

Chapter 5
Other Sports and Recreation

“The volleyball season climaxes with a championship flourish. . . . Occasion is the 1967 All-Church Volleyball tournament. The rapidly-rising sport is expected to lure some of the top teams in the United States. Last year’s finalists, Oakland 4th and Lanakila, Hawaii, have played and beaten some of the nation’s better volleyball squads.”¹

Hartt Wixom, *Deseret News*

“As we reflect back on the all-church [tennis] tournament, it’s one of the memories that we treasure. It’s not very often you get to say, ‘We won the all-church tournament’ in anything even if it was a tennis tournament that didn’t last very long. It’s one of those that we think back on quite often.”²

J. L. Thornton, Oral History

“I am most grateful for the athletic program of the Church and the great opportunity it affords the youth. Since becoming a member of the Church, I have understood why we are here to develop our talents.”³

Billy Casper, Pro Golfer, *Improvement Era*

“With another general conference history, the eyes of the Church now turn toward the MIA. June Conference, the fifty-second, to be held in Salt Lake City, Utah, June, 15, 16, and 17, 1951. There is eagerness in the hearts of thousands of young folk as they look forward to participating in one of the great annual festivals of this organization—festivals which come as the culmination of the year’s learning and doing.”⁴

LaRue C. Longden, *Improvement Era*

“Plans are being made to have relay competition in 1952 more spirited and wide-spread than in 1951.”⁵

YMMIA Athletic Manual, 1952-53

Basketball and softball were the largest all-church athletic programs. They attracted the most teams and participants. But these sports were not the only Mormon athletic activities. Other all-church tournaments included volleyball, tennis, golf, and relays. One interviewee even remembered a horseshoe tournament.⁶ While not competitive, another large all-church function was the dance festival at June Conference. This chapter examines these other MIA sports and recreation activities. Following the pattern set in the basketball and softball chapters, there is a brief history of each sport or activity to give a larger context, a history of the LDS Church experience, and then personal examples. For all these activities, church leaders' goals were to help young people improve all aspects of their lives.

Volleyball

Church leaders kept careful records of the teams that registered from each region in three major sports: basketball, softball, and volleyball. Their goal was for all wards and stakes to participate. In 1957 the athletic committee compiled a list of registered teams that showed basketball and softball dominated from 1955 to 1957. Volleyball was a distant third. While the leaders called it an all-church tournament, most of the teams came from Utah and Idaho.⁷

Volleyball History

In 1895, Massachusetts YMCA employee William G. Morgan wanted a businessmen's game for non-basketball players. He created a game he called mintonette, which used a net and a ball and required very little equipment. A year later Professor Alfred T. Halstead at the School for Christian Workers changed the name because the men "volleyed" the ball. Morgan's game resembled faust, an Italian game from the middle ages introduced in Germany in 1893, and minton, a game brought to the United States in 1895. But Morgan claimed there was no connection. He invented the game.⁸

Within a few years the game spread. The YMCA sent the first published rules to all its athletic directors in 1897. Ten years later the Playground Association of America conference (now the National Recreation Association) introduced the game. The rules evolved. Morgan started with no limit to the number of players per side. Like baseball, the games had nine innings where the teams played for nine periods, and like basketball, players could "dribble" the ball. In 1912 new rules specified six players per side and rotating servers. The American Sports Publishing Company produced the first book on volleyball with new rules on touches, points, and net height in 1916.⁹

The game spread internationally. By 1917 the YMCA had introduced the sport in Canada, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, and Brazil. Between July 1918 and July 1919 the YMCA distributed fifteen thousand volleyballs to American troops and allies throughout the world. Soldiers liked the game and continued to play after the war. Twenty-seven teams from eleven states participated in a YMCA national tournament in 1922, and the Pittsburgh Downtown YMCA won. Seven years later 821 leagues (including over 7,000 teams) competed.

The Amateur Athletic Union (1925) and the United States Volleyball Association (1928) regulated rules. In 1937 the two organizations combined. The AAU turned its responsibility over to the USVBA, which also became a charter member of the International Volleyball Federation. By 1956, sixty million people played the game and twenty-five countries considered it their main sport. Volleyball became an official Olympic sport in 1964.

In 1916 the YMCA invited the NCAA to edit rules and promote the game. During the 1920s American universities taught classes and formed intramural programs. USVBA held its first men's and women's college championship tournament in 1949. In 1952 the NCAA agreed to hold a national championship if eight schools had teams with varsity status. While more than fifty schools responded, only six had variety teams. The NCAA did not sponsor its first tournament until 1970. The LDS Church College of Hawaii won the first National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics championship in 1967.¹⁰

Volleyball, Mormons, and Hawaii

It was not surprising that Mormons from Hawaii won the first tournament. The sport and the Church had been popular there for years. Mormon missionaries introduced volleyball to the Big Island of Hawaii in 1917. Members played at the church's Hui Opio meetings, a youth organization. In 1921, Mormons formed the first men's volleyball league in Hawaii, and in 1924 they organized the first women's league. Volleyball tournaments included celebrations before the games and potlucks afterward. In 1958 the Big Island teams traveled to other islands and competed against other Mormons. Two years later a Hawaii Mission Youth Conference with members from all the Hawaiian Islands except Oahu included volleyball as an activity.¹¹

From the Mormon beginning in 1917, volleyball spread to businesses, schools, and city recreation. Many Big Island plantations sponsored worker leagues. Volleyball was also important

in the high schools and the LDS Church on the islands during the 1930s. World War II stopped most organized tournaments, but Hawaiians resumed playing after the war. By 1946 all plantation sports ended, but community parks and recreation participation in volleyball doubled. LDS congregations entered teams in these leagues.¹²

