“The first woman football coach…”: A Media Study of Female American Football Coaches, 1888-1946.

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“The first woman football coach…”: A Media Study of Female American Football Coaches, 1900-1960.

Media reports of female American football coaches frequently laud them as being the “first,” a demonstrable indication of the lack of awareness of the long history of women in this role. This paper utilises feminist media theory to examine the language of newspaper coverage of female American football coaches from 1908 to 1960. The article identifies 26 female coaches; newspapers stated that eight of these women were the first-ever, and one was the state’s first. In all cases, the newspapers were inaccurate. The analysis demonstrates that newspaper reports sometimes emphasised women’s domestic roles and their desirable femininity and heterosexuality. While some journalists were horrified, most were not; many women found widespread support for their role, especially when schools employed them due to the absence of men during wartime. The lack of outrage about women’s involvement in a sport (and role) strongly aligned with masculinity is significant and demonstrates that women have found acceptance in the sport for far longer than academics have previously explored.

Keywords: American football; gender; media; women’s sport; history.

Introduction

When Natalie Randolph took charge of a high school team in Washington DC in 2010, newspapers hailed her appointment as historic. While the media rightly lauded Randolph's employment, it was not entirely historic as women have been coaching the sport for over a century on high school, college, and community teams despite the widespread lack of public knowledge about them. "The first woman football coach" is a common phrase in articles about female American football coaches but is not always correct. In my analysis of news coverage between 1900 and 1960, of the 73 different articles that referred to female coaches, 17 (30%) stated that they were the "first." Of these, 15 (88%) claimed they were the first-ever, and two (12%) said they were the first in the state: each one was incorrect. Of the 26 female coaches identified through this research, articles described eight women as being firsts, seven as the first in the country, and one as the state's first, suggesting a form of collective amnesia about women coaches. As this paper will demonstrate, there were common themes in some reports, including emphasising domestic roles, their heterosexuality and desirable femininity, and that some women were employed only because of an absence of men. However, many reports were positive and expressed little concern about these women.

Football histories barely acknowledge women's participation in the sport. John Watterson's thorough examination of the collegiate game has only four pages out of 418 mentioning women's roles. Watterson mentions Alice Camp, wife of renowned Yale coach Walter Camp, and how she "often attended practice and reported to Camp in the evening if he had not been present" (2000, 99). He also reports that at the twenty-fifth anniversary dinner for the 1888 team, the menu included a photograph of both Alice and

Walter, titled “Head Coaches, 1888” (2000, 21). Both David Nelson (1994, 63) and Dave Revsine (2014, 7) consider Alice more of a coach than her husband since he regularly missed practices. Gerald Gems mentions Stella Stagg, wife of University of Chicago coach Amos Alonzo Stagg, and how ~~the responsibilities she held~~her responsibilities “would merit assistant coach status today” (2000, 57). However, this ~~this remains~~is the extent of the current~~ historical~~ research on female American football coaches. Further ~~R~~research ~~in this area ~~is essential because “the power of the media can be used to construct women leaders in ways that challenge, rather than reinforce, traditional gender stereotypes and may in turn lead to social change” (Nicole LaVoi and Austin Stair Calhoun 2016, 172). Awareness of women’s coaching roles in football can ~~help ~~change perceptions about women’s ability to coach the sport today, leading more young women to aspire to American football careers.

Nancy Theberge notes that “Perhaps of all positions in sport, coaching captures the central features of the stereotypical view of sport as masculine” due to the connections of power with masculinity. This stereotype is coupled, she notes, with the assumption that “men are naturally superior athletes and, on this basis, also superior coaches” (1993, 305). A masculine role in a hypermasculine sport should have ruled out women’s participation. However, as this paper argues, while some reports countered the unusual sight of women coaching with references to their orthodox femininity, there was little outcry about women’s role. From here on, references to football are for the American code.

It is important to reveal female firsts in sport, and especially football. Understanding how the media have represented female coaches reveals the barriers these pioneering women faced, ~~and~~ helpings~~s~~ future female coaches ground their participation within a broader historical context. Dunja Antunovic summarises the

situation well: “We need to remain attentive to moments of resistance that could challenge the gender hierarchies in sport, particularly when these moments occur within football, the ‘last bastion’ of male hegemony” (2014, 65). Revealing female football coaches’ history will challenge male dominance in the sport and the idea that female football coaches are a recent phenomenon. This paper will first introduce the coaches and findings before discussing key themes.

