalin Trains His Olympic Teams” *New York Times*, April 20, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, SM19.

<sup>50</sup> Neal Stanfrod, “Sports- Soviet Style: an Intimate Message from Washington” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 11, 1951; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *Christian Science Monitor*, 16.

athlete must win at all costs; else he is casting discredit on the political system of the U.S.S.R.”<sup>51</sup> In reality, the Soviets knew that sport success created national identity and pride, if not Cold War victory. The Soviet government had regulated sport and fitness prior to the Cold War. The Cold War merely offered an opportunity for the Soviet Union to showcase their strength to the United States and the world.

Soviet sport programs fascinated Americans partly because of their intensity, but more importantly, due to the success of Soviet athletes. But Americans did not know how to think about the athletic Soviet women. The Soviet Union was still recovering from nearly nine million military deaths from World War II. Women offered an essential source of labor and brainpower for the rebuilding efforts of the early Cold War. Intentional or not, “the utilization of women as a major economic and political resource, however, could not help but transform the very meaning of equality” but “sexual equality ultimately came to mean an equal liability to mobilization.”<sup>52</sup> American Cold War rhetoric preferred the image of a domesticated mother compared to the image of a Soviet mother who worked and trained and brought her children to a nursery.<sup>53</sup> The Soviet Union entered the Cold War with women ready to win sport competition, since they could not afford to contain women into the restrictive roles of domestic femininity.

Initially, Americans ignored Soviet sports, but recognized that fitness of citizens mattered. When the boasts of the Soviet Union and the United States remained untested in international competition, both countries claimed superiority. The United

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 337.

<sup>53</sup> Jack Raymond, “Russians Get Ready” *New York Times*, October 14, 1956; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, SM16.

States believed in their superiority as much as the Soviets in theirs. Americans believed that fitness endeavors of free citizens represented superiority over government controlled programs of the Soviet Union. Indirect comparisons of fitness made it easy for the United States to applaud capitalism and made it easy to value a static definition of femininity and denigrate the Soviet “Amazonian” women.

Men felt pressured by gender roles as well. As some women highlighted their femininity, some men worried about diminished masculinity. Unprecedented changes in “consumption and white-collar work generated concerns about male physical fitness and vigor.”<sup>54</sup> Cold War politics and rhetoric amplified fitness concerns to the level of national emergency, so that “the state of American masculinity was so thoroughly entangled in questions of national resolve and global politics that fat became as worrisome for what it symbolized as for the health risks it augured.”<sup>55</sup> The domestic fear of an unfit American citizenry offered a direct demerit to capitalism and the United States. The more the United States government learned about the fitness of the Soviet Union, the less it trusted the American citizens.

In this time of emergency, the American government issued an official response. President Eisenhower created a new council on Youth Fitness in 1956 and appointed members of his cabinet to the committee. Originally, Eisenhower believed that the US did not need an “over-riding federal program” to improve mental and physical health of

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<sup>54</sup> K.A. Cuordileone, “‘Politics in an Age of Anxiety’: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960.” *The Journal of American History* 87 (2000): 525-526.

<sup>55</sup> Berrett, 809.

the nation's youth.<sup>56</sup> Eisenhower emphasized that "fitness programs should begin in the home and should be participated in by all members of the family."<sup>57</sup> The impetus for Eisenhower's program came from Cold War fears- and medical and fitness tests started in the early 1950s that continually reported that Americans lagged behind European youngsters.<sup>58</sup> By 1952, family fitness became a government concern. Women joined the fitness craze, by executive invitation. A few years later, Eisenhower appointed Dr. Shane McCarthy as head of the council on Youth Fitness. McCarthy took a more direct approach. He never shied from identifying the problem, enlisting help, and offering solutions. McCarthy claimed the "United States was becoming a nation of softies because of 'buttons, dials, gadgets' and 'overprotecting parents.'"<sup>59</sup>

McCarthy added to his team a man named Avery Brundage. Brundage built a lifetime of careers around amateur sport, with the A.A.U. and later as International Olympic Committee President. Brundage accepted McCarthy's invitation to be involved in the US Council on Youth Fitness. In a personal letter of acceptance to McCarthy, Brundage wrote, "For sixty years, the Olympic Committee has been preaching the importance to any country of a national program of physical training and competitive sports, in developing stronger and healthier boys and girls, and as a result better citizens, and in promoting international good will. Ironically the Communist countries

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<sup>56</sup> Leonard Buder, "Eisenhower Acts on Youth Fitness" *New York Times*, October 14, 1956; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, SM16.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Dorothy Barclay, "Accenting the 'Physical' in Fitness" *New York Times*, October 25, 1959; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, SM70.

<sup>59</sup> "Push-Button Softies Accused of Making us Softies" *New York Times*, May 3, 1958; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 3.

that have adopted such programs are pursuing them with great success.”<sup>60</sup> Brundage believed that sports represented physical and ideological strength. Brundage, like many anxious Americans, noticed that the Soviets had started down the path of fitness for all citizens long before the United States.

Americans grew increasingly aware of the Soviets and their fitness claims. The American government worried about a direct test of its citizens. Physical fitness signified a strong country and ready citizenry. So the United States government encouraged whole families to enlist in physical activity, in the name of national security. Yet improving fitness for women carried potentially contradictory consequences. The US government seemed to put aside gender contradictions without thought to any consequence, other than besting the Soviets.

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<sup>60</sup> “Avery Brundage to Shane McCarthy” June 26, 1958, *Box 333, U.S.O.C., 1947, 1950-52, 1955-56, Avery Brundage Archives at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

### Chapter 3 Getting Hotter

Sports competitions added heat to the Cold War. The Soviet Union applied to join the 1952 Summer Games in Helsinki after missing the Olympics for forty years. Commentators at the time as well as historians later, understood the athletic and political significance of the Soviet entry. The Russians had competed in the 1912 Olympics at Stockholm and then did not mention Olympic competition until 1951. In 1951, the Soviets initiated procedures to qualify for competition in the 1952 Games. Though some observers at the Vienna meeting in 1951 suspected Soviet Russia of “ulterior political motive,” most acknowledged that “the Russians believed they have produced the best athletes in the world and are confident of making an excellent showing.”<sup>61</sup> In order to compete in the Games, countries needed to accept Olympic rules governing amateur athletic status and create an internal agency to communicate with the International Olympic Committee. The Soviet Union created the Russian Olympic Committee in Soviet Sports from within their already existing committee for Physical Culture and Sport.<sup>62</sup> This action told the world that the Soviets wanted to enter the Olympics, that they were well prepared, and most importantly, “the Kremlin does not expect a world war by 1952.”<sup>63</sup>

The looming Helsinki Olympics increased Cold War anxieties for Americans nervous about losing to the Soviets. Sportswriters became unofficial political commentators. American pride and Cold War fear spilled from the pens of sports

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<sup>61</sup> Richard Mowrer, “Soviets Bowed to Olympic Rules to Gain Admittance” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 8, 1951; ProQuest Historical Newspapers; *Christian Science Monitor*, 9.