Boy Scouts of America and Vanball/Volleyball

The first Mormon involvement with volleyball on the mainland was in a scouting program that the LDS Church developed for older boys ages fifteen and sixteen. The Salt Lake Council of the Boy Scouts of American held its first annual Older Scout Conference in 1924, and four years later it became the Church's Vanguard program. The early Mormon group played a game that they called "vanball," a modified form of volleyball that combined basketball and volleyball. A 1931 article in the *Improvement Era* explained vanball was based on volleyball, the major sport of the YMCA, and combined elements of tennis, basketball, soccer, and other sports. "From a standpoint of balanced physical development and the opportunity to develop skill, grace, and agility" it was an important sport.¹³

The Boy Scouts developed a vanball league in 1931. At the fifth annual tournament in 1936 the Logan, Utah Fifth and Ninth wards played in the finals. They were co-champions the year before, and they were evenly matched again. When it looked like the match would never end, the officials set a time limit; the match had to be over at midnight. At that time Logan Fifth Ward was ahead and was declared the winner. The church magazine explained that the losers were tired because they had other close matches. But despite this "handicap," the magazine declared, "Logan 9th was as magnificent in defeat as were the champions in victory." The winning team received sweaters, and all participants got a ribbon.¹⁴

The game caught on slowly, so in 1936 church leaders sponsored vanball clinics in Ephraim, Provo, Cedar City, Salt Lake City, Ogden, and Richmond, Utah, along with Burley, Montpelier, and Rexburg, Idaho. "Demonstrations of serving, passing, set-up, and attack plays, and team work followed a discussion of the purposes and objectives of the General Board of YMMIA in creating and promoting this new game, especially for older boys." The clinics also advertised the tournament in January 1937 at which "special features will be added to the tournament to increase further interest in the Explorer program."¹⁵

The LDS Church and the Boy Scouts vanball tournaments were closely connected. For the seventh annual Region 11 and 12 vanball championship in 1938, the YMMIA helped with planning and allowed the boys to use the Deseret Gymnasium for the semifinal and final rounds. The Scouts used the gym in 1935, but from 1935 to 1938 the tournament was held in other facilities. Church leaders explained that starting in 1938, “The Explorer finals will be given the same consideration as M Men basketball.”¹⁶ The Mormon magazine estimated one thousand Explorers competed in the Salt Lake area and four thousand played church wide.¹⁷

The same cooperation continued in 1939. Explorer leaders reported, “Participation in the official competition Athletic Sport for Explorers has been much greater than ever before. With keener competition and wider representation, this year’s tournament promises to be the best one ever conducted.” YMMIA leaders planned activities for the championship game (but did not explain what they were except they would involve the Junior girls). This 1939 event was the first meet with professional officials and box scores.¹⁸

In 1941 Logan Ninth won for the second year in a row “by playing as fine a brand of vanball as has ever been played by Explorers. The smoothness and accuracy displayed was indicative of long consistent training under competent leaders.” Emigrant Ward from Salt Lake Council won second and “surprised even themselves by playing a championship brand of ball from the beginning of the game until the end.” Logan Ninth won 15 to 13 and 16 to 4. The rest of the top eight were:

- 3rd Logan Fifth Ward
- 4th Manchester Ward, Los Angeles
- 5th Salt Lake Thirty-third Ward.
- 6th Pocatello Fifth Ward
- 7th Fairview, Utah Ward
- 8th Ogden Ward.

Logan Ninth players received Explorer sweaters and second place Emigration and consolation winner Salt Lake Thirty-third ward teams got vanballs. The church magazine explained, “The tournament was characterized by a much finer type of vanball playing than in previous years. On practically every team was one or more outstanding server, kill-shot, or set-up artist.” Although everyone was good, the tournament organizers selected an all-tournament team. The tournament was

a success because “hundreds of Explorers throughout the Church today have an athletic program they can proudly call their own.”¹⁹

Scouts and YMMIA leaders held the tournament again in 1942, but the April issue of *The Improvement Era* announced a cutback in Explorer sports during the war. The article stressed the need for some social activities and maybe even more athletics to “build morale.” Yet, the author continued, “There is not time for more play than is absolutely necessary. War time is work time and Explorers have plenty of work to do.”²⁰

All-Church Tournament

Scouting did not return to vanball after World War II. By 1950, church members started playing volleyball and held the first all-church tournament. Why? While none of the records discussed why vanball disappeared, the best guess is that it had not ever caught on as a sport. However, volleyball was becoming very popular and had similar elements. So rather than returning to an unknown sport that had ended because of the war, the YMMIA leaders introduced a new popular sport. A June Conference report explained that many wards had started teams which spoke “well for the future of this sport.”²¹ The athletic department expounded, “This interesting sport is taking hold in excellent shape and can be used as an excellent ward activity.”²²

Since the all-church tournament for volleyball as opposed to the Boy Scout vanball tournament was so new, the 1952-53 *YMMIA Athletic Handbook* included a term glossary and rules for volleyball. The 1958-59 handbook encouraged more participation. The author explained that senior volleyball was “a very fine activity for old and young (nineteen and up) that can be used to bridge the gap between the basketball and softball seasons.” The game worked well indoors or outdoors.²³

