

MEMORIES OF ATHLETICS

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Excerpted from History of Athletics at Ricks College

The season is now opening for field sports. Let us wake up and take advantage of it. If we mean to do anything now is the time to begin. Boys, don't wait until the time for contest comes, organize teams now, so that you will be ready for work as soon as the campus is dry. We have nearly two hundred strong men, who, at present, are good for nothing but practice. One cannot become an expert in a day. The ball player, the foot-racer and all do not reach their standard at once. It takes time and constant practice. Start now! Now that spring is opening there is a fever beginning to spread. The best remedy we can suggest is the following: Take daily doses of one hour's vigorous exercise, such as track work or baseball playing. Always say: 'I will try' instead of 'I can't.' We can have the best team in the Idaho Scholastic League. Never let the word 'can't' slip from your lips, never let it enter your mind. Follow this treatment for a few weeks and you will be ready for good athletic work. We wish to encourage the girls to 'get busy' as well as the boys.

This was the first ever reference to athletics at Ricks Academy, in the March 1906 issue of *Student Rays*, a monthly student publication. At the time some 340 students were enrolled. Establishing a gymnasium became an early priority. However, it would be more than eleven years before the dream became a reality:

A gymnasium is necessary for the progress of any high school or college. For if a student spends all his time in mental work his muscles become soft, and in fact in many instances his constitution is broken down. No student can do good work unless he has good health which can be attained only by the exercise of the body for which purpose our gymnasium has been established. (*Student Rays*, January 1907)

The first account of an organized basketball game is found in the January 31, 1907, edition of the *Current-Journal*, a weekly Rexburg newspaper. The game was played between the faculty and the missionary class on January 29, 1907. The score was 6-4, in favor of the missionaries. Two issues later, mention is made of a basketball game between employees of the Bell Telephone Company and the Academy, won by Bell, 14-11. Another game was played on February 22 of 1907.

'The Rexburg gymnasium was packed to watch the Academy girls play Idaho Falls High School girls. Playing for the Academy were: Lucy Hallstrom, Amy Ricks, Mary Robb, Ruly Wilson, and Alice Thurman.' No result is given but it was

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noted by an observer that ‘nothing but the best of feeling prevailed throughout the game.’ (David Crowder, *The First One Hundred Years, 1883-1983*)

The outcome of the game was recorded on the *Current-Journal*, with the Academy winning 19-6 and Miss Hallstrom scoring nine points.

Baseball in 1907 was suffering from lack of scheduling opponents. Although a team was in place, the student newspaper lamented:

The great distance between us and the other secondary schools of the State makes the expense of a meet so great that we are not able to come together. This reason makes the number of our games very small. We could no doubt play with some of the local teams. This would be all right and very interesting, still it would not arouse the spirit that meeting another high school does, and after all it is this spirit of enthusiasm that puts the life into a game. (*Student Rays*, April 1907)

Friday afternoon, May 17, 1907, students at Ricks Academy met to participate in a potato race, a hurdle race, a 100-yard dash, pole vaulting, a tug of war, a basketball game between the girls’ team and the faculty, and a baseball game.

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The 1908-9 school year can be considered the first of any sustained inter-school competition in athletics. “Woodvine’s hall has been leased for the use of our students. The hall has been remodeled and very much improved on the inside” (*Student Rays*, October 1908). “The armory hall is being equipped by the Academy as a gymnasium. \$250 worth of up-to-date apparatus has been set up” *Current-Journal*, November 19, 1908).

Coached by James C. Anderson, the Ricks Academy women’s basketball team included Helen McAllister, captain; Maud Turman, Zina Hansen, and Sara Cook, forwards; Emma Steele and Lurene Walker, guards; and Vera Kerr and Sadi Lloyd, substitutes.