<sup>62</sup> “Reds Apply: Russia to Compete in 1952 Olympic Games” *Los Angeles Times*, April 25, 1951; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, C1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* See also Avery Brundage Archives Papers

analysts. The first sportswriter to win a Pulitzer, Arthur Daley, publicized the loudest and longest about the Soviets, especially the women athletes. Daley, among others understood the significance of sports to the Cold War. Before the Helsinki Games, he explained the “Russian enigma” which perplexed political and military experts for decades, might be unraveled by sportswriters.<sup>64</sup> He faithfully postulated about sports, communism, and women, with the tone of an expert, throughout the Cold War.

All the way around, the Helsinki Olympics made good press. Political implications bounced around every sports update. Whatever their motives the Soviet entry meant that sportswriters and Americans followed the Helsinki Olympics “with a more intense popular interest than any since the modern Olympics” because “national and ideological prestige” factored into every event.<sup>65</sup> Before the Games began, Americans questioned the Soviets’ talent and motives. Daley shared Americans’ fears when he asked, “What does it mean? The Red brothers are so devious and have such ulterior motives for everything they do that their official acceptance of the Helsinki bid the other day cannot be greeted in normal fashion. This isn’t just another sports-loving nation joining fellow sportsmen. This is the Soviet Union where the Kremlin controls muscles just as it controls thoughts.”<sup>66</sup> Daley believed that Soviet politics and values contradicted with sports. He also reflected Cold War fears of the United States. Soviet victory would not just mean gold medal, but also, ideological superiority. The Soviet Union embraced the

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<sup>64</sup> Arthur Daley, “Sports of the Times: The Olympic Enigma” *New York Times*, July 16, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers; *The New York Times*, 29.

<sup>65</sup> “Olympic Omens” *The Washington Post*, February 16, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Washington Post*, 6.

<sup>66</sup> Arthur Daley, “Sports of the Times: What Does It Mean?” *New York Times*, January 8, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 32.

opportunity to use sport for diplomatic purposes and the United States used the games as a new angle for public scrutiny of the Soviets.<sup>67</sup> Sportswriters questioned the government, society, motives, and athletes. Rather than solicit funds through clubs and organizations, athletes appealed to Americans for direct contributions; Americans responded in record numbers in order to beat the Soviets.<sup>68</sup> Americans believed that Olympic victory represented political and social superiority and agreed with one sportswriter who claimed that Soviet victory “would give the Russkis too much to brag about, and keeping them shy in that department could do much for the peace of the world.”<sup>69</sup> Victories reverberated beyond the finish line and into diplomatic arenas. Sportswriters recognized the power and potential danger of the games through their commentary. The Olympics were not quite the hyperbolic “powder keg” of some claims, but true to Cold War fears, Helsinki stacked “athletes and ideologies so close together the conflict could spread beyond the playing fields.”<sup>70</sup> Either way, neither country wanted to lose.

The mediation of the International Olympic Committee reduced any real threat of open Cold War conflict. The Russians accepted and abided by IOC standards so for “whatever the motives” the Olympics became a “better- or safer- place to let off any

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<sup>67</sup> Irina Makoveeva, “Soviet Sports as a Cultural Phenomenon: Body and/ or Intellect” *Studies in Slavic Culture* <http://www.pitt.edu/~slavic/sisc/SISC3/makoveeva.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> Shirley Povich “This Morning” *The Washington Post*, January 8, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Washington Post*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Shirley Povich “This Morning” *The Washington Post*, July 11, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Washington Post*, 26.

surplus patriotic fever.”<sup>71</sup> Americans prepared to rationalize defeat in some ways too. They acknowledged that the Soviet Union would do anything to make an impression on the world.<sup>72</sup> Americans hypothesized that the Soviets played by different rules. Even though the Soviet Union adhered to amateur status rules for the Olympics, Americans questioned the training of Soviet athletes, especially the women. One sportswriter wrote fervently about Soviet society. He educated Americans to the true methods of the Soviets. He claimed that the “Reds” created special elementary schools that catered only to outstanding athletic prospects and colleges that focused on sports, not academic achievements.<sup>73</sup> Americans wanted to believe that capitalism and democracy were the most fertile ground for sports successes. Americans wanted to believe that neither Soviets, nor communism, could prevail at sports- or best the United States- at any endeavor.

Women created the kink in United States sport supremacy. Going into the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, the United States accepted the possibility of the defeat because of the US women. The United States wanted to claim superiority, but not at the expense of diminished femininity. Most sports fans accepted that the Soviet women would prevail at Helsinki “especially in the field events” and understood sportswriters’ descriptions of

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<sup>71</sup> “Russia at the Olympics” *New York Times*, April 26, 1951; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 28. See also: Eddy Gilmore, “Medal Awards to Athletes May Get Russia in Olympics” *The Washington Post*, July 13, 1947; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Washington Post*, C3.

<sup>72</sup> Eddy Gilmore, (former sportswriter and present chief of the Moscow Bureau of the Associated Press) “Doubt Over Russia in Olympics Rises” *New York Times*, June 1, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, S8.

<sup>73</sup> Pat Robinson, “The Sports Grill” *Atlanta Daily World*, May 1, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *Atlanta Daily World*, 7.

the Soviet women as “big strapping gals, built along the lines of a 10-ton truck. And they are used to doing manual labor alongside men.”<sup>74</sup>

Before the inaugural Cold War Olympic showdown, Americans, hypothetically, accepted women’s losses. They believed that superior and feminine women could not also be competitive athletes, as evidenced by Gorgeous Gussie. After 1952, Americans faced growing anxiety and contradictions. In track and field, the center of the Summer Olympics, American women proved deficient to the Soviets. These failings posed an acute problem for US politicians, sports leaders, and a patriotic public “because the Soviet women overpowered the Americans by so much that they threatened overall US Olympic victory.”<sup>75</sup> Feminine beauties did not always make competitive winners. Both American and Soviet athletes wanted to outperform each other, in part because the performance of an athlete symbolized more than just athletic prowess. Sport and fitness, wrapped in gendered rhetoric, made tangible the Cold War ideological claims of national superiority.