With fewer teams, the all-church tournament only lasted for three days. There were junior and senior divisions, but only sixteen teams competed on the senior level in 1969. Still, there was a devotional, a banquet, an opening ceremony, and the excitement that surrounded basketball and softball. YMMIA Athletic Secretary Judy Donaldson remembered the devotionals and named YMMIA leaders and General Authorities who spoke. While she did not remember their talks, she assumed they talked on “being your best and the sportsmanship angle. It was being examples and bringing the gospel into that context.” Donaldson continued, “It started the tournament off on the

right foot.” She also recalled the banquet, “Just prior to the volleyball tournaments starting, they would have a banquet. They did that for a number of years. I guess that got too expensive, and it kind of died out. One year they had it at one of the hotels. Another time I think they had it at the Hotel Utah in one of the banquet rooms. Volleyball wasn’t such a large group. [Only] the coaches and the team members would come.”²⁴

To help cover expenses and to register participants, each team paid first a two-dollar and then a three-dollar annual fee. The money was used to pay for the banquet, rent facilities, pay officials’ fees, buy equipment, prepare a program, and purchase trophies. Each year the committee reported a profit between \$1,000 and \$3,000. Unlike the basketball program, the YMMIA athletic committee did not provide housing for volleyball players who competed in the all-church tournaments. Donaldson explained, “I don’t know why. I guess we blew it all on basketball.” Senior and junior teams competed in the Deseret Gym, in other church buildings, or in public schools.²⁵

Church participation grew over the years. In 1954 there were 17 divisions and 447 senior teams that competed. Two years later in 1956, 615 senior and 515 junior teams played. During the rest of the 1950s and the early 1960s the number of teams competing on both levels was between four hundred and five hundred. In 1965, that number grew to 869 junior teams and 735 senior in 24 divisions. Then the numbers of divisions and teams increased. In 1966 there were over nine hundred teams in both junior and senior categories. The next four years there were over one thousand teams in thirty-nine divisions. The number of teams in each division changed each year, but the Utah divisions that played basketball and softball had the largest numbers of teams.²⁶

In the early 1960s teams from BYU wards won the senior division. But starting in 1965 the Oakland Fourth Ward, a team of Polynesians, became the champion and kept the title for five years. In 1967 the Oakland Fourth Ward defeated a Hawaiian team for the senior championship, and a Kahuwai team of Hawaii won the junior championship. Judy Donaldson especially remembered the Oakland and Hawaii championship game. “It almost blew the roof off that place with just the noise and the enthusiasm.”²⁷ The Kahuwai junior team also won the all-church tournament in 1969. In 1970 the Church College of Hawaii beat the Polynesian Ward of San Francisco.²⁸

Oakland Fourth Ward

The Redd Center collected fewer stories about volleyball than it did basketball and softball.

It was not the initial focus, and there were not as many responses. A member of the bishopric told the story of the dominant Oakland Fourth Ward. Henry Whiffen grew up in that city. Because of his troubled home life, the state eventually put him in foster care. But the Church was an anchor in his life. When he was only twenty-seven years old, he became a counselor to the bishop in his childhood ward. Many Hawaiians moved into the area, and Whiffen “was assigned to work with them.” This experience led to mutual respect and friendship. However, there were some divisions. Whiffen recalled, “Some were Japanese Hawaiian, some were Chinese Hawaiian, some were Filipino Hawaiians.” As the group looked for similar interests, they talked about playing volleyball on the islands. So Whiffen introduced them to church athletics, and they formed a team.

The team brought the group together as friends and increased their spirituality. Team members invited friends to play, and some of those joined the Church. At the same time, the team also won. The first year the Oakland team won every game and every match. Their toughest opponent was a team from San Francisco that always went to the “regional and to the area championship. They had gone to Salt Lake to the all-church several times.” But the Oakland team “blew away San Francisco.”

When the Oakland team went to all-church in 1965, they were the unknown dark horse. Initially everyone had expected a previous championship team from BYU to win the tournament. When the Oakland team started to warm up, Whiffen recalled, “They were spiking the ball, and it was hitting the ground and then going up and hitting the wall behind the bleachers. Most people had not really seen power volleyball of this caliber.” As a result, spectators started to watch the Oakland team warm up and play games. The Oakland ward dominated the tournament. But it had to go three games against a team from Ohio because Oakland team members had worn themselves out the afternoon before the game playing in a pool.²⁹

The “aloha” spirit of the Oakland and other Polynesian teams added to the excitement of the tournament. Ray Hale, who was on the volleyball committee for twelve years, remembered that the Hawaii and Oakland teams “brought a lot of color [excitement] to the church tournaments. They showed us locally how to play good volleyball.”³⁰ At the opening ceremonies before the Hawaii and Oakland game, the Oakland team brought pineapples; the Laie, Hawaii, team provided leis.³¹ The two teams fought hard during the match, but their competitiveness did not carry over after the game.

Team members joined in impromptu singing at the banquet.³² They also sang after the championship game. The announcer explained that the Hawaii team had earned money to come to the tournament by singing and invited them to sing for spectators. “They came out and began to sing. They motioned for the Oakland team to come and join them. Then their wives on the other side of the court started singing.” A participant from another team Ray Oaks summarized, “These moments I think are what sports were about. You really felt the spirit there.”³³

Dale Christensen, who grew up in Blackfoot, Idaho, recalled the Oakland Fourth Ward as “Polynesians [who] knew how to play volleyball.” Although they were “a foot shorter than we were, they could jump higher. . . . They could spike and retrieve the ball. . . . We were just amazed how good of volleyball players they were. They taught us so much in just the games we watched them play.” Judy Donaldson joked that the team won so often that she just wondered “why don’t we hand [the trophy] to them” at the beginning.³⁴