Literature Review

Female Coaches in Team Sports

There is e~~There is e~~xtensive research on female coaches, with most articles focusing on current coaches and the barriers they face. These obstacles include issues related to motherhood, for example, maternity pay and policies, and time for family commitments (Sheila Robertson 2010; Cindra Kamphoff 2010; Jeff Greenhill, Chris Auld, Graham Cuskelly, and Sue Hooper 2009; Annette Hofmann and Silke Sinning 2016, Leanne Norman and Alexandra Rankin-Wright 2006). Another common barrier for female coaches is~~is~~ the informal social networks open only to men (Gretchen Kerr 2010; Greenhill et al. 2009; Norman and Rankin-Wright 2016; Theberge 1993; Nefertiti Walker and Trevor Bopp 2011; Jean Williams 2003). As a result of this perceived exclusion, authors cite female coaches’ need to “fit in” to the dominant culture, in some cases compromising their values and changing their behaviour (Norman and Rankin-Wright 2016; Theberge 1993; Walker and Bopp 2011; Walker and Melanie Sartore-Baldwin 2013). Much of women’s need to prove themselves comes from gendered assumptions that men make superior coaches (Norman 2010). Research demonstrates that these beliefs include that the coach is a position of power, requiring the authority and toughness that some male authority figures assume women lack (Walker and

Sartore-Baldwin 2013; Kerr and Cervin 2016; Hofmann and Sinning 2016; Lindsey Blom, Laura Abrell, Matthew Wilson, Jennifer Lape, Meghan Halbrook and Lawrence Judge 2011). Research indicates that assumptions exist that women are unable to coach men's sport (Theberge, 1993) and are stereotyped into only being able to coach "feminine" or aesthetic sports (Kerr and Cervin, 2016; Greenhill et al., 2009). Other barriers come from sporting organisations. The hegemonic masculinity and misogyny in these institutions are significant obstacles (Hofmann and Sinning 2016; Greenhill et al. 2009). Walker and Bopp (2011) note that female basketball coaches believed they did not get the same coaching opportunities or mentoring as male coaches. Norman and Rankin-Wright's research (2016) echoes this distrust of sporting organisations, revealing that female head coaches in the United Kingdom did not believe their club or governing body would help them progress.

There is a research lacuna media representation of female coaches. Calhoun, LaVoi, and Alicia Johnson (2011) examined online biographies of National Collegiate Athletic Association head coaches for references to heteronormativity and heterosexism. They found that biographies of female coaches more commonly mentioned a partner (42.1%) than those of male coaches (29.2%). Cindy Marie Allen's (2006) work on newspaper's representations of Pat Summitt, the former Head Coach of the Tennessee Lady Vols basketball team, found that emphasising her relationships with men dominated coverage. The issue of the coaches' heteronormativity was also evident in Roxanne Coche and Olivier LeBlond's research into the online reactions to Amelie Mauresmo's appointment as Andy Murray's coach. Coche and LeBlond indicate that to make hegemonic masculinity acceptable, "disparaging humour" is used towards women.

If coverage, and analysis of, media representation of female coaches is missing, even rarer is research about historic coaches. Lisa Taylor's research on Penny Chuter, an Amateur Rowing Association National Coach in the 1970s, reveals that the media emphasised her suitability for the role because of her "previous athletic successes in tandem with her professional qualification and experiences as a PE teacher" (2020, 63). While Chuter experienced a reasonably positive reaction to her appointment, she acknowledged some challenges and that the role was "a steep hill to climb".

Female Firsts

The notion of the "first" female, regardless of role, emphasises their novelty value and "de-normalises" them, making them appear a risk (Erika Falk 2010, 37) or less credible (Teri Finneman 2015). The "first" discourse is problematic. Celebrating a "first" woman, especially in a male-dominated area, allows society to feel good about progress. However, it devalues the accomplishments of women who have come before them and highlights male achievement as the gold standard.

The media representation of political female "firsts" is the subject of some ~~academic work~~research. Finneman (2015) analyses newspapers' reaction to the first woman to run for President of the United States, Victoria Woodhull, in 1872; the first woman elected to the US Congress, Jeanette Rankin in 1916; the first woman to be nominated by a major party for President of the United States, Margaret Chase Smith in 1964; and Sarah Palin, the first Republican woman selected as a Vice-President candidate ~~for Vice-President~~ in 2008. Falk (2010) similarly evaluates the media bias in the campaigns of Woodhull, Chase, and seven others. Both Falk and Finneman note the media's differing coverage of female candidates compared to males, including emphasising personal characteristics and that newspapers often portrayed ~~the~~ women as

less competent than male candidates. Finneman notes that the media referred to Smith as the first woman to run for President, despite Woodhull’s earlier campaign, emphasising her novelty.

Ingrid Bachmann, Dustin Harp, and Jamie Loke analysed magazine covers of Hillary Clinton, “the first female in a major US party ticket” (2018, 793). Their visual discourse analysis revealed three key tropes: firstly, that Clinton was secretive, secondly, emphasising her role as a wife and mother, and finally, that Clinton was a “harsh, tyrannical leader.” As the authors comment, the media presented Clinton as a “counter-stereotypical woman.” This coverage demonstrates the “double bind” that women in leadership positions often find; if they are confident and assertive, the press can vilify them; if they are warm and affectionate, they are not tough enough. In all the examples, there was an emphasis on the candidates’ adherence to traditional female roles and that female politicians are unusual.

