



Suffrage at 100 and Women's Sports

There I was, watching the Women's College Baseball World Series and hearing how the game had expanded since the first game in 1988. I heard about how the West Coast schools dominated the series until recently as more and more leagues entered the competition. The players were making spectacular plays and pitching great games. What had made this competition become more national?

During World War II, women played baseball as a major sports event as depicted in the film *A League of Their Own*. Yet women in sports were always second in funding—if funded at all. In 1972, the passage of Title IX created an even playing field in men and women's sports.

The political process works in slow motion at times. The women's suffrage movement in 1848 held a meeting at Seneca Falls to talk about enfranchisement when women had few legal rights. For example, California allowed women to have property rights only in 1849. A former slave, Sojourner Truth, gave a speech in 1851 to her fellow women, titled "Ain't I a Woman?" By 1868, women were more vocal in their calls for rights. The phrase "Men their rights and nothing more; women their rights and nothing less!" appeared in newsprint.

Level Playing Fields

Women were winning the right to vote in western states as those states entered the Union—Wyoming in 1890 and Utah in 1896—while other western states granted women suffrage—Oregon, Kansas and Arizona in 1912, and Nevada and Montana in 1914. Jeannette Rankin was elected to the House of Representatives in 1916 from Montana and seated in 1917. Arkansas allowed women to vote in primary elections in 1917, and by 1918, Michigan, South Dakota and Oklahoma had granted suffrage.

Still, women in most of the nation were forbidden from voting. If they did vote, they were arrested for illegal activity. In 1872, Susan B. Anthony and 15 other women were arrested for casting ballots in New York State. Alice Paul was placed in prison along with other women to break their movement for suffrage during the Great War. The story is told in the film *Iron Jawed Angels*. However, the war effort did provide a shift in public policy on suffrage. Congress passed the 19th Amendment in 1919, and it was ratified on August 26, 1920. The goal of the woman's movement at the time was to get women out of factories and back into the home, children into school and out of factories, and the vote.

Time has a way of making change, if only slowly. The 1950s saw the feminist movement pushing for women in the workplace, children in school and equal treatment for women. The women that played baseball in the 1880s to 1940s set the stage for suffrage 1919 and Title IX in 1972. The movement for women's suffrage not only won the vote for women but it also leveled the playing field in sports.

D.H.Coop is a retired fire/paramedic and retired teacher having taught IB and AP World History 30 years. He continues to substitute, tutor and consult. www.HistoryDepot.com