The Oakland Fourth Ward wanted better competition and offered to give clinics. Whiffen recalled, “Our team got out the word that they’d be happy” to teach others how to play. On weekends the Oakland team traveled throughout California teaching volleyball skills to Mormon wards. The team developed a routine to demonstrate how to position players, rotate, set, and jump. Wherever the Oakland team gave a clinic, they also challenged an all-star group from the area. Oakland always won. In fact, Whiffen added that the games were “not close. This was an incredible team.” The Oakland players stayed with the local members as they traveled around, and it provided an opportunity to meet wonderful people.³⁵

The team not only brought good volleyball to the Church. It also provided a sense of community and spirituality to team members. Henry Whiffen looked at a team picture with Elder Thomas S. Monson and Marvin J. Ashton and then commented on each player. Earl Shem was “totally inactive” in the Church when he started playing volleyball, but “he became active and was ordained an elder.” Peter Pua “was semi-active,” and although “he never really got very activated,” he attended church enough to meet the requirements to play. Freddy Hiapo was “a nonmember at this time.” He took the missionary lessons, his wife took the lessons separately, and they both joined. “He has since been a bishop.” Whiffen continued with each player and concluded, “It was a fabulous bunch of guys. We became very close. . . . It was thrilling to watch the spiritual growth of these

men.” An article reported, “The team was composed mainly of non-members and Aaronic priesthood adults. They all progressed in the Church until there were two investigators, six elders, and one high priest.”³⁶

Besides creating a team community, volleyball created a ward community. When asked how the Oakland Fourth Ward members felt about the team, Whiffen explained, “They were so proud. At first they couldn’t understand the idea of a volleyball team. They couldn’t understand what’s the big deal. Volleyball was a sissy thing” to the European Americans. But after a few people came to the games, these fans convinced others to come because it was exciting. “The ward became extremely supportive” and the team “bridged the gap” between the Polynesians and whites. Before volleyball the Polynesians were “clannish because that was comfortable.” But volleyball gave whites a chance to meet the players and learn their names. “They became more and more friendly and really took them in. They were very warmly received by the ward and stake.”³⁷ Nearly all the team members were Polynesians.. Whiffen was an exception when he played.

Other Teams

Gradually other teams learned to play. Richard Ball said that his Stratford Ward in Salt Lake City enjoyed basketball, but they did not know how to play volleyball. He put together a team that went to the all-church tournament where “we got beat badly.” The players asked for help, so he had them practice. “For two or three weeks we worked on nothing but bumping the ball.” When they asked when they could play, Ball told them they had to know how to “handle the ball.” He had the team play in county recreational programs even though there were much better players. At the all-church tournament, they beat a California team with more experience. But winning at volleyball was not the main goal. Ball explained, “Today some of those boys from our group have become stake presidents and bishops and different leaders. These are young men that just make you beam when you see them. I had one of the young men who was in the quorum of the seventies,” a General Authority.³⁸

Those who played sports in the Holladay area in Salt Lake County learned integrity from their coaches. Kenneth Erickson played fast pitch softball in the all-church tournament in 1952 and volleyball in 1959 or 1960. Later, he coached the Holladay Sixteenth Ward in the all-church tournament play. His team competed against a Pleasanton, California, team, and Erickson recalled

a play that showed the character of his players. “I always told our guys to call themselves if they were in the net or touched the ball whether the refs saw it or not.” The match was in the third game; each team had won one. The score was 14 to 13 in the final game. The other team “hit a ball and it went out [of bounds], but our player called a touch on himself.” Had he not confessed, “that would have given us the match, and we would have advanced to play in the semi-finals.” The match continued, and Holladay lost. Erickson added, “But we didn’t lose because he called himself. We lost because they were the better team.”³⁹

Participants in church athletics also learned about friendly competition. For example, David Olson lived in the Orem, Utah, First Ward and took part in softball, volleyball, and basketball. The volleyball team did the best according to Olson because the BYU men’s volleyball coach lived in the ward and coached the team. When the ward was divided, the new ward, the Orem Twenty-fourth Ward, became the main rival. “We were still friends, but now we were competing against them.” After playing all the teams in the stake, the winners went to region and then to zone. “After that we went to all-church. That was the goal.”⁴⁰

Tennis and Golf

In 1950 Church leaders added tennis and golf as all-church tournaments and talked about including table tennis (although that never happened).⁴¹ These were the first nonteam sports, so the program differed from the stake, division, and zone play. Tennis and golf were becoming increasingly popular in the United States during 1950s and continued to be promoted as lifetime sports in the 1960s.

History

Tennis and golf started as elite sports. Until the twentieth century, the wealthy and the working class carried on very separate lives. For example, in the nineteenth century, factory owners had leisure time; the workers struggled to survive. The rich men spent their free hours together first at gentlemen clubs; then as recreation expanded, they formed athletic clubs.