There is little work about media representations of first women in the various football codes. Brunette Lenkić and Rob Hess’ 2016 work provides one of the earliest examples of women coaching a men’s Australian rules football team as a Miss Daykin in 1942 but has nothing on the media’s response. The only literature relevant to the American code comes from Antunovic, who analyses the new-media discourse ~~about~~ surrounding Shannon Eastin, the National Football League’s first female referee. She finds that “journalists, bloggers, and fans celebrated Eastin’s achievements” but that “sexist and paternalistic comments remain concealed on the message boards” (2014, 45). Comments included that Eastin should be naked or wearing lingerie when officiating or ~~that she~~ should be at home making dinner. Paternalistic comments included that she should not officiate in case she got hurt. Antunovic notes that Eastin’s

involvement “signified an intrusion” in this hyper~~-~~masculine sport, something equally true for ~~these~~ female football coaches.

This paper has the opportunity to push the field of feminist media studies forward, despite being historical. The work fills a gap in the research, challenging the notion that women in football coaching are novel and new. Analysing the media coverage of these women, who were enacting a masculine role in a hypermasculine sport, challenges dominant discourses about how the media represents women in positions of power. Women’s role in football, as with many other sports, has been marginalised. Consequently, this paper will break down stereotypes about gender roles, providing girls with more role models, and feminist media scholars with a new avenue of exploration.

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Method

These examples of female coaches arose serendipitously from this authors’ doctoral work on the history of women playing football between 1890 and 1960. Key term searches of digitised newspaper databases for the thesis utilised terms such as “football,” “foot ball,” or “foot-ball” in combination with words such as “women,” “girls,” or “coeds” to cover the different terminology that journalists employed. For this work, additional searches covering the same years included ~~the word~~ “coach.” Ending in 1960 ~~also~~ corresponds with social changes, ~~with~~ second-wave feminism, and new women’s football leagues~~.~~; i~~I~~t would be worth exploring these later decades separately. Reports came ~~through access to~~from Chronicling America, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, and Newspapers.com. The language of articles is analysed for evidence of the issues that the corpus of literature about women~~’s~~ coaches has raised, including

focusing on women's physical attractiveness, heteronormativity, the superiority of male coaches, barriers ~~preventing women from~~to coaching, and ~~any~~ assumptions that women cannot coach male sport. It is important to note that it is likely that many more women coached the sport, but newspapers did not report their stories.

It is worth noting that there were many images of female football coaches throughout the years. Articles about 13 of the 26 coaches analysed had corresponding drawings or photographs, none of which sexualised them. Images fall into one of four categories: head and shoulder pictures, coaching on the field or in a classroom, surrounded by players, or, in one case, receiving advice from a male coach. This short overview of historical images of women coaches is a site for future research as this paper focuses on the language of articles.

This paper adopts a critical feminist theory methodology which accepts that "there has been and continues to be unequal treatment and representation of females" (Christina Villalon and Karen Weiller Abels 2018, 1138). Consequently, this paper approaches critical feminist theory as a desire to make sure that these female coaches' names are known and stories told. Evaluating how the media "[re]presents and reinforces dominant cultural ideologies, supporting hegemonic power struggles" is also a critical element of feminist theory (Bachmann, Harp & Loke 2018, 794). Consequently, the analysis of articles is based on how journalists highlighted prevailing conventions about women's roles and male coaches' superiority.

Findings

Pre-World War I: 1888-1916

Codified by Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and the University of Pennsylvania with the formation of the Intercollegiate Football Association in 1876, football emerged in a

post-Civil war, industrial America in which newspapers and many public commentators frequently expressed a fear of an increasingly feminised male populace (Michael Oriard 1993, 26). Football became the ultimate peacetime proving ground for young men to demonstrate their orthodox masculinity and develop the skills necessary for war and leadership (Michael Kimmel 2006, 61). Football's manly connotations left little opportunity for women to take part. The examples here reveal that while a minority of reporters believed that female football coaches were a radical idea, there was mostly a lack of concern about these ~~knowledgeable and successful coaches~~women. In these years, seven women coached football ~~took on coaching roles~~, four of whom newspapers reported as the first of their kind, despite Alice Camp arguably claiming that title.

While Alice was not the official Yale football team coach, one newspaper viewed her role as significant. The *Hartford Courant*'s obituary emphasized her coaching, crediting her with being "responsible for various changes in football tactics brought about by her personal observations" (1934, 1). William H. Corbin, the captain of the undefeated 1888 Yale team, referred to her as having "very superior knowledge of the strategy and value of different plays" and that she knew as much as any man (*Hartford Courant* December 19, 1934, 1). However, twenty years after her success, newspapers covered another female coach more widely.

