

# School Sports 'Come Of Age'

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Sports Editor

A quick glimpse at the history of the Birmingham public school system is enough to show what a key role athletics

has played in the area's coming-of-age.

Sports, though not officially organized until the 1920's, were prevalent before the turn of the century when boys from the village of Birmingham

challenged other schools to rugby, or football contests.

The early games were hardly a resemblance of today's top high school battles, but they served the purpose. No equipment was used and the rules, if any, usually bordered on the "no-holds-barred" theory.

IT WAS in the decade before 1900 that the state's oldest grid-iron rivalry began, between Birmingham and Royal Oak. Records, however, are hazy until 1913, when Royal Oak won, 7-6.

This bitter rivalry blossomed into an annual Thanksgiving Day contest which was started in 1915 and carried through 39 seasons until the game was cancelled in 1956.

The Thanksgiving Day game, probably the best known of all the athletic endeavors, grew into one of the biggest prep attractions in Michigan. The Little Brown Jug, donated in 1924 by a Royal Oak teacher, became the trophy awarded to the winner.

THE ACORNS held the edge in the series and took the final game, 27-20.

When terminated in 1956, the contest was the oldest in the state. Only the Flint Northern-Flint Central game approaches the rivalry in longevity.

With football the main attraction in the early 1900's, other sports started to enter the school scene. In 1925, the Board in Control of Athletics was formulated.

THE LATTER 1920's and early 1930's saw an amazing growth in the athletic program at Baldwin High. Baseball, football and basketball were established sports and, in 1926, cross country joined the list along with track.

A year later, tennis was started as a varsity sport and it was followed by golf in 1929 and swimming in 1931.

The depression of the 1930's had a hindering effect on the growth of athletics in Birmingham schools. A lack of funds forced the school to drop golf, tennis, swimming and baseball for several years.

In 1934-35, the school board approved the resumption of all three sports. It was also in the thirties that the first memorial award was set up to honor the top student athlete.

As more high schools became



BALDWIN HIGH BASEBALL TEAM IN THE LATE 1930's  
Athletic Board dropped baseball during depression.

increasingly aware of the interest in sports, schools began banding into leagues. Baldwin High entered the Twin Valley Athletic Association in 1939.

Birmingham received its new high school, now Seaholm, in 1952 and sports became a major part of the curriculum. A new football field was dedicated in 1954 and, in 1958, the school added a track.

1959, entered the Northwest Suburban League.

Birmingham's public school system has one of the broadest, best-equipped and top-instructed athletic programs in the state. No less than nine varsity sports are practiced at the city's two high schools.

Birmingham's facilities are highly-rated, on both the high school and junior high level.

Present athletic director Frank Whitney has helped organize Birmingham's athletic program to a point where many of its sports are self-sufficient.

GROVES HIGH, constructed in



LITTLE BROWN JUG  
Thanksgiving Day trophy

More than 1200 students now participate in sports in the city's intramural program and plans to form a league between the three junior highs are already in progress.

With five school pools, numerous tracks, baseball and football fields, it is no wonder that 34 per cent of all boys in Birmingham's high schools are represented on varsity teams.

BIRMINGHAM SCHOOLS have won state crowns in four different activities; track, golf, cross country and swimming. League titles have also been achieved in basketball and football.

Although sports have certainly attained a high level in Birmingham's schools, it is evident that they are just now hitting their peak.



MAPLE BALL CARRIER GETS YARDAGE IN 1948  
Birmingham-Royal Oak Thanksgiving game was highlight of season.

## Recreation Board Created in 1943

Twenty-one years ago, the City of Birmingham adopted an ordinance that set up a Recreation Board. It proved to be one of the most valuable motions ever carried for area residents.

Birmingham's recreation department has developed into one of the most thorough of its kind, offering citizens no less than 20 sponsored activities plus a host of other recreational opportunities.

SUPPORTED jointly by the city and the board of education, the recreation department, headed by Don Martin, had a total of 115,925 persons attend its activities in 1962-63.