Over time these combined. In 1879 a Boston country club, the first in the United States, featured tennis courts, baseball space, and a club house. The idea caught on quickly; by 1901 there were a thousand clubs across the nation. Most were in the East, but every state had at least one. Country clubs featured games that required equipment and space: tennis, golf, yachting, and

horsemanship.⁴²

Some form of tennis dated to the Roman Empire. The rules evolved, and the current game came from Wales court tennis. In 1872, Major Walter Clopton Wingfield invented lawn tennis as an outdoor athletic game for men and women. Mary Outerbridge brought the game to New York the next year. Women especially enjoyed it because they could play in Victorian dress.⁴³

Tennis became less popular as the elite discovered golf. Robert Lockhard brought the Scottish game to Yonkers, New York, in 1888. At first he played with his friends in an orchard. Later they used a field and established St. Andrews, the United States' first golf course. By 1900 there were a thousand golf courses in the United States.⁴⁴

At first tennis courts and golf courses did not mix. But clubs learned that combining sports provided more options and attracted more members. These new facilities shifted the focus from golf back to tennis, and tennis regained popularity from 1890 to 1920.⁴⁵

But golf and tennis did not remain only for the wealthy. Frederick Olmstead, the father of the American park, included tennis in his Boston park in the 1880s. He argued that the area provided a place to play, and when not in use, it was "pastoral scenery." Many cities created public golf courses in the 1920s because more Americans wanted to play and could pay. The profits from golf funded other public athletic venues.⁴⁶

The 1930s Depression leveled the playing field. The wealthy needed money to operate their clubs, so they invited more members to join. However, World War II slowed their growth. After the war, Americans had higher incomes and more free time, so the middle-class began adopting the country club lifestyle. Clubs improved and upgraded their tennis courts and golf courses for the new clientele.⁴⁷

As interest in golf and tennis grew, many Americans demanded public facilities. A 1946 study claimed that tennis was the number one city-sponsored sport. Golf was close behind. Four million Americans played golf in 1948, and the number of golfers rose to eight million in 1966. Likewise, tennis participation increased 300 percent from 1970 to 1975. With the growing popularity, national tennis and golf organizations called for more and better places to play. In 1975 the United States Tennis Association Facilities Committee recommended that a city of fifteen hundred provide twenty courts and a city with one and a half million residents should have three

thousand courts.⁴⁸ In 1967 the National Golf Foundation complained that only 13 percent of courses were municipal while 47 percent were private and 30 percent were semi-private. The pamphlet listed the virtues of a public course as a community asset, a place for outdoor civic events, an open space, a place for city youth programs and school play, and a social center for women. In addition, it increased property values for the surrounding area and provided employment.⁴⁹

Historian Richard J. Moss explained in *Golf and the American Country Club*,

It is better to play a sport than to watch one.

Leisure should bring families together, not drive them apart.

Sports should be nonviolent, not thinly disguised substitutes for combat.

Sports should teach self-control, honesty, and civility.

Sports should help people retain a sense of place.

Individuals acting together may create and control their own lives.⁵⁰

The Mormon Tournaments

Tennis

Mormons recognized the virtues Moss described in tennis and golf. But in the late nineteenth century Mormons did not always play these games. Tennis, for example, remained a game for the wealthy until the twentieth century. No one is sure whether military personnel at Fort Douglas, immigrants from the East, or M. H. Walker, a rich Salt Lake resident, brought the game to Utah. Walker hosted the first tournament in 1885 on the Walker Block between Main Street and West Temple and Fourth and Fifth South. The *Salt Lake Herald* reported that tennis “has already taken a firm hold upon large numbers of our society people.” Ogden and Provo residents also enjoyed the game. BYU built tennis courts in 1912 and leading citizens such as T. N. Taylor had private courts. Tennis became a popular college sport in the 1920s.

In 1911 the Mormon-owned Deseret Gymnasium trained ward coaches for four weeks in “basketball, baseball, volleyball and tennis.”⁵¹ The M Men tried a tennis tournament in the 1920s, but the game was not popular and few participated. As a result, the Church dropped the program.⁵²

Following World War II, more Mormons, like other Americans generally, started to play tennis, and the sport joined the all-church tournament roster. In 1950 and 1951 players competed in singles and doubles. Men over seventeen years old were eligible and paid a two-dollar registration

fee for stake play. After winning on a stake level, the players went on to compete in division and all-church tournaments. There were not always many competitors, so tennis did not have an upper age limit. Divisions sometimes combined for a tournament. For example, Divisions 9 and 14 in the Salt Lake Valley held “a double duty” meet in 1951.⁵³ That year Marvin J. Ashton and his wife won the all-church mixed doubles; then he and a male tennis partner, won the all-church tournament men’s doubles title. In 1971 when Ashton became a member of the Quorum of Twelve, he explained, “I started playing tennis when I was about 12 years old, and I have been playing ever since.”⁵⁴

Over the years the tournament changed as tennis became more popular. The 1964 tournament included new divisions—mixed family doubles, father-son doubles, and singles in A, B, and non-rated. Tournament leaders awarded thirty-three trophies. The newspaper praised the winners, calling Glen Haynes, “one of the state’s best” and claiming “a more deserving champion would be hard to find.”⁵⁵ Unlike the team sports, excellent players were not eliminated; they competed in a skilled division.

In 1969 three hundred players from “Hawaii to Great Britain” played for fifty trophies in thirty-four divisions. The four-day tournament was held at Salt Lake City’s Liberty Park. That year the YWMIA also sponsored a separate meet for girls and women. In 1970 about the same number of players participated. Patrick Landau, a member of the BYU Forty-sixth Ward, a recent convert, and a former member of a Davis Cup team, won first place in the ranked singles. Richard L. Warner, the president of a University of Utah stake, and his son Rick won the men’s doubles for the second year.⁵⁶

YMMIA Athletic Committee secretary Judy Donaldson recalled, “I didn’t do a whole lot with the tennis tournament. They were mostly held at Liberty Park. At least I didn’t go to any of them. There wasn’t that much to do on my part. Of course they had to get the referees, the lineman, arrange for the facilities, and get the information out to the zone supervisors, so people could know about it. They had to get their entry forms in and get their pairings, singles or doubles. That wasn’t held for too many years before everything changed.”⁵⁷ Donaldson’s oral history does not explain why things changed nor do other records. One speculation is that the YMMIA focused on the advantages of team sports. They encouraged the young men to learn to play together and to develop a community. It was also easier to determine who came to the all-church tournament for team sports

because of the playoff system. Eligibility was more difficult to determine for individual sports.