The girl’s basketball season started with a win over the Academy of Idaho girls’ team in Pocatello on October 3, 1908. According to a report of the game, ‘the teams were evenly matched and put up a good game but our girls were much better drilled and those got the victory. Because of their lack of knowledge of the rules of the game,’ the Pocatello team ‘made so many fouls and some feeling was engendered because they were so frequently called down.’ Pocatello partisans complained that the referee was unfair. After all, James Anderson was on the Ricks Academy faculty and certainly was biased against Pocatello. He kept calling the Pocatello team for ‘progression,’ which they did not understand and about which the continued to complain. Despite complaints, the Ricks girls left Pocatello with a 7-5 victory. (David Crowder, *The Spirit of Ricks*)

As they returned to Rexburg via train at 4:45 AM, “There was a crowd of enthusiastic students at the depot to welcome the girls. There was a blinding snowstorm, and the hack as well as the presence of the students was a welcome sight to the tired girls who has been up all night” (*Student*

Rays, Nov. 1908). Two days later, at the Monday morning devotional, the coach related incidents of the game. They were all greeted with loud applause, a newspaper account stated.

The faculty men's team defeated the boys' team in basketball 25-12. The faculty kept the boy's team from scoring in the second half, after trailing 12-7 at intermission. Revenge was sweet the following month as the boys' team prevailed, winning 15-9. On December 5, 1908, the same boys' team defeated a Rexburg town team, 9-8. The girls entertained the Idaho Falls High School on the same day, winning 9-3 after leading only 4-2 at the half. Credit was given to Lurene Walker and Emma Steele for being "there with their hair braided and held the I.F.H. down by their close guarding" (*Student Rays*, Dec. 1908).

A glimpse of the competitiveness of the game of basketball in 1909 is shown in a report of a game played January 15th that year and won 21-20 by Idaho Falls High School:

The game was fiercely contested from start to finish for the rivalry was keen and the teams equally matched. Unfortunately it was very rough owing to the fact that inexperienced referees failed in announcing decisions promptly, especially in the case of dead balls. But the best of feeling prevailed between the contestants, for both sides realized the roughness was not intentional. Idaho Falls fouled more than Ricks, a fact due, perhaps, to the unintentional abuse of their superior size and strength. Time was called for injuries to Ricks players and once for an injury to an Idaho Falls man. Our two men were Richardson and Anderson, who collided violently with their respective opponents and were laid out for several minutes. (*Student Rays*, January 1909)

The sport of football, considered too rough by many at the time, was not allowed at a Church-owned school. Crowder, in his book about the history of Rexburg, mentions a city football team, "under the coaching of James Anderson from the academy," that was organized in the fall of 1909. The team played games at St. Anthony and Blackfoot, but the sport had yet to be witnessed in an official game in Rexburg by year's end. In 1905, U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt had summoned a group of college presidents to a meeting at the White House and told the group to make football safer or he would abolish the sport. New rules, including legalization of the forward pass, were implemented nationwide for the 1906 season. The October 1908 issue of *Student Rays* editorialized about the diminution of "the rough element" of the game and stated that "the sentiment against football in our Church schools is gradually diminishing."

Record of a baseball game, played April 17, 1909, is found in the commencement issue of *Student Rays*. After only one week of practice, it is reported, the Ricks team won 19-11 at Blackfoot High School. Apparently no other games were played.

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Three track results from the annual track and field competition prior to commencement were recorded in the *Current-Journal*. Angus Green took first in the long jump at 17'8". He also won the 100-meters, but no time was given. Clay Woods won the high jump at 7'0", a height being disputed by recent coaches.

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On November 17, 1911, the juniors defeated the faculty 19-12 in basketball to set the stage for the first game in the restored inter-class series for the Flamm Cup. Crowder writes, "It was facetiously reported that for their show of impertinence, the faculty 'failed all juniors in the weekly tests.'" The sophomores won the first round, defeating the freshmen 32-10. They also won the cup.