The pressure on women athletes to be both feminine and athletically successful increased. The Soviets knew their women were the key to victory- and so did the United States. The American press accentuated the masculinity of the Soviets and flaunted the femininity of American women athletes. The American press and public confronted the realities and constructs of gender because of women athletes and discovered that femininity no longer won the ideological battle of the Olympic Games. Athleticism ultimately challenged femininity. Initially, American coaches and athletes

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Cahn, 131.

used femininity to claim moral and social victories over the Soviet Union. Female Olympians, as a result, felt both competitive and social pressure. The women on the US team followed a dress code and conformed to standards of modesty, even as they flaunted their femininity and tried to win Gold.<sup>76</sup> Sportswriters who covered the 1952 Olympics reported on feminine characteristics of women athletes. The Soviet women of the track and field events presented the biggest counterpoint to the idealized American woman because of their bodies and abilities. In fact, Arthur Daley reported that the Soviets could be beat in all areas except “women’s track, where their Amazons really are top-flight.”<sup>77</sup> Known sports columnists put regular authorship to articles about Soviet women track and field stars. If the US lost the Olympics, they penned collectively, the credit- or blame- belonged to these unfeminine women. Inevitably, Soviet women topped the American women. One writer offered a Soviet explanation. After conceding the superiority of Soviet women athletes, he explained, “much of this prowess stems from the fact that in the Soviet Union women work side by side with men as miners, ditch diggers, stevedores, and in similar occupations where brawn is a primary requirement.”<sup>78</sup> Of course, to Americans, the Soviet women athletes merely reflected the flawed role of women in Soviet society. Therefore, not much credit needed to be heaped on the women. Sportswriters used Cold War gender rhetoric to concede defeat

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<sup>76</sup> David Maraniss, *Rome 1960: The Olympics that Changed the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 74-75.

<sup>77</sup> Arthur Daley, “Sports of the Times” *New York Times*, January 8, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 32.

<sup>78</sup> Harry Schwartz, “Stalin Trains His Olympic Teams” *New York Times*, April 20, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, SM19.

and claim the ideological high ground. The underlying message the sportswriter offered was that American women did not need to toil at manual labor in our superior society.

Though the US prevailed in the overall medal count at Helsinki, the Soviets made an impressive showing, and sportswriters qualified the close victory. One regular sportswriter explained to an awed public “these 1952 Games wouldn’t even have been close between Russia and the United States save for the almost complete dominance of the Russian women in the heftier field events and the gymnastics.”<sup>79</sup> After minimizing the gymnastic wins as less important than the men’s decathlon, he also pointed out that “in the non-bicep division, though, in the more graceful swimming and diving events where feminine form counts more than feminine muscle, the American girls were all-conquering.”<sup>80</sup> At Helsinki, the American women’s losses to Soviet athletes did not exacerbate Cold War anxieties. American women athletes remained feminine, superior, losers. At Helsinki, the first Soviet-US Cold War Olympic showdown, winning women athletes mattered less to the US than maintaining an abstract social idea of femininity.

Experiences at Helsinki, however, slowly started to expose the limitations of Cold War gender stereotypes. Americans encountered beautiful and friendly Soviet women athletes, one in particular named Nina Dumbadze, who could also reign on the track. The Soviet women athletes came prepared to win on all Cold War fronts- social and athletic. Nina Dumbadze proved that strategy. She was not only the world-record holder

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<sup>79</sup> Shirley Povich, “This Morning” *The Washington Post*, August 4, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Washington Post*, 8.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

in the discus throw, but also “attractive by any standards.”<sup>81</sup> Reportedly a busload of Soviet track athletes unexpectedly visited the American camp at the Helsinki Olympic Village (Soviets did not stay in the same village at Helsinki). Athletes and photographers swarmed Nina, “a powerfully-built housewife” who wore “rouge and lipstick and pencils her eyebrows in approved Fifth Avenue fashion.”<sup>82</sup>

The fascination with the Soviet women continued to grow after the Olympics concluded. The United States sports world continued to follow the Soviet women athletes. After Helsinki, American and international Olympic figures debated the role of women at the Olympics. In 1953, the IOC President, Avery Brundage openly protested against women’s events at the Olympics, suggesting that track and field events, especially were not feminine.<sup>83</sup> Nonetheless, Soviet women continued to train and Americans remained interested. One female writer took a trip to Russia to visit with Miss Zibina, the shot-put winner at the Helsinki Games. Miss Zibina, described as tall with disproportionately large and masculine hands, told the reporter that Western women were “fragile.”<sup>84</sup> The report intended to de-legitimize Soviet training as government-driven, but the reporter wrote mostly about Zibina. This reporter’s eagerness to learn about Soviet women athletes partially reflected a desire to train American women who could compete with them. Her critique of the Soviet athlete as

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<sup>81</sup> “Russia’s Track Queen is Big But She’s Damn Good Looking.” *The Washington Post*, July 17, 1952; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Washington Post*, 14.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Cahn, 132 as seen in Avery Brundage Collection, Box 70, circular letters to IOC’s, NOC’s and IF’s, 1952-1954, University of Illinois Archives.

<sup>84</sup> Marguerite Higgins, “Sports Craze Gains Among Russians, Athletes Practice for Hours Daily” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, December 17, 1954; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Washington Post*, 8.

masculine represented her critique of Soviet society as well. Commentary on women athletes during the Cold War was always one-part sports, preceded by two parts social commentary.

Excuses and rationalizations closely followed poignant social commentary about women athletes. As preparations for the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games began, the United States again conceded victory in women's track and field. Commentary continued to indict the Soviet Union and justify American losses. One article, which started with a sarcastic call to screen factories and industrial plants for women athletes, offered a critique of Soviet society.<sup>85</sup> Yet the same article, in seriousness, quoted the US Olympic Committee director as he lamented that "it so happens we just don't have the means for developing women's teams. High schools and colleges don't go in for women's track."<sup>86</sup> The USOC started to show concern about women's track and field losses. This concern reflected a growing challenge to Cold War femininity. When it came to Olympic victory, it seemed, Americans were beginning to bend the roles.

Women athletes, on both sides of the "iron curtain", gained attention. American femininity provided shelter for American women to lose- and strangely, improve. The American team and sportswriters could always use the Soviets' women athletes as the feminine foil for the increasingly athletic American women athletes. Then the United States could continue to claim ideological superiority until they figured out how to

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<sup>85</sup> "Factory Girls Urged in Olympics" *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, May 13, 1956; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Washington Post*, C8.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

defeat the Soviets.<sup>87</sup> Americans claimed victory from the men's competition and superior femininity, but started to set their sights on complete victory. The press, leading up to the 1956 Melbourne Olympics employed the constant theme of focusing on femininity to claim victory. Yet, the American women went to compete, including famous athletes like US Olympic diver, Patricia McCormick. After acknowledging that gold medals were the quest of the "gals," one sportswriter flaunted the victory of US beauty. He described the "Soviet musclemen" as "big-limbed, hard-faced girls, with legs and biceps of an all-America full back."<sup>88</sup> He believed the American "gals'" body measurements deserved a medal too. When he described the American discus contender, he explained, "even if you look closely, you won't see the muscles of young Pamela Kurrell bulging under her sleeves. They don't bulge. Pamela is a discus thrower very different in appearance from Russia's leading discus thrower. Russia's 27-year-old Nina Ponomareva, is large, some 210 pounds. Pamela, 17, weighs in at only 129 pounds and is 5 feet 2. Pamela is feminine-looking. She wears her hair in a pony-tail. But she's all athlete."<sup>89</sup> Though the emphasis of American ideological victory remained on feminine qualities, American women increasingly found room to identify themselves as athletes.