J. L. and Mary Thornton participated in what they called an all-church tennis tournament in the 1970s, although it might have been a regional event since all-church tennis ended in 1971. They married in 1972 and moved to Blanding, Utah, where they started playing mixed doubles in city competitions. The Thorntons did not remember exactly how they qualified, but they knew they had to have won other tournaments and then apply. Another player from Blanding had been to the tournament the year before and told the Thorntons about it. Four teams from the town went to the tennis meet at Brigham Young University. They recalled every match in detail. The tournament had an impact on the Thorntons; they won and received a trophy. The awards ceremony was at the tennis courts, and the committee served brownies and punch.

J. L. Thornton recalled, “The memories are what had meaning to us. The trophies don’t mean anything at all. At the time I remember being a little disappointed that there wasn’t more to it than that. I wanted some hoopla or something. But since that time, over the years we reflect back on that a lot. I think some of the experiences we had playing tennis together and doing other things together have helped us get along a little better.”⁵⁸

Golf

The YMMIA Athletic Committee developed a golf tournament following World War II. Participants had to be seventeen years old and were divided into Explorer, senior, and veteran categories. Each group had a winner, and then the lowest score was the overall winner, which could come from any category. While church leaders encouraged stake play, they suggested that because of the individual nature of the sport, division tournaments were more successful. In 1964 the committee explained, “There isn’t a lot of golf activity [on the ward or stake level] for golfers who love the game. You can whet the appetite of golfers for the region by encouraging stake” tournaments.

In 1952 all division winners and others who were eligible to play based on scores were invited to participate. Entrance fees were higher than the other church sports because of the green fees. In addition to the use of the course, the committee gave golfers tickets for a hamburger and two soft drinks. The tournament leaders held an award banquet; the golfers received a ticket; guests could pay to attend.⁵⁹ The Church used private and public courses in Utah over the years, including

the Alpine Country Club in American Fork, the Wasatch Mountain State Park in Midway, and the Meadowbrook and Willow Creek Golf courses in Salt Lake City. The tournament barely broke even, some years making a little money; and some years losing a little.⁶⁰

In 1951, forty-five golfers competed in nine divisions at Salt Lake City's Fort Douglas Country Club. The participants were the winners from local tournaments; eighty-seven participated in a southern California meet. The tournament was so successful that as soon as it was over, leaders made plans for the 1952 meet. Organizers hoped for more than thirty-six holes in one day; they wanted a two- to four-day tournament with handicaps. That way it could draw "five times as many players. And it should too, for golf is a great game for hundreds of faithful Church men who enjoy its relaxation and golf links friendships."⁶¹

To promote the tournament, the Queen of the Days of 47—a celebration on July 24 in honor of the day Brigham Young entered the Salt Lake Valley in 1847—posed with the trophies and the picture appeared in the *Deseret News*. The committee asked businesses to donate awards. The golf report bragged that the tournament would "develop into one of the top golf attractions in the state in years to come." Golfer Ben Hogan endorsed the program, "I can see a great future for your program—both in developing the popularity of golf and in building better American manhood. More power and success to your tournaments. I hope some day to be in your beautiful city for one of them."

The tournament continued to expand. In 1959 the first women's section was added. The women continued to play along side the men until 1962 when the *Church News* announced that the fourth annual golf tournament would not be at the same time as the YMMIA. That year Barbara Trish, a sixteen-year-old from Pensacola, Florida won the tournament and the newspaper bragged that participation was up 600 percent from the year before. In 1963 50 women took part in three categories: Nifty-Fifty for 50 years and old, Senior for 18 and older, and Junior for 13 to 18. Dorothy P. Holt, the activity counselor for the YWMIA, teed off first. To grandmothers had the best scores. While most of the women came from the Mountain States, there were representatives from Chicago and Las Vegas.⁶²

The men's tournament continued. In 1960 non-professional male members age fifteen and older took part. Those playing had to attend church four times in the two months before they played.

According to the rules, participants could not have ever played on Sunday. Players took part in district tournaments. “To add interest and good fellowship,” golfers played in flights of nine after the first eighteen holes. The final thirty-six holes were played round robin. Besides the overall winners, each flight had a winner. Participants paid a \$7.50 entrance fee.⁶³

Each year the committee encouraged men to play golf. In 1964 the committee reminded local church leaders that golf was an official part of church athletics. The program was more than just “basketball, softball, and maybe volleyball.” Every region could have six or more golfers. The YMMIA committee asked that the regional meet should be encouraged, asking bishops and stake presidents to play with a handicap. Regional supervisors determined who came to the all-church tournament. However, only very good juniors should be invited who could compete with the seniors. That year 115 golfers qualified for all-church. Richard Harris, a junior from Menlo Park, California, set a course record the second day and became the first junior to win the tournament.⁶⁴ The 1968 tournament drew 270 golfers representing the 15,000 that had competed in 37 zone tournaments.