In 1908, seventeen newspapers reported on Lillian Merrell, a Whitman College graduate who coached school basketball and football teams in Kalama, Washington. Newspapers across the country printed articles about her, including in Hawaii, Texas, Massachusetts, and Kentucky, and the *Lincoln Daily Star* reported that she was the first-ever female football coach (November 27, 1908, n.p). The *Evening Statesman* ~~stated~~ emphasised that she had been one of the most popular students at the college and had

held several important positions, such as vice-President of the student association and playing on the basketball team. The author also commented that Merrell was “~~known as~~ one of the most beautiful and accomplished girls of the school” (November 21, 1908, 3). The *Butte Inter Mountain* stated that no woman had “made so radical an advance as” ~~she had~~her, demonstrating the novelty of~~at~~ her role ~~was highly unusual~~ (November 19, 1908, 6). Reports stated little about how successful she was as a coach, unlike articles about Annie Bragdon the following year. In 1909, Bragdon led her Revere (Massachusetts) Grammar School football team to an undefeated season. The *Daily Boston Globe* highlighted Bragdon’s belief that athletics were important for her male students and that she also coached basketball and baseball (March 13, 1909, 49). Only one other newspaper, the *Trenton Evening News*, reported her story,~~ and~~ emphasising~~ed~~ that she “turns out nothing but champion teams” (March 2, 1910, 4). Similarly, Estelle Sherwin, who coached the San Pedro, California street playgrounds’ teams in 1910, was “making a great success” as the country’s “first” football coach (*Indianapolis News* January 3, 1910, 18). However, there were no ~~stated~~ match results~~ from any matches~~. In all cases, journalists expressed little concern about female coaches and roundly praised their abilities~~ and knowledge~~.

Some newspaper reports praised female coaches in these years while reminding readers of the women’s conventional roles. For example, in 1913, three articles about Carrie Burckhardt from Covington, Kentucky, mentioned how she coached the Price Hill High School team to six wins out of six and a total of 161 points to six. The *Seattle Star* referred to her as “about the most attractive, most feminine little woman ever” (1913, 11). Burckhardt ~~herself~~ also felt the need to highlight her adherence to traditional roles when she stated her belief that “housework should come first” before ~~time dedicated to~~ exercise (*Seattle Star* December 22, 1913, 11). Her decision to highlight

her traditional opinions could have resulted from her awareness that some commentators might view her position as inappropriate.

Sometimes journalists chose to interview the women's husbands, who often emphasised that their wives conformed to ~~conventional notions of femininity~~stereotypical behaviour. For example, in 1915, a sole article in the *Washington Herald* mentioned that the University of Michigan coach, Fielding H. Yost explained that he and his wife were "figuring out all the plays" to use next season and credited her with the "successful forward pass formation" that the team successfully used the previous year (January 19, 1915, 10). A year later, 58 newspapers from across the country reported on Cozette Brannon, the coach of the State Agricultural College in Arkanasas' second team. The *Houston Daily Post* (August 30, 1916, 4) explained that Brannon's appointment ~~as a coach for the State Agricultural College in Arkansas' second team~~ was due to a lack of money and available faculty. The *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette* (September 24, 1916, 23) stated that "for the first time in history a woman is coaching a football team." The *Ogden Standard* (October 14, 1916, 2) included a comment from her husband, the first-team coach, about how his wife began as his scout and demonstrated that she knew as much as his assistants. A further point of emphasis in 15 of the 58 articles was that~~The *Green Bay Press-Gazette* article about Brannon started with the comment,~~ "She doesn't believe in woman suffrage and is not the masculine or athletic type of woman. She weighs only 116 pounds and dances well" (*Green Bay Press-Gazette* November 16, 1916, 5). These comments ~~came~~ from her husband ~~but~~ demonstrate the importance of ensuring that she was no threat to the feminine ideal. ~~15 of the 58 articles included the same information.~~ The importance of her marital status is evident as all 58 articles called her Mrs Earl Brannon. By

interviewing their husbands, the women's achievements appear secondary in comparison.

World War I and the Inter-War Years: 1917-1940

Ten women coached male football teams between these years, one of whom was referred to as the first-ever female football coach. While none of them attracted more than a handful of newspaper articles, some common themes emerged. For the three women who coached during World War I, articles mentioned that this was the reason for their employment. In other cases, explaining that their employment was an emergency or attributing their knowledge to their husbands were journalistic devices used to belittle their efforts. Despite this, articles often referred to the women's successes, and most did not mention any concern about their role. This narrative suggests that female football coaches were tolerable in times of crisis.

