

---

**Original research article**

# WOMEN'S WORLD GAMES

**Ivana Parčina<sup>1</sup>, Violeta Šiljak<sup>1</sup>, Aleksandra Perović<sup>1</sup> and Elena Plakona<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Management in Sports, Alfa University, Belgrade, Serbia

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of *sport* and physical education, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Ivana Parčina, Violeta Šiljak, Aleksandra Perović and Elena Plakona

UDK 796.093.1-055.2

---

## SUMMARY

The subject matter of this paper refers to one of the first international athletics competitions known as the Women's World Games. These first Games for women were organized by the International Sports Clubs of Monaco and Monte Carlo, with the aim to attract and entertain sporting enthusiasts. At this international competition, women had their first opportunity to participate in athletics competitions. The Games were held in 1921, 1922 and 1923 in Monte Carlo. At that time, these Games had a prefix - Olympic. The success of the first Games made the organization of the following competitions for women in a variety of events much easier. The President of the International Federation of Sports for Women was Alice Milliat, and she organized the Women's Olympic Games in Paris in 1922, the International Women's Games in 1926 in Gothenburg, in 1930 in Prague and in 1934 in London. The aim of the study is to determine the importance of Women's World Games for the overall development of women's sports and their inclusion into the competition program at the Olympics. The historical method was applied in the paper. Results of this paper contribute to the clarification of doubts regarding the inclusion of women in the Olympic movement, given that with her work, Alice Milliat directed the attention of the International Olympic Committee to the importance of including women in the competition program at the Olympics.

**Key words:** women, athletics, international competitions, Alice Milliat

---

### Correspondence author

Violeta Šiljak  
violeta.siljak@alfa.edu.rs

---

## INTRODUCTION

Keeping in mind Coubertin's influence, the framework of his creative work and motivation, it can be considered that the main causes for the lack of presence of women in competitive sports are associated with religion, war preparation, ancient Olympic Games and Victorian England. There was a large number of direct opponents to the idea of women's equal participation in sports. Coubertin's works provide enough evidence of this claim. He opposed the participation of women in competitive sports because, in line with his upbringing, he did not consider it natural. Coubertin was a man of his time, and did not change along with the social changes that had swept Europe, causing upheaval in old traditions and principles. In 1901, he wrote: *The role of a woman in the world remains as it always has been. She is above all a companion to man, the future mother of the family and should be brought up having such fate in mind ...*<sup>1</sup>

The first time he thought about the role of women in the reconstruction of the Olympic Games, Coubertin was in England and he was watching the process of awarding the winners of the Games organized in his honour in 1890. The winner rode on a white horse up to where the girl stood, descended from his horse and knelt in front of her in order to be crowned with a laurel wreath. He then kissed the girl's hand. Coubertin, who had already adopted the English way of life liked what he saw and described it at a conference in Geneva in 1935. In later years of his life, Coubertin accepted the participation of women in sports and public life, but he was still troubled by presence of fans at women's competitions.

The admission of women into the Olympic movement became official in 1924, when a text was introduced to the basic rules: *Women are accepted into certain competitions at the Olympic Games. The program will define in which events they will participate.*

At the Congress held in Prague in 1925, Coubertin announced that he was resigning as president, and slowly tradition as a factor used for the exclusion of women started to disappear. At the next Congress held in Lisbon in 1926, women were admitted to athletics competitions and for the first time were able to enter the Olympic Stadium in Amsterdam at the Games in 1928. This was the last hurdle of the masculinised hegemony that women jumped over. Their acceptance on the track was the result of a long process.

---

<sup>1</sup> Norbert Müller, ed., *Pierre de Coubertin Textes Choisis, Vol.1* (Zurich: International Olympic Committee, 1986), 47 (Eng. Selected Texts).

## SUBJECT MATTER, PURPOSE AND METHOD

The subject matter of the paper refers to the participation of women in special athletics competitions called Women's World Games. The aim of the study is to determine the importance of Women's World Games for the overall development of women's sports and their inclusion into the competition program at the Olympics. The historical method was applied in the paper.