The first board, in 1943, consisted of Mrs. George T. Hendrie, Mrs. William E. Essery, Mrs. Wilbur Johnstone, Mrs. J. Quinn, Mrs. E. Newhall, Ray Palmer, Robert Lynd, Fr. Ralph Barton and Wylie Groves.

Recreational activities and facilities of that year were playgrounds at Torry, Adams, Barnum and Qarton schools, swimming at the Barnum pool, music, religion, drama, art, baseball, riflery and ice skating in the winter.

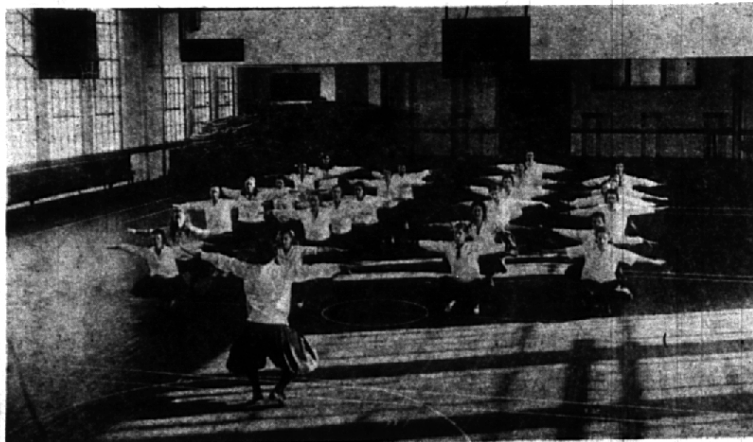
The total budget was \$4,131.50. This year, in an effort to offer something for everyone, the department has a budget of \$117,952.

A YEAR AFTER the 1946 ordinance created the joint ownership of the department between the schools and city, Frank Whitney became director. He resigned in 1956 and Martin took over the reins.

The current staff consists of Martin, a supervisor, secretary and 45 part-time personnel who conduct the various recreational programs throughout the year.

Birmingham's recreation department offers activities for groups and individuals on a year-round basis. Besides handling numerous sports teams, the department also holds classes in therapeutic swimming, life saving, water ballet, tennis and hockey.

THE RECREATION department, which also sponsors dances, kite-flying contests, halloween and Christmas parties and sports tournaments, is truly one of the most active organizations in Birmingham.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES WERE IMPORTANT YEARS AGO, TOO  
A class of girls, clad in bloomers, does calisthenics.

## Tracy Heads List of Athletes

Birmingham school athletics have helped many an athlete discover a special skill and prepare himself for a collegiate or professional career in sports.

The local schools have supplied colleges and universities in Michigan and other states with a steady stream of top performers, dating back to Quentin Brelsford in 1938.

Brelsford, a top track performer for Baldwin High set a mark of 1:56.7 in the 880-yard run that withstood 24 years of Class B competition before being broken in 1962.

TRULY AN outstanding runner, Brelsford went on to set new track marks at Ohio Wesleyan. He graduated from Baldwin in 1938.

Probably the best known of all Birmingham athletes, and one who did make pro ball, is Tom Tracy, better known as "The Bmb."

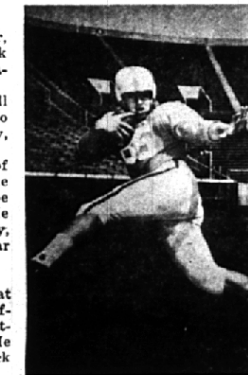
Tracy, who was a graduate of Birmingham High in 1952, was the first Birmingham player to be named to the All-State team. He was also selected to all-county, all-league and almost every all-star team of the year.

A THREE-SPORT letterman at Birmingham, Tracy played halfback in football, guard in basketball and third base in baseball. He was also a sprinter on the track team and an expert diver.

After graduation, he attended University of Tennessee, where he turned in a remarkable year as a

sophomore playing fullback. His junior season, he was selected as the conference's best fullback with a 6.7 yards per carry average.

Tracy quit school to play pro ball with the Ottawa Roughriders in Canada. He then played several years for the Detroit Lions and, later, for the Pittsburgh Steelers.



TOM TRACY  
Best-known athlete