~~During World War I, women moved into jobs vacated by men, including as football coaches.~~ Only three articles about the two women who coached in 1917 and 1918 exist, suggesting the media's lack of interest or awareness. However, that the *Washington Herald* perceived one woman's role as more radical than anything else related to the war demonstrates the power of the ~~just how powerfully the~~ sport's connections with masculinity. ~~were.~~ For example, in 1917, Miss Iker began coaching the ~~players at~~ Business High in Washington DC players. Despite the school's need to fill the position due to the war, the *Herald* commented that: "Even in the battle-harrassed [sic] regions of Europe no-one has been so radical as to suggest a woman football coach" (September 16, 1917, 6). The *Wichita Eagle* (November 11, 1917, 25) echoed the sentiment that women coaching as a result of the war was particularly

unusual, stating that “One of the strangest positions accepted by a woman because of the European war is that of football coach and athletic director.” This article referred to Anna Hurd, who had taken on the role at the Jacksonville Oregon High School despite the apparent belief of the directors that women could not coach football. Articles praised Hurd ~~gained praise~~ for her play design which opposing teams had not been able to overcome, and stated that the team had “won a majority of games.”

Even in the post-war years, women found positions coaching men’s teams. For example, in 1921, Genevieve Jones, a recent graduate from Oregon Agricultural College, coached the boys’ football teams at the local school in La Grande. The *Albany Evening Herald* highlighted that she specialized in physical education (November 1, 1921, 6). Similarly, six years later, the *Morning Register* (November 4, 1927, 8) declared that Ora Read Hemenway was “probably the only woman football coach in the state of Oregon.” The same year, the *Reading Times* represented Mrs William McMullen, coach of a school team in Gaylord, Kansas, as a good coach and “the only woman football coach in the country” (December 20, 1927, 20). None of these articles expressed concern about the appointments, nor felt the need to emphasise the coaches’ feminine attributes. Women’s roles during the war and the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment that gave women the vote may have helped these women.

In the 1930s, ~~“~~the~~e Great~~ Depression “simultaneously heightened gender roles and undercut them” (Kleinberg 1999, 246). Women used their domestic skills at home to grow food, but they also needed jobs. Women’s expected role in football in the 1930s continued to be as a spectator, as evidenced in Judson Philips and Robert Wood’s 1936 *Hold ‘Em Girls: The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Men and Football*. The authors

informed women about how to be good spectators and impress their dates. The 1930s saw ~~many~~ societal anxieties over female athletes whom the media linked with the “mannish lesbian,” “a label that brought harsh condemnation” (Pamela Grundy and Susan Shackleford 2007, 58). Marilyn Cohen notes that “the eroticised heterosexual sports competitor also emerged” (2009, 41) to counteract this image. However, articles did not eroticise these female coaches despite women’s expected football role and the sport’s hyper~~-~~masculinity. For example, Mary Colvin coached a high school football team to great success. When the *New York Times* published their 1931 article about her, Colvin had been coaching the O’Keefe Junior High School team for seven years, winning the city title for the fourth time. The report noted that she “goes out on the field, discusses plays, points out weaknesses…tells the boys how to stand, how to run, how to pass and how to direct the team to best advantage” (December 6, 1931, 10), making it clear that she was not a coach in name only. None of the five articles about Colvin mentioned her appearance, a powerful indicator that women could coach the sport successfully without media concern that they were unfeminine.

Colvin was not the only female football coach in the 1930s. In 1933 in Columbus, Ohio, Dorothy Lambert coached a Sunday school football team. Lambert’s husband, ~~was married to~~ Fonsa, ~~Lambert, who~~ had served as “chairman of the advisory council of the national football rules committee” (*Chicago Daily Tribune* October 26, 1933, 23). The *Tribune* article explained how Lambert learned about ~~the sport~~football from helping her husband with stenographic work for the committee. In this case, the journalist attributes Lambert’s knowledge to her relationship with her husband and the opportunities this role afforded her, reassuring readers that the correct gender order prevailed. In 1935, various reports introduced “America’s first woman football coach” or “Mississippi’s only woman football coach,” Mary Thompson (*Collegiate Digest*

March 12, 1935, ~~6~~5; *Daily Mail* December 19, 1935, 8). Thompson coached the Central Wildcats team for "several years" and in 1935 was fighting for the city's elementary school championship. She took over the squad in the absence of a male coach but had previously coached at Shelby County Reformatory in Tennessee and the Tennessee State Agricultural and Training School (*La Grande Evening Observer* January 3, 1936, 6). No reports emphasised her femininity. ~~, and photographs showed her dressed in a v-neck sleeveless sweater with a white shirt underneath, a whistle around her neck, holding a football, or were close-ups of her head and shoulders.~~ In 1936, Edith Schell was the subject of a *Valley Morning Star* article about how she coached the boy's football team at an elementary school in Bailey, Texas (November 20, 1936, 6). As with Thompson, her position was due to a lack of male coaches, and the article did not emphasise her looks or stereotypical roles.