Inevitably, Americans could not claim ideological victory from femininity without some tangible medals to complement the rhetoric, especially when sport and fitness were essential to the ideologies of both countries. To put it succinctly, "to Americans

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<sup>87</sup> Cahn, 132-133.

<sup>88</sup> Bill Jauss, "U.S. Girls Add Beauty to Olympic Games" *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, November 11, 1956; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Washington Post*, C3.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

expecting to be number one, excuses about unfemininity sounded lame.”<sup>90</sup> Ultimately, Americans wanted to claim complete victory. Though beautiful women satisfied Cold War domestic rhetoric, Americans could not indefinitely sustain international claims to superiority without gold medals. Olympic defeat by Soviet track and field stars spurred the Americans to recognize the capabilities of women in sports. The Olympics offered an excuse to challenge the gender rules of the Cold War femininity at a time of otherwise widespread domestic conformity. At the same time, when American women athletes succumbed to feminine and domestic rhetoric, they discovered a lot more room to improve their athletic abilities, in the name of Cold War victory, of course.

Sports created an excuse for women athletes to compete and offered the Cold War rivals a venue to compare ideologies. In between the Olympics, American and Soviet athletes used cultural exchange opportunities to trial-run Olympic competition. The press subjected women athletes to gender expectations and athletes continued to compete and develop. The government chose the desire to peer inside the Soviet Union and “educate” the Soviets to American values over the desire to confine women athletes to the home. The Cold War provided increased opportunities for women to become competitive athletes, as good-will ambassadors of American values.

Women athletes realized that if they emphasized their feminine qualities, sports opportunities abounded. In an article which featured a women’s basketball team preparing to travel to Russia, the women, and the male coach, played along with Cold War rhetoric. The reporter described Coach John Head as a “tactful coach” who used his

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<sup>90</sup> Mary Jo Festle, *Playing Nice: Politics and Apologies in Women’s Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 89.

“suave diplomacy” to coach “beguiling” women.<sup>91</sup> Most likely, any career basketball coach negotiated a playbook more frequently than he did a women’s etiquette guide. At least publicly, though, the women athletes also took the cue to emphasize their femininity, especially if they expected to lose to the Soviet women. When questioned, these “small-hipped” athletes explained, “we all have plenty of dates and meet many boys. We travel and love to play basketball. We don’t want to play forever, however. Like everybody else, we want to get married.”<sup>92</sup> Cold War anxiety caused the country to follow the same cue card. If women embraced the feminine stereotype, which offered domestic security, they found a lot more latitude to participate in sports. African-American women found increased opportunities in the same manner. *Jet Magazine* described the female baseball player, Toni Stone as a “lady through and through.”<sup>93</sup> In 1954, Ed Temple followed this lead with his women track athletes. Temple was a coach for college, national and Olympic teams and an African-American man, coaching many African-American women track and field athletes. He rushed the athletes from the finish line to the locker room to apply make-up before facing reporters.<sup>94</sup> He negotiated the complicated terrain of Cold War and Civil Rights politics. He understood that embracing the security of Cold War femininity allowed for the advance of women athletes.

Ed Temple made the news as an AAU coach with his cultural exchange track teams. Cultural exchange competitions offered a unique opportunity for many athletes. These Soviet-US competitions manifested many of the social and political forces of the

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<sup>91</sup> Gary Talese, “Tactful Coach Taking Girls’ Quintent to Russia” *New York Times*, April 18, 1958; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 30.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Macy, 102-103.

<sup>94</sup> Cahn, 133.

1950s and 1960s. Even though the competitions existed for official political purposes such as the sharing of ideas and fostering of friendship, neither the Soviet nor the American public wanted to lose the track meets. Once again, though, Cold War politics offered the perfect cover for women athletes. Even as the American public praised the women for their femininity, women emerged as great athletes too. One of the U.S. “squad’s field-event hopes to upset the Russians” at a 1958 meet was Earlene Brown.<sup>95</sup> The press made sure to emphasize that the American women were the underdogs, but on the rise, thanks to Ed Temple and Earlene Brown. The writer described Earlene Brown as “the oldest and heaviest of the squad (she’s 226 pounds)” and “the mother of a 2 ½ year old son.”<sup>96</sup> Earlene Brown represented a shift in the press to accepting physically strong women on the track team. The press noted her physical qualities, but with little indictment- because she represented potential American victory.

Many sports commentators acknowledged the significance of the meets as a part of Cold War politics and rhetoric. If they mentioned the women, the objective of reporters was not to promote equal opportunities for women athletes. When women competed, however, the press took note. The press usually prepared for the defeat of US women by preparing ideological and moral arguments about women as athletes. If American women won, sportswriters needed to employ new, oftentimes, contradictory strategies. One regular sportswriter, a man named Shirley Povich, explained that the American “girls” did not stand a chance against the Soviet women. He contrasted the

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<sup>95</sup> Deane McGowen, “U.S. Girls’ Team Drills for Meet in Russia.” *New York Times*, July 16, 1958; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 34.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

Russian “babes” and the American “lasses.” He forecasted that “the American lasses may hold their own and even show an edge in the running events but in the javelin, the discus and the shot put the powerful Soviet damsels have bigger muscles in what Slenderette would call the wrong places.”<sup>97</sup> No matter how the press described women, women competed. If American women lost, the US press claimed ideological victory, due to our superior femininity. When American women won, however, the physical characteristics became a part of a background story, not the cause. Cultural exchange meets offered official friendship and sharing and unofficially provided gains and changes for women athletes.

For competitions about friendship and sharing, the point scoring caused quite a stir, and women athletes landed in the middle of the controversy. Like the Olympics, the Soviet cultural exchange teams combined men’s and women’s victories to claim overall victory. From 1958-1964, the same story ran in the sports pages: how to decide the winning team of the US-Soviet track meets.<sup>98</sup> Both countries used politics to garner great press for sports. In turn, sports became politics. One US reporter proved that politics and sports often mingled as he explained that in the United States, “The equal but separate doctrine has been pretty well demolished in other areas, but Ike could tell

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<sup>97</sup> Shirley Povich, “This Morning” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, July 16, 1959; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Washington Post*, D1.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.; “Moscow Raises 2 Posers: How We Train, How They Count.” *New York Times*, July 30, 1958; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 25.; “Who Won Meet? Russians Hedge” *New York Times*, July 17, 1961; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 15.; “U.S. Track Coach Willing to Total Men’s Women’s Points in Soviet Meet.” *New York Times*, July 17, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 46.; Frank Litsky “U.S. Trackmen Gain Most Decisive Victory in 6 Meets with Soviet, 139-97” *New York Times*, July 27, 1964; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 24.

Khru that in track-event point scoring we are still finicky about it.”<sup>99</sup> Sport and fitness victories reflected a strong citizenry and fit, Cold War society. Track victories represented Cold War victory. Both countries wanted to report victory and twisted the results to accomplish the right press.

