



An Obsession With Rings: How Rowing Became an Olympic Sport for Women in the United States

Joanne Wright Iverson with Margaret O. Kirk

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Joanne Wright wanted to go the Olympics. An amateur athlete, she had taken up the sport of rowing those long skinny boats and found that she was good at it. She also quickly learned that there were no rowing events for women in the Olympics. Why? Because the governing body for rowing in the United States viewed it as a man's sport and they would not sanction U.S. women to compete in international competitions. When the International Olympic Committee considered the addition of women's rowing to the Olympic program the various countries were asked if they would send a women's rowing team. The response from the US governing body for rowing had always been No because the men thought that women not only could not, but should not row. Joanne set about changing their minds. In 1963 she, Ted Nash an Olympic Gold Medalist training in Seattle Washington, and Edwin Lickiss, a dedicated coach of young rowers in Oakland California teamed up to form the National Womens Rowing Association (NWRA) to literally become their own governing body for women's rowing. By 1966 they organized and ran the first regatta to pick national champions even though at the time there were less than nine clubs and colleges available to race. This is Joanne's story of how three people communicating without the help of the Internet started new rowing programs, encouraged colleges to add women's crew programs, provided a venue for those colleges with intramural women's crews to start competing against one another, and proved to existing men's clubs that they should welcome women to their ranks of competitors. The 1976 Olympics in Montreal held the first rowing events for women. The United States team came home with a Bronze and Silver medal. The Second edition is now fully annotated and contains the official National Association of Amateur Oarsmen race results for women prior to the formation of the National Women's Rowing Association.

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