Recalling a 1912 basketball game against Fielding Academy in Rexburg, Earl Paul of the class of 1912 said:

Everyone told me that if I could control their center we'd win the ballgame. Every time the ball went up [rules called for a jump ball after each basket], he'd put his hand on my shoulder and knock the ball [to his teammates] and they got a few points ahead of us. I finally got the referee to call a foul on him.

With Ricks able to control the ball, the Rexburg team pulled ahead a few points. That's when Fielding "walked off the floor and went into the locker room because they had never been beat by anybody and had never trailed anybody." In order to resume the game, Ricks Principal Ezra Dalby gave Fielding an ultimatum: they could pay their own way home or they could finish the game and have their way home paid. "So they came up and finished the game and we beat 'em," Paul said with a great deal of satisfaction (interview, 1988).

Basketball fever swept Ricks in 1912-3, as is evident in this gushing report in the student publication:

Perhaps never before in the history of our school has there been so much interest taken in basketball as this season. Ricks has just awakened to the fact that she has a place in the athletic world and the prospects for future years are even brighter than at present. We have entered the field of combat with the leading schools of Utah and Idaho, sometimes gaining victories and occasionally meeting defeat. (*Student Rays*, November 1912)

With Coach W. B. Oldham at the helm, the Ricks team consisted of Greeley "Deet" Green, Alvin "Bob" Green, David "Swede" Ballantyne, Henry "Towser" Wardell, Rawlston "Chub" Green, Neal "Corn" Williams, and Russell "Buck" Barnes. The game of the year undoubtedly was against the University of Utah on February 12. It was the first time Ricks faced an out-of-state team.

The house was packed, there being present about six hundred people, consisting of the greater part of the students, along with a number of people from Rexburg

and a large crowd from the surrounding towns. There was yelling, singing, and waving of pennants by our enthusiastic students during the entire game. Those splendid specimens from Utah found it necessary to do some good playing in order to win 34-19. (*Student Rays*, February 1913)

An early spring in 1913 allowed for the construction of a circular track and to prepare grounds to play baseball. No accounts of games are available, but records show that a track meet was held with Rigby High School on April 25, and a team was to have been sent to Pocatello for the interscholastic meet on May 9.

In the spring of 1914 there was optimistic talk of “an up-to-date gym, with all the modern conveniences.” A later report mentions the acquisition of “a dandy wrestling mat” for use by wrestlers and boxers. Meanwhile, the third floor of the Spori Building was serving as a makeshift gym. In twelve basketball games played, Ricks lost only once, to Brigham Young University. In the first meeting between the two schools, “the crowd gathered early,” according to the *Current-Journal*. A platform reportedly gave way under the crunch of the crowd, but no one was injured. BYU had lost at Oneida Stake Academy prior to playing at Ricks, and expectations were high that Ricks might win. The quotes reported from the game include a reference by the Ricks coach: “BYU was an older sister to us,” whereupon the captain of the BYU team replied that “The older sister ought to win.”

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Many spectators felt that BYU was deliberately fouling and they were abetted by a ‘blind’ referee. When the contest ended, ‘Ricksie’ had lost by a score of 19-35. However, the defeat was mitigated by knowledge that the Agricultural College in Logan, Utah, had lost to BYU by a score of 19-38. The assertion was made that although Ricks lost to BYU, it was three points better than the A.C. (David L. Crowder, *The Spirit of Ricks*)

BUILDING A GYMNASIUM

On January 12, 1916, in a meeting of the Fremont Stake Presidency with its nine bishops, it was decided to go ahead with the building of a new gymnasium, which was to be built of rock to complement the existing building. The estimated cost was \$30,000 to \$40,000. A decision was made to begin quarrying and hauling rock to the building site, but work was immediately delayed by exceptionally heavy snow. Then financial conditions caused further delays. Still, the March 1916 edition of *Student Rays* reported, “It is gratifying to see the rock on the ground for the building of our gymnasium for next year. Our dreams are beginning to materialize.” Former Ricks College president Hyrum Manwaring wrote in his memoirs, “I shall never forget my personal thrill when I saw President

Peter J. Ricks move on to the campus with the first load of rock for that new gym building.”