When victory on the track failed, the press claimed ideological victory. One American paper, in fact, reported that the Soviet Union was ashamed of victories because of their women. Since the United States women did not beat the Soviet women for overall victory, the strategy to discredit the Soviet Union lead one reporter to write, “*Izvestia*, the Soviet Union’s government newspaper, told Russian athletes and coaches today that it’s time they [Soviet men] quit riding the apron strings of the women athletes.”<sup>100</sup> Women became central figures in Cold War rhetoric. Realistically, women also became integral to track competitions. Though American officials or politicians never supported the idea, at least one American track and field coach, Payton Jordan, advocated combining the scores. He was confident they could win with the women athletes.<sup>101</sup> Even if the AAU director or cultural exchange administrators did not support this, American coaches started to realize the potential of women in the United States to become competitive athletes. The coaches and athletes wanted to win the meet, not just the ideological battle. Depictions of women athletes from Helsinki and cultural exchange meets personified many of the ambiguities of Cold War women. At times, the press admired the beauty, alone, of American women athletes. In time, the press even

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<sup>99</sup> Shirley Povich, “This Morning” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, July 29, 1958; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Washington Post*, A18.

<sup>100</sup> “Soviet Male Athletes Told to Quit ‘Riding Women’s Apron Strings.’” *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1958; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *Los Angeles Times*, C6.

<sup>101</sup> “U.S. Track Coach Willing to Total Men’s Women’s Points I Soviet Meet,” 46.

accepted the increased physical strength and appearance of individual women, like Earlene Brown. Often the press exaggerated the masculine features of Soviet women athletes. Collectively, women athletes, as ambassadors of political values and friendship, found themselves involved, observed, and recognized in sports. Cultural exchange competitions provided hypothetically politically neutral places for athletes. When the Olympics returned for the 1960 Rome Games, women awakened the imaginations of Cold War citizens even more.

## Chapter 4 Unintended Consequences

No matter the political importance of cultural exchange and Olympic competitions, for individual athletes, these competitions represented opportunities. Athletes discovered sport, fame, friendship, and love. Cold War governments never predicted that love could cause an international incident. The political climate and personalities of the 1960s intensified, and changed, fitness and sport rhetoric of the Cold War, to further challenge American citizens to succeed. Women across the country, and the world clamored for, and some achieved, recognition at local, state, national, and Olympic levels of athletic competitions. In the 1960s, women across the country grew politically aware and active. The American women were true athletic contenders. Though women athletes did not always see themselves as political agents, they were visible at the right time. The opening ceremonies and competition of the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome awakened the world to the stereotypes of Cold War women. Becoming Olympic contenders never translated into the creation of equal programs for women. In a time of anxiety, political moves caused unintended consequences.

At the Melbourne Olympics in 1956, a Soviet woman discus thrower, Olga Connolly, fell in love with an American male discus thrower. Their story of engagement, marriage, and life evolved within the context of Cold War tension. Connolly recorded and published her memories in 1968 in her book, *The Rings of Destiny: The True Story of Two Olympic Champions Whose Romance Transcended the Iron Curtain and Became an International Incident*. These Olympic lovers also participated as representatives of their country on cultural exchange good will tours. Eventually the logistics of their romance

and marriage drew the attention and scrutiny of top government officials in both countries. While Olga pleaded for release and marital permission from the President of Czechoslovakia, the American press asked Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, what “the United States was doing to help Harold Connolly in his efforts to marry Olga Fikotova.”<sup>102</sup> In 1958, track meet promoters invited both athletes to participate throughout Scandinavia and Germany but the Czechoslovakian government refused Olga’s request to compete and neither “were allowed to compete on Czechoslovak soil.”<sup>103</sup> By 1959, Olga and Harold welcomed their first child of four, a son, and in 1960 Olga became a US citizen. In the concluding thoughts of her memoir, Olga wrote, “we see the splendor of the Olympic movement in its offer of hope that if men will summon the courage to find one another, despite the barriers between them, they will discover they can compete with honor and live with peace.”<sup>104</sup> Olga and Harold’s story was more than just a quaint love story of Cold War Olympians. Their love story captured the attention of Americans and Soviets. Contact between athletes conspired against the efforts of the two rival governments to use sports as political battlegrounds. Athletes found, despite the press and the political posturing, that athletes of the world possessed more commonalities than differences. Though the government intended that athletes display the best and the brightest to the world through cultural exchange and Olympic competitions, the results varied. Athletes discovered that athletic prowess, femininity, politics, and daily life did not depend so much on politics and Cold War rhetoric. Though

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<sup>102</sup> Olga Connolly, *The Rings of Destiny: The True Story of Two Olympic Champions Whose Romance Transcended the Iron Curtain and Became an International Incident* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc, 1968), 243-245.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

the Cold War provided the opportunities, athletic sharing resulted in public examination of the policies governing athletics and women in both the United States and the Soviet Union. Cultural exchanges created some unintended friendships, as well as social and political discoveries.

The Soviets displayed a willingness to examine the athletic development strategies of the United States. This allowed them to prepare defenses against American attacks. When asked about their younger looking basketball team at the start of the Rome Olympics, a representative explained, "We have taken a tip from the United States- we are using schoolboys now, much faster."<sup>105</sup> The stereotypes of the Cold War grew more illegitimate when challenged. The Soviet Union showed that their athletes were more than just burly factory workers. Sports no longer represented war, but everyday life. Soviet foreign policy of the 1960s changed so that it "emphasized the development of friendly relations with the world, rather than aggressively promoting Soviet supremacy through competition....During the 1960s sports as metaphor for everyday life temporarily displaced the metaphor of war."<sup>106</sup> The Soviets desired to adopt the façade of greatness. In other words, Soviet victory at the Olympics seemed more impressive if it did not result from the repressive state-run programs. Casual athletic victories also satisfied American queries into amateur status of the Soviet athletes and challenged Americans' flat descriptions of Soviet politics and society. Cold War rhetoric constructed, confused, and reflected reality.

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<sup>105</sup> "Well-Dressed Olympic Team, Including a 7-Foot 3-Inch Basketball Player" *New York Times*, August 16, 1960; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 33.

<sup>106</sup> Makoveeva, 19.

Just as the Soviets seemed to ease up on militaristic fitness rhetoric, the United States intensified its sports rhetoric. The intensity reflected social and political changes of the 1960s. President Kennedy provided his youthful leadership to this new action-oriented American culture. Kennedy both encapsulated and implemented a masculine ideology to justify his, and the nation's claim to power.<sup>107</sup> His writing in *Sports Illustrated* left no doubt about the connection between physical health and political viability. He believed that individual citizens needed to be as responsible as the government. He explained, "the strength of our democracy and our country is really not greater in the final analysis than the well-being of our citizens. The vigor of our country, its physical vigor and energy, is going to be no more advanced, no more substantial, than the vitality and will of our countrymen."<sup>108</sup> In other words, if the United States failed, it was due to the collective failure of citizens to prepare physically. Kennedy believed that physical readiness translated into Cold War readiness. In 1962, he wrote a second article in *Sports Illustrated* to highlight the point that "the health of the people is really the foundation upon which all their happiness and all their powers as a State depend."<sup>109</sup> Kennedy tapped into existing physical fitness programs and commitments from previous administrations. He merely added his personality to emphasize the accountability of individual citizens. Kennedy also made a much more direct connection between physical

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<sup>107</sup> Robert D. Dean, "Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Policies of Foreign Policy" *Diplomatic History* (Volume 22 (1), Winter 1998, 29-62), 29.

