CHAPTER FOUR

Part V: Athletics

With a new gymnasium built in 1928, one might expected that women’s varsity basketball for women students would really have taken off, but was not the case. Just at the time when ISNS was transformed to a Teachers College, two decades of women’s varsity basketball came to an end.

Women had been playing basketball at ISNS since the last years of the 19th century, well before male students took up the game. Sports sections of yearbooks and other normal school publications may have focused on the exploits of male students in football and baseball, but women’s enthusiastic participation and great success in basketball received prominent coverage consistently over the years. Such participation and success lasted until the end of the 1920’s with a new philosophy on women’s athletics that was taking hold across the county.

In 1920, the Women’s Athletic Association (WAA) was established on the ISNS campus. According to the 1922 Instano, this organization’s objective was “to promote the idea that prospective women teachers should be trained to care for their own physical welfare and that of their students.” Rather than encouraging only the best players to play on varsity teams that would compete with other schools, its philosophy held that everyone should play a variety of sports from hiking to tennis as well as basketball and all “educational forms of recreation that encourage health.” To encourage participation, they developed a point system which allowed female students who played a variety of sports regardless of skill level to earn school letters.

The 1921 Oak noted that the president of the WAA was Sara Beven (later Trustee Sally B. Johnson) and also the captain of the
women’s basketball team that year. At this point, women’s varsity basketball was quite popular among students, attracting many to try out. In 1921 when that season opened, 150 young women showed up to try out for the team, a large percentage of the 786 total enrollment for that year. Great excitement surrounded the games. During that season they won 9 of their 11 games, in one case beating Clarion 28 to 1.

But a shift in philosophy for women’s varsity sports would soon sound the death knell for this popular varsity sport. Across the nation women’s physical educators were voicing concern for the impact of participation in varsity sports on female athletes who were competing before audiences of mixed genders. A campaign was launched to limit the participation of women in competitive athletics. Leading this effort was the Women’s Athletic Association.

In 1923-24, the WAA encouraged the participation of all female students, making an effort to “give every girl the opportunity to enjoy a major sport in season.” Lacking an on-campus gym suitable for basketball, they rented the Armory from January to the middle of March for intramural basketball play. Their teams were campus groups such as Clark Hall girls versus those in Sutton Hall. They also made arrangements for female students to use the pool at the YMCA at no cost and encouraged a wide variety of sports from basketball to bowling, tennis, hockey, soccer, swimming, horseback riding, baseball and track. To discourage students from playing only one sport, the point system required participation in different sports.

At first the intramural was in addition to a popular varsity team which continued to play until at least 1926. In 1926, the regular varsity team played Slippery Rock, Juniata and other schools, and the WAA team played the ISNS varsity and high schools in the area.

In November 18, 1927, ISTC joins the Women’s Athletic Association and the WAA took complete control of sports. Varsity basketball disappears from yearbooks, though the game is still played by intramural teams.
Instead of playing games with other school teams, the coaches arrange participation in play days, where students from local colleges travel to the hosting school and play a variety of sports. At the play days, students did not play on teams representing individual schools, but were deliberately mixed. This new manner of playing downplayed what they considered to be unhealthy competition.

In a song that appears in the 1929-1930 ISTC handbook, it appears that women’s athletics had gone far from the early days when women took pride in their skill and athletic ability on the basketball court.

W.A.A. by Carline Leichliter

There’s a club at Indiana,
W.A.A is its name,
From the rise of the sun,
“Till the day is done,
There’s lots of fun and game,
In a pool so nice we go to swim,
come on and play with us,
Hockey sticks will make you trim,
Basketball will make you slim,
In our club at Indiana.”

New Gymnasium and College Lodge

During the 1920s, the student athletes had suffered from the lack of an adequate gymnasium. There were no facilities for swimming on campus and women’s basketball games were played at the Armory. Students and physical education
instructors were eager for the building and opening of a new, modern gymnasium which was completed in 1928.

The building, now called Waller Hall, provided accommodations for athletic events, but also for school-wide assemblies.

In 1925 Dr. Keith provided another location for faculty and student recreation when he purchased a big farm northeast of campus that was perfect for school outings and picnics. It would become the College Lodge.

**Summary**

During the 1920s, under the direction of John Keith ISNS moved steadily towards its new status of ISTC. The shift to a state teachers college forced the retirement and relocation of some female faculty members who did not have the academic credentials necessary for teaching in a college.

During this period, women faculty continued to outnumber men. By 1929, there were only 19 male faculty and 83 female faculty.
Women dominated departments such as Home Economics were able to keep pace with the changes, reworking their programs to four year ones, and awarding the school’s first Bachelor of Science degree in 1927.

Jane Leonard celebrated women’s increased access to the political process, by running, for a seat in the Pennsylvania legislature. Though she did not win, she succeeded in demonstrating that women should vote and play an active role in politics and civic life, a lesson that was not lost on the students of ISNS. Her passing two years later demonstrated that the school was entering a new era. Social change had also come to the campus as male and female students questioned long held traditions of school life and asked for more freedom.

In 1929 the wave of economic prosperity that had characterized the 1920s came to an end with the stock market crash. The period that would follow, now known as the Great Depression would offer new challenges to the students and faculty of ISTC.