To provide impetus for getting the building under way and to gain support and approval for the project, a stake priesthood meeting was held. About \$10,000 was subscribed at that meeting, which, hopefully, would signal local determination to meet obligations incurred in the building project... Optimism was still high that the building soon would be under way. However, another year passed before a contract was awarded to begin the building. Many had long anticipated that Founders Day 1916 would include dedication of a new gymnasium, so there was marked disappointment that the new building was not yet started... The cornerstone was laid for the gymnasium on June 15, 1917, by Nathan Ricks. The academy executive board headed by Albert Heath presided; Yellowstone Stake President Daniel G. Miller was the principal speaker. The benediction was pronounced by Bishop Parley J. Davies of the Milo ward. The building was to be completed and dedicated by October 15 so it could be ready for use during fall term. That proved to an overly optimistic expectation. (David L. Crowder, *The Spirit of Ricks*)

The 400 students enrolled [for 1917-8] found work was progressing on the new gymnasium. However, it was slower than anticipated.

Construction of the gymnasium was delayed because of a shortage of workers caused by the war. A tragic accident also occurred on November 12 when a painter, F. E. Hall of Portland, Oregon, fell from a scaffold about forty feet above the ground. Critically injured, Hall died the next day. Another unexpected delay was caused by the lava rock at the site. Excavating the rock proved much more difficult than expected. The new building was not finished until November, so Founder’s Day, which had been postponed from November 12 to November 23, was again postponed until December 21. (David L. Crowder, *The Spirit of Ricks*)

Ultimately it would be January 11, 1918, when the first basketball game was played in the new facility. It is unclear whether the first game was a win or a loss or who the opponent was.

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A popular story has it that Marion G. Romney was the first person to shoot a basket in the new building. According to the story the young Romney sneaked into the building before it was opened to the public to get in some early practice time.

AN ATHLETIC PROGRAM

Clyde P. Packer was hired and arrived at Ricks Academy in the fall of 1917 with a new gymnasium about to be completed and Ricks on the verge of gaining college status. He would stay twenty-two years, coaching basketball every year, except for 1926-7 when he took a sabbatical leave. He started the football program in 1919, opening a new era of athletic

competition at Ricks, and coached the sport for fifteen years. He also coached track and field for thirteen years and was involved in coaching tennis. Almost single-handedly, Packer nurtured and advanced athletic competition during some of the most turbulent times for the college.

The first Ricks College football game was held on October 10, 1919 (another date given for the first game is October 13), against St. Anthony. The Ricks team was hampered by the fact that ‘none of them have ever seen a game of football, and the few days of practice they have had, has at best, only given them a few rudimentary ideas and served to knock off some of the rough corners.’ However, what they lacked in know-how, they made up for in ‘enthusiasm and determination.’ They lost that first game, 18-7, but learned some lessons. (David L. Crowder, *The Spirit of Ricks*)

Ricks emerged at the end of the season with the championship and still had the championship trophy. Scoring the first touchdown ever for Ricks was William Klingler, a right half [running back]. Playing a seven-game schedule, Ricks finished 5-2, winning the Idaho and Northern Utah Junior College League, consisting of Ricks, Idaho Tech at Pocatello, B.Y.C. at Logan, and Weber Normal College in Ogden. In the next-to-last game of the season, a 12-6 win against Idaho Tech, the temperature at game time “was a little above zero, the ground covered with snow,” the *Current-Journal* reported. A member of the team, Golden Andrus, remembers about fourteen inches of snow on the ground and leveling the playing area as best they could and using sawdust to mark the lines and boundaries. Ricks scored its two touchdowns in the first half, and Tech countered with three consecutive passes and a score in the last three minutes of the game. A rally and chicken supper followed the game.