World War II: 1941-1945

As during World War I, the Second World War provided opportunities for more women to take on coaching roles. In these years, newspapers reported on five female football coaches. What is significant in these years is the increased amount of media coverage. While 26 newspapers reported on five of the women, Pauline Rugh attracted the attention of over 150 newspapers. Despite all the media attention given to Rugh, newspapers referred to Mrs Joe Ward, who was coaching in the same years as Rugh, as the first female football coach. This coverage reveals a lack of awareness of what was happening elsewhere.

During World War II, women held various industry roles ~~in industry~~, but employers and returning servicemen expected that female employment would be ~~only~~ temporary. Women also took men's place in sports, including the development of the

All-American Girls' Softball League, which "while novel…was logical, in the projected absence of men" (Merrie Fidler 2010, 33). Authorities did not permit women in the military to lead men (Milkman 2004, 468), yet, like in World War I, women coached male football teams as part of the war effort. Other themes emerging from the articles include highlighting some coaches' attractiveness, attributing success to their husbands, but also much support for these women. These women were taking on a masculine role in a hypermasculine sport, so the simple fact that many outlets did not demonstrate significant concern is a sign of their acceptance.

In 1942 Pauline Foster won her first game as coach of the Corning High School, Pennsylvania, football team 14-0. The *Logan Daily News* (October 22, 1942, 6) explained that her role resulted from not finding a male coach. The newspaper articulated little concern about the situation; however, the opposing coach stated that "I'll never live it down that a woman beat me." He further suggested that he would rather go to war than lose to a woman when he stated, "The sooner the army calls me, the better." Madeline Bell took over coaching the football team at Mahaffey High School, Pennsylvania, in 1942 and continued for four years while their coach Guy Wensell was at war. Following the end of the conflict, Bell returned to her regular classroom teaching. While the article accepted Bell's role, the title "Woman Football Coach Returns to Knitting" (*Oelwein Daily Register* October 15, 1946, 4) provided a stark contrast from the masculine coaching role to one the journalist considered more appropriate for women.

In 1943 ~~Pauline~~ Rugh gained widespread media coverage as "possibly the nation's first feminine football coach" (*New York Times* August 20, 1943, 11) when she coached the Bell Township High School team in Pennsylvania. Despite this comment, Rugh was not even the first female coach in the state, as, according to the *Appeal-*

Democrat, *Time* magazine ~~had to print~~printed a letter from ~~Pauline~~ Foster's brother explaining their mistake in believing Rugh was the first female football coach in the country (October 9, 1943, 5). This coverage is either an example of collective forgetting or a lack of awareness from the journalists writing about Rugh. Newspapers from 35 states reported on Rugh, and of the 27 different articles about her, ten mentioned her looks. The *New York Times* (August 20, 1943, 11) stated that she was "young, blonde and much easier to look at than any masculine instructor,"~~;~~ while the others all mentioned that she was blonde. The focus on Rugh's hair colour held her up to a sexual ideal of attractiveness going beyond a simple comment about her looks. The final article about Rugh in July 1944 reported that she was quitting her coaching position to focus purely on classroom teaching, but also that she had recently married Wenroy Smith (~~*The*~~ *Morning Herald* July 24, 1944, 5), a statement that confirmed her heterosexuality. Far more suggestive comments than those directed at Rugh are evident in a 1944 James J. Corbett article in the *Hartford Courant* about Mary McMichael, the head football coach at Amite High School. Corbett referred to McMichael as a "favorite pin-up girl" and "buxom blonde" (December 7, 1944, D3). He also commented that "Her record of one victory against one defeat – is fanfare enough for the young lady who set aside cosmetics and gowns for sweat-pants and cleats." ~~The one photograph of McMichael showed her on the field coaching two players and thus was not a sexualised image.~~ The uneven coverage of the two women (over 150 articles about Rugh compared to six for McMichael) makes it difficult to comment on whether their appearances led to more reports. However, the amount~~extent~~ of ~~the~~ coverage about Rugh suggests that the media emphasized~~s~~ females who fit ideals of feminine attractiveness.

~~It is worth noting here that there were many images of female football coaches throughout the years. Articles about 13 of the 26 coaches analysed in this paper had~~

~~corresponding drawings or photographs, none of which sexualised them. Images fall into one of four categories: head and shoulder pictures, coaching on the field or in a classroom, surrounded by players, or, in Rugh's case only, receiving advice from a male coach. The word count and journal article form have made it difficult to provide more than an overview, but it would make an excellent conference paper.~~

One final example of a female coach during World War II comes from 1943 when ~~Mrs Joe~~ Ward, coach of the football team at Woodlawn Hills Elementary School in San Antonio, Texas, beat her husbands' team. The *Hartford Courant* stated that Ward had been coaching for three years and claimed that the city had the first female football coach (November 2, 1943, 14). Ward was highly successful as the article stated that her team had won eleven games, lost one, and tied one. The team won titles in 1940 and 1941 and ~~only~~ lost by one point in 1942. In addition to the references to her husband, the article described her as "a pretty, five-foot brunette with brown eyes," emphasising how Ward conformed to heteronormative standards for women. In 1947, the *Pampa Daily News* reported that Ward retired from the sport, having coached the team for seven years (September 17, 1947, 4), a remarkable amount of time for female football coaches in this period.

