



**Centennial
Reflections**
*Essays from the
Oakwood Historical Society*

Bess Hayner – an Oakwood sports legend

By Harry G. Ebeling

With the Oakwood Centennial celebration now in full swing, and the Athletic Hall of Fame announcement made for honoring at a banquet in August, I thought it appropriate to devote some space to a teacher/coach who truly had the students and the school in her heart. There have been many, but high on the list is **Bess Hayner**, who coached the girls' sports for 26 years. Bess grew up in Dayton View and went to Longfellow grade school. She came to

Oakwood in 1930 after graduating from the University of Wisconsin. For a few years she taught biology, but it became obvious that her real skills were in athletics.

She motivated the girls to be competitive and good sports. Her teams played high schools and colleges throughout the state, challenging and beating them. Oakwood acquired a real name for itself in the sport of field hockey which wasn't well known in the early 30's except for popularity primarily in the east. As interest in the team sport grew, Oakwood girls vied for positions on the team and cheered the team from the stands. The spirit of comradeship was contagious and school spirit for hockey was equally as high as that for football. All this and more is chronicled in two huge scrapbooks that she filled with clippings, pictures, souvenirs, newsletters, personal letters and telegrams.

As the thirties and forties progressed she added other sports to the menu, and Oakwood became known for women's tennis and basketball. The war years took its toll on the football team, but girls hockey soldiered on for a 54-game-winning streak which ended in 1946 with a loss to University of Cincinnati. This was particularly heartbreaking because *Life* magazine had been here to photograph the team for a cover story. It had been promoted by Howard J. Smith, father of Joey Thiele and Katie Makarius, in extensive correspondence in which he touted them as "symbolic of the perfect American School Girl." After diligent follow up, *Life* contacted The *Dayton Daily News* to check out his claims and check out the girls to see if they were as attractive as Smith had said. "Is there any star who is particularly good looking" asked the telegram to the DDN.

When *Life* got serious about doing the article, they started telegraphing for particulars about the team, its record, personality of the coach and players, and whether they could be released from school early so as to accommodate the midday sun. Photographer Herbert (Hank) Walker arrived on November 12, 1946 for the shoot. Well, the inevitable happened. After 54 games from 1939 to 1946, the Jill's lost its game with University of Cincinnati on November 19. A short article in the newspaper quoted an axiom: "A *Life* cover is the kiss of death to the athletic star pictured." The story never ran, but the full story of the incident with some *Life* pictures are in the scrapbook that she kept. A personal handwritten note to her dated November 24 from a teacher in the Department of Classics at U.C. praises the team and their sportsmanship in defeat, saying that he will never forget it. And so they continued in the sport for many years. Not many girls went through Oakwood without at least a peripheral contact with field hockey.



Life magazine's Herbert Walker photographs action during OHS/University of Cincinnati field hockey bout held in 1946.

Her girls always referred to her as "Hayner." The scrapbooks tell of successes and participation in basketball, tennis, baseball, golf and intramural sports such as ping pong, badminton and bowling. Her teams were always league leaders, with the undefeated 1950 basketball team, of Bonnie MacKay, Joanne Maginnis, Nancy (Smitty) Smiley, Rosie Kleinhenz, Moon Mullen and Betty Epstein as an example.

In tennis, she coached the Jill's with such natural talents as Bonnie MacKay and Betty Epstein. Earlier, Lois Geis had been the Dayton Tennis Center and Journal-Herald Champ for two years. Later Marian Bergen held the J-H crown and Peach Pohl took the Dayton Tennis Center crown. Such stars as Joanne (DeDe) Demarse, Mary Lou Shank, Gretchen Focke and Barbara Sharkey were big news. Betty Epstein and Bonnie MacKay dominated the news for many years; Betty from the days of her pre-teens as four-time winner of the J-H trophy and Bonnie playing both locally and on the tour with her well known brother Barry. There are clippings from an earlier Oakwood tennis star, Virginia Hollinger, who became the National Women's Indoor Champion in 1938. Coached by her father, she was known as "Little Miss Poker Face" on tour. (She died in 1946 at age 28.)

Hayner wasn't active in golf, but that didn't deter her from keeping up with young stars such as Betty Lee Boren, several time city golf champion, Sally Price, always a contender, and Marjorie Wendel, a challenger.

Her scrapbooks are a history of Oakwood from the 30's thru the early 50's, telling of horse shows, prom queens, class officers, scholastic honors, swimming parties and commencement programs and parties.

One clipping tells of getting together with the Beaver creek coach to plan the season schedule – that coach was Josephine Auld, who later joined Oakwood's staff and stayed with us for many years as Mrs. Sipe.

The last part of the scrapbook series has a happy/sad element since she included deaths from car and plane accidents, WW II deaths and teachers deaths. On a happier note, there is an extensive engagement and wedding coverage – undoubtedly the best resource for tracing this kind of data that exists. There are some human interest stories of service in WW II.

These notes of an "era" known as "Hayner" take one back better than going through old *Acorns* because each clipping mentions names of people, some of whom we have forgotten and some of whom still live here and we see among us. They show a genuine love of young people which was returned to her many fold.

Retiring after 26 years in 1956, Hayner was replaced by Betty Epstein, a recent graduate of the University of Michigan. On her 25th anniversary, the Boosters Club presented her with a silver vase and all the team members were presented with gold hockey charms as a memento of an undefeated season. Her players will always remember her for the apples she gave out after each hockey practice and each will always have some incident to mark those years.