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Members of the Ricks team were: captain Marion G. Romney, center Ray Gibson, linemen Theodore “Ted” Barrett, Don Hacking, Bob Meilke, Golden Andrus, Hyrum “High” Barrett, Ariel “Fat” Ballif, backfielders Douglas Romney, Ellis Wilcox, William Klingler, captain-elect Antone Romney, and coach Clyde P. Packer. “I had never even seen a game played,” Golden Andrus remembers of the start of football at Ricks College. He was given some equipment that no one else had claimed. “I was placed on the line and told to knock everyone down to the right of me on the even-numbered signals. On the odd-numbered signals, I was to do the same to the left.” Andrus played many positions including end, tackle, and during the last year, he was a fullback. He was also captain of the team the last year he played. Concerning his playing days with Marion G. Romney, Andrus recalled: “He was the only one that had ever seen a football, including the coach himself. His Dad [Ricks President George Romney] was trying to get him to go on a mission. He said, ‘No, I think

I'll go play football.' He was a good player, no question about that" (Interview 1988).

The new gymnasium was now in use for its first complete season. For nearly fifty years the building would serve as the hub of indoor athletic activity. Golden Andrus recalls the gym having "one of the best basketball floors because it was a spring floor." It was advertised as such to bolster attendance and to entice teams to play in Rexburg. Andrus recalls the floor having a small metal rim around its outer edge. He also remembers a pipe used by athletes to slide down to the middle floor of the three-story building to the shower room. "There was a big round hole and the pipe went right down the middle. We just took a jump and grabbed the pipe and 'zoom.'"

In an early-season game the Rexburg town team combined with the college team to defeat a town and high school team at St. Anthony, 32-0. The college team ran up an 8-2 record, while the high school team won second place in the Upper Snake River Valley League. The season marked the first time that an actual college team was fielded. Still, the distinction between the two teams is often difficult to ascertain in written accounts.

Baseball became the third sport at what was now officially called Ricks College. The "Normal" designation was dropped because the high school curriculum was to be phased out, starting in the fall of 1923. In practice games the Ricks nine defeated high schools from St. Anthony, Idaho Falls, and Driggs. Two games with Idaho Tech were scheduled, but no record of their outcome is available. Golden Andrus remembers the team catcher, Hugo Jorgensen: "He played college ball every once in a while and the coach got onto it that he wasn't eligible and kicked him off the team. He returned to Rigby where he couldn't play either, because of his having competed in college athletics."

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During the 1923-4 year, track and field became the fourth varsity sport at Ricks College with a six-man team capturing second place in the northern division competition of the Utah-Idaho Junior College league. Theodore "Ted" Hanks was the high-point man at the meet with 20 3/4 points. Others on the team were Arnold Holland, Edgar Minner, Joseph Rytting, Todd Andrus, and C. C. Lemmon. As far as being fully organized, however, it was 1927 before Clyde Packer is given credit for coaching a track and field team.

Tennis began at Ricks in 1926-7, with Art Wilson, Clyde Anderson, Blair Rich, and Howard Swendsen making up the team. Ricks tangled with the University of Idaho Southern Branch (formerly Idaho Tech), losing both encounters. Wilson won a singles match. The following year, tennis became a club sport, the first to be sponsored by the school, according to the 1928 *Rixida*. Blair Rich won the singles trophy.

In 1928, the name “Viking” was attached to the Ricks game reports published in the *Student Rays*, the official student newspaper. No copies of the previous year’s edition are available to trace the origin of the name.

The story of the Viking dates back to 1928. Ricks players were jokingly referred to as ‘Northerners’ because the ‘other teams felt like it was really an excursion up to the land of ice and snow just to play a game,’ said Clyde Packer. The term ‘Northerners’ was later changed to ‘Norsemen,’ and the Ricks athletic council met to decide upon a mascot. The symbol of the Viking, first suggested by Leroy Richman, quarterback of the football team and editor of the *Student Rays*, fit right into place. (*Scroll*, 1971) ☺