Post World War II Years: 1946-1960

At the end of the war, an "almost frenetic return to traditional gender roles" restricted women's jobs (Eileen McDonagh and Laura Pappano 2007, 188). The principal social expectation was that women should look after the children and home, while men earned a wage (Elaine Tyler May 2000, 492). Despite this emphasis on women returning to the home, acceptance of female coaches on their own merits returns in the post-World War II years. Five women coached male teams in these years, with newspapers naming Ruth

Fretwell the first female coach in Pennsylvania despite Foster, Rugh, and Bell preceding her. While each woman only attracted two different articles each, 23 newspapers reprinted one of those about Mildred Crowley. It is not apparent why newspapers were so interested in Crowley. Articles about three of the five women hint at concerns about female coaches; two emphasised their stereotypically feminine attributes, while the other highlighted administrators' concerns that female coaches were not appropriate.

Evidence that some authority figures were concerned about female coaches comes from Pennsylvania, the same state that embraced Rugh, Foster, and Bell. A West Fairview school appointed Fretwell as the coach of the Enola Reserves in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1947. The school had an all-female faculty, which led to Fretwell's appointment in order to comply with Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) rules that permitted only staff from the school to coach athletics teams. While the *Indiana Evening Gazette* article suggested that there would be more interest than usual in the match, it did not otherwise seem to be concerned with the development (September 25, 1947, 24). However, the *Times-Leader* reported that the PIAA, after initially allowing the school to join the association, later reversed their judgement (November 4, 1947, 17). The PIAA claimed their decision was not due to Fretwell's involvement with the football team, but neither did it report their reasons.

Reports about female coaches in these years often emphasised their appearances. For example, t~~T~~he *Pasadena Star-News* referred to Barbara Stevens, who began coaching the Washington Elementary School team in Pasadena, California, in 1946 ~~her~~ as "a tall, statuesque brunette" who won 11 out of 12 matches (1946, 26). ~~i~~In 1946, the *Anniston Star* (December 22, 1946, 16) referred to ~~to Barbara Stevens, who began coaching the Washington Elementary School team in Pasadena, California, in 1946~~her~~,~~ as someone who "a few months ago couldn't tell a T-formation line from a dowagers'

reception line." This comment created a contrast between the masculinity of football and the female-appropriate role of attending social engagements. ~~The *Pasadena Star-News* referred to her as "a tall, statuesque brunette" who won 11 out of 12 matches (1946, 26).~~ Stevens took on her position because of a lack of men to fill the role, but her place was short-lived as "tradition-minded officials…found a man for the job." Reports about Jean De Lurme, the "pretty female member of Lopez High School," not only mentioned her role as coach of the high school football team but also that she "washes her teams' uniforms" (*De Kalb Daily Chronicle* June 9, 1955, 8). The comment contrasts the role of a coach with appropriate feminine behaviour. The same year an *El Paso Herald-Post* article introduced Lydia Sierra as the athletic coach of St. Joseph's Catholic School. Sierra had been coaching the team for fifteen years after taking coaching courses and coming "from a family of football players" (November 5, 1955, 9). This sole article about her made no mention of her looks or ~~other irrelevant information~~feminine behaviour. Reports about ~~Mildred~~ Crowley, a coach at Mount Alvernia School in Newton, Massachusetts, demonstrated a similar lack of concern. The short reports ~~that accompanied large photographs of Crowley on the field coaching her players, or standing by a blackboard drawing plays~~about Crowley~~,~~ simply stated that she had not had much experience before taking over from the previous coach who had entered a seminary (*Ithaca Journal*, October 31, 1956, 15).

Discussion and Conclusion

This article aimed to change the discourse about the "first" female football coach. Women have a far longer history in the sport than has been previously documented, and through this work, the earliest women coaches' stories are revealed, allowing us to acknowledge their accomplishments. ~~The fact that~~That this research has uncovered only

26 female coaches in 70 years means~~ that~~ it is difficult to draw too many conclusions about differences over the various eras ~~covered ~~or how coverage differed based on the level of the game. What is clear ~~from these examples ~~is that progress ~~is not a linear process~~was not linear. It is not possible to state that reports about female football coaches got more positive as time went on. Stories from across the decades accepted the women~~ coaches~~; articles commented on how good they were without ~~the need for~~ remarks about their femininity, home life, or other irrelevant comments. Similarly, reports exist across the years that did emphasise these elements. While no research exists on the reaction to current female football coaches, occasional comments on articles on Twitter still display indivdiduals' beliefs that women know little about football, comment on the physical appearance of female coaches, or believe the sport is too masculine for women. This paper's historical analysis helps us understand contemporary feminist media studies issues.~~, reassuring readers that the women remained feminine.~~

Writing in 2016, sociologist Toni Bruce established thirteen traditional rules of media coverage based on dozens of pieces of research (364-5). Those relevant to this article include infantilisation, reporting non-sport-related aspects of a woman's performance, sportswomen don't matter, compulsory heterosexuality and appropriate femininity, sexualisation, and finally, ambivalence, where reports juxtapose an athlete's skill with traditional femininity. The corpus of literature about female coaches similarly revealed that focusing on women's physical attractiveness and heteronormativity is common.