### The Role of Alice Milliat in the Development of Women's Sports

Despite resistance by Coubertin and other conservative members of the International Olympic Committee, some women were able to participate in the early Games in events that were socially acceptable for women. Athletics were not an event open for women, and women who were involved in it were not thought of very highly. The IOC refused to consider the participation of women in the Games in 1920 and 1924. The decision of the IOC and the International Amateur athletics Federation not to address the issue of women led to the creation of the International Federation of Women's Sports (FSFI - *Federation Sportive Feminine Internationale*), which was the main driver of



**Fig. 1** Alice Milliat

change in women's sports during the 1920s and 1930s. The Federation was founded on 31 October 1921, and it played a very important role in the evolution of women's sports and competing at the Olympic Games. From five nation-members in the founding year, the Federation grew to 30 nation-members by 1936, when it was shut down. Alice Milliat was at the head of this body (Fig.) 1).

In 1917, Alice Milliat founded the Women's Sports Federation of France (*Federation des Societes Femines Sportives de France*) around the same time when the Austrian Amateur Athletics Federation was founded. The first women's national athletics championship was held in 1918 in Austria, while athletics were developing in Great Britain, Poland, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium and Norway, even during the war.<sup>2</sup> Stimulation that was missing in order to activate the statutory

---

<sup>2</sup> Allen Guttman, *Women's Sports. A History*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 95.

body for the control of international women's athletics competitions came from a not so famous French athlete Alice Milliat. Great efforts by this woman and her associates made the Olympic officials recognize the desire of women to compete at the international level and represent their countries as men in the Olympic competitions. Milliat was a rower, which she grew to love during her stay in England. She traveled a lot around Europe and the United States and was very interested in sports and physical education. She began her career as a leader in sports in one of the three large French clubs *Female Sports (Femina Sport)*. The club was founded in 1912, and Alice became president of the club three years later. She worked as a cashier in organizing the first national championship of France held in 1917 only to be elected Secretary General of the French Association the following year. In March 1919, she was unanimously elected Speaker of the Federation. As president, she organized the championships in field hockey, football, basketball and swimming.

### Olympic Games for Women and Women's World Games

Alice Milliat focused all her energy on women's sports to be recognized by federations of men's sports. She used her experience to help women's sports, and in 1921, after her request for the inclusion of athletics events for women at the Olympics was denied, she organized the first Olympic Games for women in Monte Carlo together with the president of the Monaco International Sports Club, Camille Blanc (Fig. 2). At the competition called *1er Meeting International d'Education Physique Feminine de Sports Athletiques*, there were 100 female contestants from 4 countries.<sup>3</sup> The competition was held from March 24 to March 31 in the garden of the *Monte Carlo* Casino.

Women from England, France, Italy and Switzerland competed in a 60 m running event (Fig. 3), in 250 m and 800 m events, in 4x75 m and 4x175 m relays, 65 m hurdles, long jump, standing long jump,



Fig. 2 Competition Program  
Front Page

<sup>3</sup> International Association of Athletics Federation, "Plaque commemorating first women's Olympics" IAAF, <http://www.iaaf.org/news/news/plaque-commemorating-first-womens-olympics-un> (downloaded Feb 15, 2013).

high jump, javelin and shot put. At this sporting event, there were also exhibition matches in basketball, gymnastics and pushball.<sup>4</sup> (*pushball*).

All the gold medals were won by competitors from England and France and all the participants received special medals for taking part in the Games.

The following games were held the following year in the same place and both competitions experienced great success and attracted a large number of fans. The Games were held in 1923 and, since 2009, the IAAF has been calling these games the first Women's Olympic Games.



Fig. 3 60 m race

After the FSFI was formed, Milliat resent her request to the International Olympics Committee to include women in the athletics events at the Olympics. As her request was again denied by the IOC, she organized the first women's Olympic Games in Paris on 20 August, 1922. These games were followed by 15,000 fans, and they experienced such success that in the August edition of the newspaper *Sports (Le Sportif)* Milliat was compared to Coubertin<sup>5</sup>.



Fig. 4 medals from the Games in Monte Carlo

By organizing the Games and establishing the Federation, Milliat achieved two objectives:

- she overcame resistance from Pierre de Coubertin to allow women to equally participate in the Olympic Games and
- she forced the International Amateur Athletics Federation IAAF to take female athletics seriously.

There were 77 competitors who participated at the Olympics from Czechoslovakia, France, England, Switzerland and the United States. The

---

<sup>4</sup> Pushball was played by two teams on a field usually 128 m long and 46 m wide with a ball 1.83 m in diameter and 23 kg in weight. There were 11 players on each team and in two half times they tried to get the ball to go over the goal or to push it under. Points were won based on the way the ball was thrown over. The game was invented in the United States in 1891.