<sup>108</sup> James Feron, "Fitness of Youths Urged by Kennedy" *New York Times*, July 20, 1961; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 1.

<sup>109</sup> John F. Kennedy, "The Vigor We Need" *Sports Illustrated*, July 16, 1962, *SI Vault*, CNN 2008 <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1074003/index.htm>, March 8, 2010

and political viability. Cold War preparation required both physical and political strength.

American women were not immune from the national call to become more active and involved. Olympic defeats motivated women to answer the call of Cold War fitness and competition. Though the US tried to highlight femininity, many people still wanted real Olympic victory from American women athletes. In 1958, shortly “after the defeat in 1956, the United States created a U.S. Olympic Development Committee, including a Women’s Advisory Board to brainstorm possible solutions for improving women’s performances; some efforts included promoting participation for all girls and women throughout schools in the country”.<sup>110</sup> In 1960, Doris Duke Cromwell, heir to the Duke Tobacco fortune, and competitive swimmer, donated \$500,000 to the USOC to promote women’s sports.<sup>111</sup> The money and the attention for developing women’s sport needed justification. The losses, especially to the Soviets, justified the American transition away from “the belief that women should play sports for fun and not for competition.”<sup>112</sup> Olympic events for women increased throughout the 1960s and 1970s and the “the Soviet bloc’s lock on women’s field events may have influenced the IOC to increase the number of medals to be won in a sport still dominated by the West.”<sup>113</sup> The Cold War created changes and improvements in women’s opportunities and efforts. The American media expressed similar sentiments. As one sport historian observed, “before the Cold War many journalists who opposed women’s track and field just

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<sup>110</sup> Festle, 89; Jay, 56.

<sup>111</sup> Jay, 57.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>113</sup> Guttman, 204.

ignored it. But the Soviet threat to American athletic superiority demanded a response.”<sup>114</sup> True, American women later needed to lobby to gain equal access and opportunity throughout the nation, but when it came to beating the Soviets, the American government responded too. The United States did not want to lose to the Soviets at another Olympic Games and prepared American women for the 1960 showdown in Rome.

One group of women concerned about women’s athletics set aside the rhetoric of Cold War rivalry to join to improve women’s participation at the Olympics. In August of 1960

a Russian, an Australian and a United States sports leader, said that women athletes are ‘sick to death’ of being treated as poor stepsisters in the Olympic games. They announced plans for an all-out campaign to give women a voice on the inner councils of the International Olympic Committee. No woman ever has been allowed on the International Olympic Committee, despite the fact that one out of every eight athletes in the games is a woman. . . the U.S. Committee have virtually posted a sign saying ‘no women allowed.’<sup>115</sup>

Women realized their respective countries needed them for victory in the Olympics and used that to justify improved access. Women realized that the Cold War and Olympic competition created opportunities but also recognized that joining forces improved their chances of success.

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<sup>114</sup> Cahn, 132.

<sup>115</sup> “Sports Gals Clamor for a Voice in the Olympic Games” *Daily Defender*, August 31, 1960; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The Chicago Defender*, 15.

The 1960 Olympic Games at Rome also brought more than one surprise to the world. The surprises started at the Olympic Village and with the opening ceremonies. The Russians, exasperated with inaccurate caricatures of their athletic women, delivered women who could best the Americans in femininity. The Russian dolls stole the show. Less important to the media, they stole Olympic victory too. From the start, the Soviet athletes appeared different. Rather than stay in their own quarters outside the Olympic Village, as the Soviet athletes did during the 1952 Olympics, the Soviets joined the Olympic Village in Rome. One observer noted that not only did they join, but the Soviets also offered friendly greetings to their neighbors and “forgot to ring down the iron curtain.”<sup>116</sup> Americans noticed their fashion too: the men came dressed in immaculate blue slacks and jackets and the women “wore beige suits, hose and high-heeled brown pumps. Many of them had on lipstick.”<sup>117</sup>

When the Russian women marched into the opening ceremonies, they kept that notable lipstick. Sports pages across the country shared the awe caused by the opening ceremonies. Most newspapers ran the same description. When the Russians entered there was a gasp of surprise” because “Moscow had sent to Rome something that would not suffer from comparisons with New York’s Rockettes. The Russian Gals: 1. Wore red pumps with pointed toes and needle heels two inches tall. 2. Wore billowing white skirts, about knee length 3. A neckline that was not exactly plunging but certainly was poised on the diving board ready to jump 4. They walked as though they had spent 10 years of training in

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<sup>116</sup> “Well-Dressed Olympic Team, Including a 7-Foot 3-Inch Basketball Player” *New York Times*, August 16, 1960; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, 33.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

the Boshoi Ballet, sort of floating through the air.... “no more frizzy hair or bulging muscles. They were really dolls.”<sup>118</sup>

Of course, the Americans tried to discredit the Russian women. The same articles challenged the genuineness of Soviet femininity. Many articles introduced the topic by explaining that this shock only resulted from a two-year plan.<sup>119</sup> American news reports also observed, “the more muscular Amazons had been excused from the parade. Even Yves St. Laurent could not have masked the lines of the lady shot-putters from Russia.”<sup>120</sup> Despite the “yeah-buts” and “however,” the image of feminine Soviet women lingered in the American imagination and press. The Soviets proved that they could win on all fronts of the Cold War rhetoric battle. They could bring athletic, winning women, who just so happened to be feminine and beautiful. Despite the discredit that accompanied the description, the Soviet glamour women caught American attention. American women athletes could not continue to claim victory based on femininity alone. The restrictive, feminine stereotype, which US officials used to claim American superiority, became paper-thin when the Soviet’s demonstrated that femininity was an easily duplicated, artificial and social construction. This display of femininity both challenged the American use of gender roles and proved that the Soviets succumbed to the same restrictions in order to prevail at battles of Cold War rhetoric.

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<sup>118</sup> “Russia Dolls Up for the Olympics” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*; August 26, 1960; ProQuest Historical Newspapers *The Washington Post*, D2.

Same information found in “Russia’s Two-Year Glamour Plan Pays Off for Feminine Athletes” *Los Angeles Times*; August 26, 1960; ProQuest Historical Newspapers *Los Angeles Times*, C3.

Same article/ information in: “Ceremony is ‘Wonderful’: U.S. Athletes” *Chicago Daily Tribune*; August 26, 1960; ProQuest Historical Newspapers *Chicago Tribune*, C3.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Maraniss, 107.