Infantilisation is most apparent in reports that referred to ~~female coaches~~women as girls or young ladies. Of the 26 coaches, newspapers referred to ten as girls and one as a young lady. These occur throughout the period from Merrell in 1908 to De Lurme

in 1955. ~~In Merrell's case, only one of the six articles about her called her a girl.~~ However, references to ~~the~~ coaches as girls are more common in reports ~~that highlighted~~highlighting women's attractiveness. For example, 11 of the 27 different articles about Rugh called her a girl, as did both articles about Stevens.

The emphasis on non-sport-related aspects such as domestic roles was only true in some reports. Articles about Burckhardt, Stagg, and De Lurme referenced housework and those about Brannon, Lambert, and Stagg mentioned their husbands. References to female football coaches' husbands were clear means through which editors emphasised the women's heteronormativity, comments that are "rarely seen when male coaches…are profiled" (Pat Griffin 2007, 222). The construction of coaching as a masculine pursuit means that women who take on this role can sometimes be presumed to be lesbians (LaVoi and Calhoun 2016, 170), hence the emphasis on marital status.

Emphasis on women's appearances demonstrates the rule of compulsory heterosexuality and appropriate femininity. Evidence comes from reports that referred to Merrell as beautiful, Burckhardt as "most attractive," and Rugh as a "comely blond." However, sexualisation is only evident in articles relating to McMichael. Comments about Bell returning to knitting also adhere to the rule of appropriate femininity.

There were various ways that articles demonstrated ambivalence and belittled the ~~female coaches'~~women's achievements. Reports about Iker and Hurd in 1917 mentioned that the appointment of female coaches was "radical" and "strange" even given the effect of war. References to the employment of female coaches because of a lack of male coaches were evident in reports about Thompson, Schell, Foster, and Bell. These comments position the women as second choices despite articles' ~~the~~ praise for

their work~~ that many articles articulated~~. A further way to undercut women's efforts was to attribute their knowledge to men, as ~~was the case ~~with Lambert.

Regarding the rule that sportswomen don't matter, the lack of large numbers of female football coaches explains the lower levels of coverage. However, it is essential to consider that there may have been many more female coaches that newspapers did not report.

Despite some articles conforming to Bruce's rules, there was also much praise. There was little outcry over women taking on this role, despite the sport's masculine narrative. Many articles praised the women for their successes, commenting on their knowledge and the number of matches they won. Colvin and Ward coached for seven years, while Bell coached for four years, Thompson for "several years," and Sierra for 15 years, demonstrating that some schools and colleges accepted female coaches on a longer-term basis.

The literature on female coaches indicated that issues that faced these women were assumptions that women cannot coach male sport and that male coaches are superior. The superiority of male coaches was evident in articles about Brannon and McMullen that both attributed their knowledge to their husbands. Assumptions that women cannot coach male sports were only evident in articles about Iker, Hurd, and Stevens. However, these issues probably prevented many other women from ever being appointed.

~~The fact that this research has uncovered only 26 female coaches in 70 years means that it is difficult to draw too many conclusions about differences over the various eras covered or how coverage differed based on the level of the game. What is clear from these examples is that progress is not a linear process. It is not possible to state that reports about female football coaches got more positive as time went on.~~

~~Stories from across the decades accepted the women coaches; articles commented on how good they were without the need for remarks about their femininity, home life, or other irrelevant comments. Similarly, reports exist across the years that did emphasise these elements, reassuring readers that the women remained feminine.~~

The findings of this work are highly significant for feminist media scholars. As LaVoi and Calhoun state, “When female athletes [and coaches] are underrepresented…the implicit message is that female athletes do not exist or have any notable achievements, are uninteresting, or not worthy of being covered” (2016, 170). In presenting these case studies, this paper aligns with feminist goals to emphasise women’s achievements and calls attention to women’s leadership in a sport traditionally viewed as hypermasculine. The largely positive response of the media demonstrates that it is worth scholars exploring women’s involvement in “unexpected” roles to discover unexpected discourses. Such research will help address issues of collective amnesia. These case studies also challenge the dominant narrative that football, and especially football leadership, is a male preserve. This work thus has a vital role in normalising women’s role in this most masculine of sports.

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