

## **WOMEN'S SPORT FICTION: NEEDED RESEARCH**

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Joli Sandoz  
The Evergreen State College  
L3227  
Olympia, Washington 98505

Fictional sportswomen range from the “problem, prey, or potential sacrifice” images apparent in traditional male sport narrative (Messenger, 1990 p.154) to the sassy, proud Miss Hazel Elizabeth Deborah Parker. Miss Parker, an elementary school sprinter in the 1975 short story “Raymond’s Run,” won’t accept anyone trying to make her less than she is. She loves competition. And she will gladly beat you to the finish, should you show up one day at her playground (Bambara 1994).

Miss Parker’s creator is a woman, Toni Cade Bambara. And while a very few male authors have depicted female athletes positively, the large majority of such images in fiction have been written by women. Oddly, however, few scholars have paid serious attention to those works. To date I have not found published bibliographies of sports fiction and poetry written by women. And only a handful of writers consider women’s sport fiction as part of the sports literature genre.

I’d like to begin to change that. If girls and women are to take themselves seriously in sport, and if we are to successfully “rewrite” sport to include us in important ways, we need images telling us it can be done.

The earliest piece of women's sport fiction of which I'm aware appeared in 1895 (Goodloe). Innes and Oriard (1993) discuss turn-of-the-century college and girls' series fiction in excellent survey articles. And in the last 25 years authors of a small explosion of novels and short stories have explored themes as various as sexual harrasment, coach- athlete relationships, friendships between women, feminism, disability, homophobia, sexism, females competing against males, and the definition of competition itself all in relation to women's athletics. Several critics (Carson and Horvath 1991, Griffin 1985, Lenskyj 1995, Messenger 1990, Oriard 1987, Sandoz 1995, Solomon 1985) have paid attention.

But what about the years between 1920, say, and 1970? I've found a dribble of works, but there must be more. I'm particularly interested in the 1950s and 1960s, decades for which I have not been able to locate any women-authored adult fiction featuring female athletes in competitive sport situations.

Obviously, much remains to be done in the study of women's sport literature. There are bibliographies to be compiled, stories and novels and poems still to be read, discussed and written. We must place women's sport literature in its contexts of contemporary sport, society, and women's writing, and of the field now made whole of sport literature. Perhaps then we can answer such questions as why it took 92 years after the first women competed in the Olympic Games for an adult female Olympian to appear in U.S. women's sport fiction (Anshaw 1992). And why, when women were defeating men in fictional tennis matches in 1895 (Goodloe 1985), it was 1973 before Bobby Riggs lost to Billie Jean King.

I am interested in networking with others to acquire answers to the proposed questions and to generally study women's sports fiction.