Thankfully, Americans did not have to squirm for long. The American Olympic team arrived with an equally beautiful, graceful, and athletic woman named Wilma Rudolph. Rudolph proved that American women could come prepared to win. For the first time, the American female Olympic star came from track and field, rather than one of the more “feminine” sports.<sup>121</sup> Despite losing the overall medal count, Rudolph stole the Olympic show because she cut into the Soviet monopoly and won three gold medals.<sup>122</sup> Rudolph gave the United States bragging rights, if not total victory. The immediate victories of Wilma Rudolph inspired American Cold War society. The personal story of Wilma Rudolph, however, inspired future generations of American athletes. Rudolph competed in the 1956 Olympics, but won the 200 and 400 meter dashes and the 400 meter relay at Rome. Nothing about her upbringing suggested she would become an American Cold War heroine. She was an African-American woman, when society expected little from either. Furthermore, she was one of twenty-two children born in rural Tennessee. She did not walk until she turned eight because of polio.<sup>123</sup> Rudolph prevailed despite unfortunate family origins, restrictive Cold War gender roles, and the racism of rural America. As if she needed one more obstacle, Wilma Rudolph bore a child during her senior year of high school. Rudolph’s mother raised the baby while Wilma went to Tennessee State University for College, where Ed Temple coached her to success on the track.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Guttman, 203.

<sup>122</sup> Frank Litsky “U.S. Again at Best in Major Events” *New York Times*, December 25, 1960; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, S3.

<sup>123</sup> Kathryn Jay *More than Just a Game: Sports in American Life Since 1945*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 58-59.

<sup>124</sup> Guttman, 203.

Olympic gold medals notwithstanding, Wilma Rudolph deserved recognition and remembrance. Rudolph became an exportable symbol of the American dream because she won Gold medal victories at such a complicated time in American History. American politicians appreciated Rudolph for representing the superiority of American society. Following the Olympic Games, Rudolph continued to receive attention. She met with President Kennedy in the White House. The US Information Agency made Rudolph the central figure of a documentary distributed to nations throughout the world.<sup>125</sup> The documentary did not publicize her teenage pregnancy, and instead chose to depict her daughter, Yolanda, as her “niece.”<sup>126</sup> As the feature of this propaganda film, she offered positive proof of American superiority. To the world, Rudolph proved the efficacy of both democracy and capitalism because she was proof that individuals succeeded and that the United States could solve its race problems.<sup>127</sup> Rudolph did not allow herself and her image to be used merely as pawns; she also used her Cold War success to promote civil rights. When Clarksville, Tennessee hosted a victory parade for her, she demanded that it be integrated.<sup>128</sup> Wilma Rudolph chose to make her life an example and presented a sanitized version of herself to the world. She acted like a lady, and the press, in turn, generally reviewed her positively.<sup>129</sup> She became a very unlikely Cold War heroine so that she could contribute to improving the future for women athletes and African-Americans. Cold War Americans, desperate to prove superiority over the

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<sup>125</sup> Maureen Smith *Wilma Rudolph: A Biography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 78-82.

<sup>126</sup> Smith, 82-83.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>128</sup> Jay, 59.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

Russians, found it possible to celebrate an African-American woman athlete. The United States exercised flexibility to prove Cold War superiority.

Other Cold War Olympic athletes discovered the political power that accompanied the spotlight of victory. Before the closed fists protests at the 1968 Olympics, African-American athletes understood that the implications of their position as representatives of the United States of America on a world stage. At the Olympic Village before the start of the 1960 Games, one reporter interviewed some male African-American athletes. The reporter wanted their opinion on recent Soviet claims that the United States only won at track and field because “negroes have ‘special physical endowments for sports.’”<sup>130</sup> They laughed at the Soviet anatomical explanations. Their explanation for why African-American men joined track and field, however, had everything to do with public recognition and Civil Rights. Ira Davis and Irvin (Bo) Robertson explained, track and field participation was “‘a means to an end.’ ‘What is the end?’ This reporter asked. A silence came over the group of Negroes, and then Robertson, as though speaking for all of them, said: ‘The end is equality.’”<sup>131</sup> The necessity of sending competitive athletes to beat the Soviets provided opportunities to Americans denied social and political opportunities at home. The fear of losing Cold War competition necessitated strides in opportunities for American athletes. American athletes knew to capitalize on these opportunities, whether or not they had permission.

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<sup>130</sup> “Soviets Say Negroes Give U.S. Advantage.” *Daily Defender*, August 30, 1960; ProQuest Historical Newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*, 23.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

Following the Rome Olympics, the US Olympic Development Committee continued to advocate for improved preparation for women athletes. In its desire to create winning women Olympians, the US Olympic Development Committee encouraged changes across American society. In their 1964, NCAA Newsletter, the organization claimed that the best prepared Olympic athletes had been nurtured by American schools and colleges of America and used Kennedy's language to conclude that "U.S. Olympic strength is directly proportional to the vigor and scope of school-college sports programs."<sup>132</sup> The widening of athletic experiences for girls and women caused some major shifts in athletics. The Olympics required amateur status, and because Olympic achievement was the goal, the NCAA eventually dominated the AAU as the natural agency for overseeing and developing women's programs in high schools and colleges.<sup>133</sup> Eventually new precedents in women's sports developed: women enjoyed new opportunities, became a part of Cold War success in the Olympics, and participated in broader sport experiences in secondary schools and colleges. If the NCAA wanted to become the training grounds for Olympians and the U.S. wanted to win the Olympics, women's sports needed attention. Following again the lead of Kennedy, and introduced by the U.S. Olympic Development Committee, the NCAA commissioned their own Committee on Women's Competition in 1964 to investigate women's sports; at this

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<sup>132</sup> "U.S. is Strongest in College Sports" *NCAA News*, Volume 1 (4), September-October, 1964, pg. 1 and 4 Found on "News Archives - NCAA.org." *NCAA Home Page*. 28 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.ncaa.org/wps/ncaa?ContentID=135>>.

<sup>133</sup> Ying Wushanley, "The Olympics, Cold War and the Reconstruction of U.S. Women's Athletics." *Bridging Three Centuries: Fifth International Symposium for Olympic Research*, 119-126, LA84 Foundation Home Page <http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/ISOR/ISOR2000p.pdf>

point women, though barred from the NCAA, competed in non-NCAA sponsored college sports competitions, cultural exchange and Olympic competition.<sup>134</sup>

Private groups, such as the AAU, sponsored most of the cultural exchange sport competitions. The shift away from the AAU and the NCAA represented an interest in better preparing Olympic athletes, especially women. This change was in no way inevitable. The battle between the AAU and the NCAA was so long and public that Howard Cosell “told a special House education subcommittee yesterday that Congress should create an amateur sports commission and stop ‘once and for all the nonsense’ involved in the NCAA-AAU feud. ‘This dispute has gone on longer than the Vietnam War.’”<sup>135</sup> When the NCAA shifted to support for Olympic sports, women’s athletics, began to move into a more public realm, at time when the civil rights movement made the equality of educational opportunities a public concern. By the time that questions of equality in education and sports for men and women reached the American consciousness, women had many years of competitive athletic experience, at home, and abroad. The NCAA wanted to be the Olympic feeder. Part of the unintended result of taking the lead as Olympic feeder meant that collegiate sports became subject to federal guidelines and regulation. Increased Cold War opportunities for women translated into the groundwork for challenges to access and equality throughout American public schools and colleges.