<sup>5</sup> Andre Drevon, Alice Milliat La Passionaria du Sport Feminin ( Paris: Vuibert, 2005), 68.

competition was opened with an Olympic style ceremony. Athletes competed in the 60-meter, 100-yard (91.44 meter), 300-meter, 1000-meter, relay 4x110-yard (about 100-meter) and 100-yard hurdles running events. Long jump, standing long jump, high jump, javelin and shot put were also the events they competed in at this sporting event. The contestants in the shot put and javelin events first threw with their right and then with their left hands. Summarized results of the best right-hand throws and the best left-hand throws gave the final order of contestants. There were 18 world records set in this competition.

The success of the first women's Olympic Games held in Paris in 1922 forced the IAAF to negotiate with the FSFI about the control over women's athletics. In 1924, IAAF voted to sanction women's athletics and to exclude them from the program of the Games. FSFI pressure continued and eventually an agreement was reached to retain the right to organize women's athletics competitions, but to exclude the term "Olympic" from the name of the Games. Milliat excluded the term "Olympic Games" and used the name Women's World Games. FSFI became a strong independent body that began to rival the Olympic movement, especially after the Women's Olympic Games in 1922. Consequently, the said agreement was signed and the IOC was finally ready to include some of the athletics events at the Games.

The next competition called Women's World Games was held in 1926 in Gothenburg, Sweden. The Games took place from August 27 to August 29, and involved competitors from Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, England, Japan, Latvia, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland. The discus throw was introduced in addition to the competitive disciplines from the previous games. The Olympic opening ceremony was attended by over 20,000 fans, and the Games were opened by the wife of a former Prime Minister Mary von Sydows.



**Fig. 5** *Kinue Hitomi*

These Games were made special by a Japanese competitor Kinue Hitomi, who was the only representative of her country (Fig. 5). She won in the long jump event, setting a new world record. She won in the standing long jump event, came in second in the discus throw, finished third in the 100 yard race, fifth in the 60 m race and sixth in the 250 m race. Her results contributed to Japan finishing up fifth in the final standings.

In 1928 in Amsterdam, the IOC included 5 of the 11 events that were at the Women's World Games, believing that women were not physically able to cope with some of the disciplines even though they have repeatedly participated in them. Milliat confirmed that the number of events were inadequate and was not sure whether they would be further reduced in the upcoming Games. She decided to continue organizing the Women's World Games.

The Games in Prague were held in 1930 as the third consecutive Women's World Games. They took place from September 6 to September 8, with 200 participants from 17 countries. Athletes from Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, England, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and Switzerland competed in the following events: running events including 60 m, 100 m, 200 m, 800 m, 4x100 m relay and 80 m hurdles races, long jump, high jump, javelin, shot put and discus, as well as in the triathlon (100 m race, high jump and javelin). They also played exhibition basketball matches (Canada had a special team, Fig. 6), handball, fencing, archery and canoeing. The only sporting event on the third day of the competition was a basketball game between Canada and France, where Canada won 18:14.

During the International Athletics Federation Congress in 1928, there was a debate on the motion by some countries to cancel the women's competition. After a discussion, it was decided to cancel the 800 m race only and to keep the other events. Women who competed in previous Games did not deserve such hostility. Women's athletics had constantly been exposed to criticism probably because they were not one of the aristocratic sporting events. The athletes were not from wealthy families and did not appear on the front pages of magazines or advertise products. They were ordinary women from the factories, offices, tailor's shops, and the identification of athletics with the lower class and the working class lasted for decades later.

At the 1929 IOC Congress held in Lausanne, it was decided to exempt athletics for women from the Games in Los Angeles that were supposed to be held in 1932 because of inadequate reporting on competitions from the previous Games. The journalists were not ready to follow women's athletics, and submitted false reports on female competitors fainting in the middle of the race, crying hysterically if they did not win, and so forth. Official figures refuted the journalists' allegations. An interesting piece of information was that the press reported that

out of 11 women only 6 of them completed the race, while the official figure was that out of 9 women 7 of them made in through the finish line. At the Games in St. Louis held in 1904, in the 800-meter race two men collapsed, while the IOC did not take this as a good enough reason to expel athletics from the program.