In 1967, Billy Casper, a professional golfer who had joined the Mormon Church, attended and provided training at the all-church golf tournament. The YMMIA honored him in 1967, the year after he received “Athlete of the Year” and “Top Performer in Golf” awards. Casper offered golf clinics, played exhibition matches, and handed out the awards. In 1970, two thousand fans watched Casper’s exhibition. N. Eldon Tanner, then a member of the First Presidency, thanked Casper for being a church spokesman. Judy Donaldson explained, Casper had “joined the Church, and that’s probably why we got him to do that. He was always very gracious about it. The participants enjoyed having him there to talk to them and teach them a few things. He was a good man.”⁶⁵ As with the other athletic tournaments, golf was more than just a game. As Robert L. Simpson declared in 1968, “The First Presidency is delighted with the golf tournament” because “practice was key to success for golf” and in striving for “the Celestial Kingdom.”⁶⁶

Relay Races

History

Just as church leaders added softball, volleyball, tennis, and golf as churchwide sports in the 1950s, they also introduced a relay race. Relay races were part of the larger track and field events that traced their origins to the Greek. The word *athletics* comes from the Greek word *athlon* which

means contest. The Romans, Celts, Teutons, and Goths also raced as part of combat training. These activities continued through the Middle Ages but were banned in England between the thirteen and sixteenth centuries because of government restrictions. The government removed the ban in the seventh century, but races were not organized until the nineteenth century. Most athletic events took place around a 400-meter track.⁶⁷

Mormons and Track and Field

Track and field programs were not new to the Mormon Church. Sports historian Richard Ian Kimball writes, “Tens of thousands of basketball games, thousands of baseball games, hundreds of track and field meets, and countless field days could be accounted for by naming the victorious or recounting final scores.” In 1912, YMMIA General Board member Lyman R. Martineau wrote in the *Improvement Era*, “Our track meets are not primarily to make records, but are a part of a program to make men.”⁶⁸

In 1906 the eleventh June Conference in Salt Lake City included a half day and an evening of “field day exercises” at Calder’s Park. The MIA sponsored its first official field day in 1911. That year a full day of athletic meets was held at Wandamere Park. Local areas also held track meets. The Millard, Utah, Stake had a meet for young men and women in April 1910. The next year the stake added music, debates, and a dance. One person wrote, “Some fifteen hundred people from different parts of the stake attended the gathering, and it was pronounced one of the most entertaining and instructive social and literary affairs and athletic meets ever held.”⁶⁹

In 1951 the YMMIA sponsored the first 400-yard shuttle relay race. Four men from the same stake each ran one-hundred yards. Unlike other relay races where the runners circle the track, all four men ran the same one-hundred yards. Teams participated in division meets and then came to the all-church race. The event was so popular that the YMMIA leaders added a 440 yard around the track race for 1952. The sixteen teams ran in heats between 7:00 and 8:00 p.m. just before the June Conference All-Church Dance Festival. The *Church News* claimed that the thirty-thousand spectators was the largest crowd for any track event in the Rocky Mountain West and more than all the college track meets in Utah combined. The “4 gallopers” from Temple View Stake, Salt Lake City, who had won the year before repeated with a forty-four second run in the shuttle. They finished second to the Mesa, Arizona, Stake entry in the 440. Unlike church rules for basketball, school track

and field stars could compete in the races. Ron Prince from the Temple View Ward team ran track at South High School in Salt Lake and was the fastest man in the state high school meet. Dick Millett led Mesa High School to the Arizona state track championship and was voted the “outstanding cinderman.”⁷⁰ The relays continued in the 1950s.⁷¹

Dance Festivals

The relays had a huge audience, but the people were there to see the dancers and not just the races. While most all-church programs were competitive because they led to a tournament, the dance festival was a spectator event. The dancers came from throughout the Church and performed the same dances. But the festival was only the climax of a year of dancing for the young men and women. The MIA also sponsored drama and speech festivals throughout the year and at June Conference. For this study, the dance festival will represent all the cultural arts.

History

The word dance comes from a German word which means to stretch or drag. Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Dancing in the Street: A History of Collective Joy*, explains that “disputes over who can dance, how and where, are at least as old as civilization.” Mormon scholar J. B. Jennings argues that dance had its beginnings in religion. It was a form of worship for “primitive man” where every activity was considered religious. Native Americans, Hawaiians, and citizens of India had traditional dances with religious beginnings. The Egyptians and Jews also danced. The Greeks especially included dance in their worship. But the “far more strait-laced Romans” opposed the Greek god Dionysus, the god of ecstasy, in 186 BC and then eliminated dancing schools.⁷²

The dilemma of dance and worship continued in Christian churches. According to dance scholar Marilyn Daniels, dance was a part of worship for the first five centuries of the early church. The Bishop of Mende, G. Durangus, described a *pelota* dance where priests played ball games, danced, and sang with their clerks in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. E. Louis Backman, a professor of pharmacology at the Royal University of Upsala, explains that throughout the Catholic Church dance served ceremonial and popular purposes even into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A ceremonial example performed by priests was a choristers’ dance in the Seville cathedral in 1916. A popular dance performed by congregations was a dance procession in Echternach in 1904. Backman concludes, “The Christian religious dances continued from the end

of the third century in unbroken succession until our own day.” (His book was published in 1952.)⁷³ However, Daniels disagrees with this conclusion. She believes that by the end of the eighteenth century, few churches used dance. She cited the Shakers as an exception, and that did not last long since the religion slowly died out when the millennium did not come as hoped for.⁷⁴

But just as the Greeks and the Romans disagreed about the role of dance, so did the Christian churches. According to Backman, “The struggle of the Church against religious dances in churches, chapels, and churchyards began as early as the fourth century.” Some religious leaders felt that some dance was “vicious and indecent, with improper songs.” They also objected to men and women dancing together. Backman then recites the ban against dancing down through the centuries just as he described the dancing being a part of worship. Some churches worried that dance stirred sexual feelings. The archbishop of Constantinople declared at the end of the fourth century, “For where there is dance, there is also the Devil.” In the seventh century the Catholic church condemned dance as idleness. But the policy was not always consistent. Daniels said that during the eighth and ninth century, the Church declared some dance as pagan. But later in the medieval period, the Church created its own dances to attract worshipers. Dance continued to be a part of the church until the Reformation.⁷⁵