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<sup>134</sup> “Ladies Locked out as NCAA Remains Strictly for Men.” *NCAA News*, Volume 1 (2), May 1964, pg.1 Found on “News Archives - NCAA.org.” *NCAA Home Page*. 28 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.ncaa.org/wps/ncaa?ContentID=135>>.

<sup>135</sup> William Gildea, “Cosell Backs Federal Clout” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, March 20, 1973; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *the Washington Post*, D3.

The Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement existed together. Gains in women's sports in the 1960s did not merely accidentally coincide with the women's movement or the Cold War. The 1960s ushered in many changes for American society. Not all changes occurred due to the civil rights and women's movements. The Cold War also contributed, albeit indirectly. The fitness policies and rhetoric intended to contain Cold War American women, instead, allowed women to challenge restrictive roles. Cold War policy makers never desired to create equality for women in sports, but women's sports blossomed as an unintended consequence of the American desire to win the Cold War.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

Fitness and gender rhetoric of the Cold War joined seemingly unrelated, political and social forces of post-World War society. It is useful to understand the influences of the Cold War upon events of the Civil Rights and Women's Movement, especially. On the surface, American Cold War lifestyles and expectations contained and restrained women into restrictive gender roles. In reality, women found room to challenge stereotypes, courtesy of the Cold War.

American Cold War fears of losing to the Soviets created a genuine concern among US citizens about health and fitness. Many Americans heeded the call to become physically prepared. Though the American government attempted to contain women and preserve an idyllic society, results varied. Women joined fitness opportunities. Rather than deny or hide, women used the Cold War to justify their improved strength. Women, especially athletic women, learned that they gained even more latitude to improve their fitness if they adopted the outward trappings of femininity. In subtle and indirect, yet important, ways, the Cold War offered opportunities to American women. Ironically, the restrained image of the suburban housewife provided cover for women to challenge gender roles.

During the Cold War Americans monitored gender roles and applied strict standards for proper behaviors for both men and women. These strict stereotypes brought conformity and comfort to American society. Americans appreciated predictability in the age of anxiety. Americans felt even more confirmed when they exported the symbols to the world, to prove to themselves and others that American

values reflected our political and social superiority. In an isolated, early Cold War, faithful adherence to rigid gender roles made sense.

Proving superiority during the Cold War, however, made isolation for the two superpowers quickly impractical. Initially both countries relied on rhetoric. Cultural exchange sport competitions and the Olympic Games ended unqualified and isolated bragging. In athletic encounters, women took center stage. Women offered tangible superiority with their femininity and their athletic feats. Though the United States initially espoused femininity above athleticism, that strategy did not last. In fact, the use of gender rhetoric to claim superiority provided time for the United States to prepare winning women. In the end, both the United States and the Soviet Union prepared athletic women, but also valued stereotypes of femininity.

In the end, both countries knew the medal count mattered the most. The Cold War, combined with the usual magnitude of the Olympic Games, meant that winning countries needed winning women. Participation at the Olympic Games definitely improved because of Cold War politics. The United States and the Soviet Union, of course, brought increasingly larger and more effective teams, but other countries' participation grew as well. The cultural exchanges and the larger desire to export their competing values out to the rest of the world included reaching out to athletes of third world countries.<sup>136</sup> Cold War politics created opportunities in sports far beyond gender or national borders. The Olympics provided a venue, but Cold War politics and rhetoric provided the urgency, the fervor, and the necessity.

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<sup>136</sup> Frank Litsky, "U.S. Again at Best in Major Events" *New York Times*, December 25, 1960; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times*, S3.; Houlihan, 203.

Developments in the early years of the Cold War indirectly laid some groundwork for later advocates of equality of women's sports in Title IX. Women athletes, professional and amateur, remained active throughout the Cold War and in fact, found opportunities because of the Cold War. When the NCAA lobbied to be the official Olympic feeder, the decision-makers probably never considered the consequences. The Cold War created the context for the Olympic Development Committee to challenge the private organizations and clubs, like the AAU, and to consider the public and college circuit of the NCAA. When Title IX passed in 1972, the NCAA was no longer just an Olympic feeder program for future Olympians. The NCAA became the sponsor of men and women collegiate sport experiences in public and private universities and college. Therefore, the NCAA faced challenges of equality of programs. The ultimate and deserved credit for Title IX rests with the women and men who took to the streets to campaign for access and equality, but the 1960s social movements do not tell the whole story of progress for women's fitness and sports. Because of Cold War rhetoric, the United States encouraged women athletes. Preparing women for Cold War public contests did create momentum for future women athletes.

Specific examination of early Cold War politics often neglects intersections with the burgeoning civil rights movement. Real life existed within the margins of both phenomena. Though women of a later generation deserve just credit for their campaigns to bring equal opportunities to females in education and athletics, they did not fight their battles in a world free of Cold War events and rhetoric. Ironically the

same rhetoric that restricted society and pointed fingers at “weak” men in government created the impulse for our society to gain strength, both nationally and individually.

Though the Cold War deserved the label as a time of anxiety, many changes took place in the social undercurrent. Few people remember the Cold War for the expansion of rights or opportunities. The most resonant themes of the Cold War in the United States centered on tensions, suspicion and fear. Few people in this climate wanted to stand out from the crowd. Therefore, for good reason the stereotypical attribute of an American Cold War mother was that of restraint. The American ideal for women at the time was a woman whose major life achievements culminated in marriage and the home. Tight restrictions governed the behavior and participation of women in society. In reality, though these same constraints helped to create opportunities for women both to be creative about reaching their goals and to participate in society in new ways. Political and athletic women emerged from Cold War society. American Cold War women achieved goals and participated in society, but often cloaked their achievements to fit within the acceptable behavioral standards for the time of fear.

Cold War lifestyles, though narrowly defined, created opportunities for both the country and its citizens to flex their muscles. Cold War fitness rhetoric urged men and women to be vigilant and prepared for both subversive and direct attacks. Like the Republican Mothers of early American society, Cold War Mothers took on expanded duties in preparing their children for this new society; women could not shun or ignore the calls to strengthen themselves for the sake of their children. As long as women could rationalize their actions as a part of their Cold War duties, their participation could

expand. While women spent time “looking the part,” they also spent time becoming involved in political movements and the new emerging fitness craze. In this regard, the Cold War provided new opportunities for women and women athletes.

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