**Fig. 6** *Canadian basketball team*

Singing and dancing competitions were offered as an alternative. IAAF members threatened to boycott the program of male events if women were completely excluded, thus a compromise was made. In Los Angeles, women competed in the 100-meter race.

During this session, the Finnish Olympic Committee supported the request by the Nordic countries to abolish the women's competitions in the reduction of the program. It was proposed that the main committee should make a report on the exclusion of women after consulting with the delegates of international federations. Opinions of the members of the IOC on this issue were divided, but the proposal was passed.

A Congress held in Barcelona in 1931 put the issue of women's participation to vote in various events for the Games in Los Angeles. In gymnastics



and swimming they were accepted unanimously, in athletics with 16 votes in favour and 3 against, and in fencing with 17 in favour and 2 against.

Alice Milliat sent a letter to the IOC which was read at the Congress in Oslo in 1935. She proposed to exclude all women's events from the Olympics because they had their own Games held every four years, which were regulated by the FSFI and which covered all sports in which women competed. After taking the proposal into considering, the IOC ruled that a decision could not be made without consulting the federations. The reason for this move by Alice Milliat was the fact that the IOC did not include all athletics disciplines in which women competed in their Games in the Olympics. Team Great Britain thought it could not gain anything by participating in the Olympic Games under such conditions and boycotted the Games in Amsterdam in 1928.

These games were last held in 1934 in London. The event which was planned for 1938 and which was to be held in Vienna was cancelled because in the meantime women became allowed to compete in all athletics events at the Olympics. 200 competitors from 19 countries took part in the fourth Olympic Games, which were held from August 9 to August 11. Competitors from Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, England, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and South Africa participated in 12 competitive events. Pentathlon replaced triathlon from the previous competition and included a 100-meter race, high jump, long jump, shot put and javelin. Exhibition games were held at these Games in basketball, football and handball.

## CONCLUSION

The developmental path of women's participation in the Olympic Games was full of challenges, which due to a great sports enthusiast, Alice Milliat, were overcome and resolved in favour of women. It is a known fact that women were not allowed to participate in the first Olympic Games. The development of national and international sports federations helped women play sports and participate in competitions. Their support in negotiations with the International Olympic Committee was of great importance. Yet, the resistance of the International Olympic Committee towards women's participation in the Olympic Games produced the opposite effect, i.e., that is why the Women's World Games were created, one of the first major international Games in which women were able to compete in athletics. During his term in office as President of the IOC, Pierre de Coubertin was gradually changing his stance on women's participation in the Olympic Games, but was particularly against their participation in athletics events, believing that they were too difficult for women.

When in 1921 Alice Milliat started the Women's Olympic Games, she influenced the members of the IOC to act on the issue of women's participation in the Olympic Games in athletics. By organizing the Women's World Games, she was the best example and an inspiration to many women who wanted to achieve great results in sports. By establishing their own associations and federations, women began fighting for inclusion in the body of the IOC, an institution that was founded as a private aristocratic club for men that belonged to one man who could never even had imagined how successful this organization was going to become. Alice Milliat's efforts to create female Olympians in athletics were significant not only because of the inclusion of women in athletics events, but also because of the representation of women as female athletes, which inspired many women to take up sports. As a result, a large number of clubs and associations was established, various competitions in various countries were developed and generally speaking more attention was drawn to women's sports.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bulonj, Iv P. *The Olympic spirit of Pierre de Coubertin*. Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1984.
2. Defrantz, Anita. "Women and leadership in sport". *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* (1988): 46-48
3. Defrantz, Anita. "Progress made: Pitfalls and conditions for further advancement of women in the Olympic Movement". In *Sport. The Third Millennium*. Landry, Landry & Yerles (Eds) Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de L'Universite Laval (Eng. Laval University Press), 1991.
4. Defrantz, Anita. "The Olympic Games and women". *Olympic Review*, No. 5 (1995) :30-34.
5. Defrantz, Anita. "The changing role of women in the Olympic Games". *Olympic Review*, Vol. 26, No. 15 (1997): 18-21.
6. Drevon, Andre. *Alice Milliat La Passionaria du Sport Feminin*. Paris: Vuibert, 2005.
7. Guttmann, Allen. *Women's Sports. A History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.
8. Lekarska, Nadia. "Women in the Olympic Games and movement and Coubertin's Olympic views on their participation in the Games". *International Olympic Academy: Report of the 30th Session* (1990): 102 - 110.
9. Mechikoff, Robert A. *A history and Philosophy of Sport and Physical Education - From Ancient Civilizations to the Modern World*. San Diego, USA: WCB - McGraw-Hill, 1998.
10. Müller, Norbert, ed. *Pierre de Coubertin Textes Choisis (Eng. Selected Texts), Vol.1*. Zurich: International Olympic Committee, 1986.
11. Parčina, I. "The role of women in the development of the Olympic movement." Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Management in Sports, 2014.
12. *Pierre de Coubertin- ideas, work, life*. Belgrade: Pierre de Coubertin Yugoslav Committee

13. Šiljak, Violeta. *History of sports*. Belgrade: Faculty of Management in Sports, 2007.
14. Šiljak, Violeta. *Olympism*. Belgrade: Faculty of Management in Sports, 2013.

#### *Online Resources*

- International Association of Athletics Federation. "Plaque commemorating first women's Olympics". IAAF. <http://www.iaaf.org/news/news/plaque-commemorating-first-womens-olympics-un> (downloaded February 15,2013).

## ЖЕНСКЕ СВЕТСКЕ ИГРЕ

---

### САЖЕТАК

Предмет овог рада се односи на једно од првих међународних атлетских такмичења познатог под именом Женске светске игре. Ове прве Игре за жене организовао је Међународни спортски клуб Монака и Монте Карла и за циљ су имале да привуку и забаве спортске ентузијасте. На овом међународном такмичењу жене су имале прву прилику да учествују у атлетским надметањима. Игре су одржане 1921., 1922. и 1923. године у Монте Карлу. Ове Игре су у то време имале префикс - Олимпијске. Успех првих оваквих Игара је много олакшао организацију наредних такмичења за жене у различитим дисциплинама. Председница Међународне федерација спорта за жене је била Алис Милиат која је организовала Женске олимпијске игре у Паризу 1922. године, Међународне женске игре 1926. године у Гетеборгу, 1930. године у Прагу и 1934. године у Лондону. Циљ рада је утврђивање значаја Женских светских игара на целокупни развој женског спорта и њихово укључивање у програм такмичења на Олимпијским играма. У раду је примењен историјски метод. Резултати рада су допринели расветљавању недоумица везаних за укључење жена у Олимпијски покрет, обзиром да је Алис Милиат својим радом скренула пажњу Међународног олимпијског комитета на значај укључивања жена у програм такмичења на Олимпијским играма.

**Кључне речи:** жене, атлетика, међународна такмичења, Алис Милиат

---

## JUEGOS MUNDIALES FEMENINOS

---

### RESUMEN

El tema de este trabajo se refiere a una de las primeras competiciones atléticas internacionales conocida como Juegos Mundiales Femeninos. Estos primeros juegos para mujeres fueron organizados por el Club Deportivo Internacional de Mónaco y

Montecarlo, y tenían como objetivo atraer a los amantes del deporte y entretenimiento. En este concurso internacional, las mujeres tuvieron su primera oportunidad de participar en competencias atléticas. Los juegos se celebraron en 1921, 1922 y 1923 en Montecarlo. Estos juegos en ese momento tenían el prefijo – Olímpicos. El éxito del primero de estos juegos facilitó mucho la organización de la próxima competición para las mujeres en una variedad de disciplinas. La presidenta de la Federación Deportiva Femenina Internacional era Alice Milliat, que organizó los Juegos Olímpicos Femeninos en París en 1922, Juegos Femeninos Internacionales en 1926 en Goteborg, en 1930 en Praga y en 1934 en Londres. El objetivo de este trabajo ha sido determinar la importancia de los Juegos Mundiales Femeninos para el desarrollo general del atletismo femenino y su participación en el programa de competición en los Juegos Olímpicos. En el trabajo se aplica el método histórico. Los resultados de este trabajo han contribuido a la aclaración de dudas con respecto a la inclusión de las mujeres en el movimiento olímpico, ya que Alice Milliat con su trabajo llamó la atención del Comité Olímpico Internacional sobre la importancia de involucrar a las mujeres en el programa de competición en los Juegos Olímpicos.

**Palabras clave:** mujeres, atletismo, concursos internacionales, Alice Milliat

---