When did the Catholic Church eliminate dance? Studies disagree. The Catholic Church attempted to ban dance centuries before but did not succeed until the fourteenth century. This resulted in dance “manias” in Europe when many people mocked the priests who tried to prevent their dancing. Daniels believed, “The Reformation, which began in 1525, eventually put an end to dance within the service of the Church.” However, some new churches continued to dance. The Puritans’ views demonstrate this dilemma. Mormon dance scholar Karl E. Wesson explained the Puritans banned mixed dancing (men and women), Maypole dancing, and dancing at festivals. He quotes a 1684 Boston ministers’ publication “An Arrow Against Profane and Promiscuous Dancing, Drawn out of the Quiver of the Scriptures.” Daniels, on the other hand, explained the Puritans opposed dance when it took part with celebrations because it was considered pagan. But if it was associated with the Bible, ministers felt it helped praise the Lord.⁷⁶

Dance historians have explained this back and forth debate about dance through the centuries. While dance was popular in American society during the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries, many religions were still against it when Joseph Smith Jr. organized his church in 1830. In 1847 the Central Presbyterian Church of Cincinnati published *A Discourse on Dancing* which was typical of nineteenth century pamphlets against dance. The author N. L. Rice explains that dance as worship in the Bible was only women dancing together. He condemns men and women dancing together because of physical contact. He also argues that dancing was damaging to the participants' health, especially women.⁷⁷

J. Douglas Thomas, a professor at East Texas Baptist College, discussed similar concerns in the Southern Baptist congregations. While the Church usually focuses on the individual and not the institution, he explained it has opposed dance throughout its history in America. The main concern was recreational dance which the church associates with bad company, bad habits, sexual practices and emotions and worldly pleasures.⁷⁸

Brian Branam, a Baptist pastor in Birmingham, Alabama, wrote about dance in his "Feeling the Faith" blog in 2007. "2 Samuel 6:14 says that 'David danced before the LORD with all his might,' If David were a Baptist . . . he would not have danced. I can't dance. But that's OK because I'm Baptist. . . . I have never read the official doctrinal position on dancing, but from everything I have heard about dancing through the years, I am pretty sure we're against it."⁷⁹ Another internet site agreed. In answer to the question "should Christians dance," the authors concluded, "Since dancing is so closely associated with the works of the flesh, and since those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God, Christians should avoid dancing."⁸⁰

In the 1930s *Vision*, a youth magazine for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (RLDS, now the Community of Christ), warned, "Because of dangerous elements of misdirected impulses and unwholesome associations the church looks with disfavor on the social dance." It continued, "There are lots of activities that can be equally as enjoyable and more profitable than the social dance." These included "rhythm games and folk dances [that] will give all the muscular coordination, ease of being, grace and good exercise and social fellowship of the social dance and be free from its less desirable traits." Historian Roger D. Launius who grew in the RLDS Church during the 1960s, was not allowed to dance.⁸¹

Marilyn Daniels explains dance became part of worship again in the twentieth century. Ruth St. Denis experimented with movement in 1912 and used dance in worship at the

Interdenominational Church in San Francisco in 1917. Her work with Ted Shawn in traveling across the country to share religious dance was celebrated by *Time Magazine* in 1964. Margaret Fisk Taylor celebrated these types of dances in her 1967 book *A Time to Dance: Symbolic Movement in Worship*. She describes the history of movement in worship, focusing on the twentieth century. Most of her book though is a guidebook on how to include choirs and dance in religious ceremonies.⁸²

Mormons and Dance

Unlike the Community of Christ which also traces its roots to Joseph Smith Jr., the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has included dance almost from the beginning. A 1959 *Time Magazine* called the Mormons “the dancingest denomination.” Georganna Ballif Arrington, a LDS dancer, clarified this statement, “Although not found in Mormon worship, dance does exist in abundance in the peripheries—in the recreational and educational programs.”⁸³

Mormon history bears out this comment. Brigham Young grew up with the idea that dance was wrong. As an adult, he rebelled against that teaching and encouraged dance. He encouraged church members to dance as they moved from Illinois to Utah. Once in the Great Basin, he built a theater and dance hall, and early Mormons regularly attended dances. But there were restrictions. Early Mormons participated in square dancing and the Virginia Reel, but church leaders outlawed the waltz. While Young believed, “Fiddling and dance are not part of our worship,” he felt dance was important so the “body [could] keep pace with the mind. My mind labors like a man logging, all the time, and this is the reason why I am fond of these pastimes—they give me a privilege to throw everything off and shake myself.” Karl Wesson, who wrote a master’s thesis on dance in the LDS Church, concluded the church had halls “where socials and dances may be held under proper supervision.” Religion needed to include the “carefree as well as the serious moments of life.”⁸⁴

Acceptable dances changed over time. The older generation thought that the current dances were too suggestive, but theirs had been acceptable. MIA allowed some modern dances but also taught the classics from other generations. A 1958-59 poem suggested that the waltz, the rhumba, the fox trot, and tango each had “a place. And it’s more fun than ever to swing when you do it with rhythm and grace.”⁸⁵ Dress and performance standards were important because “what you do, what we do, is a reflection on the church as a whole and the world judges the church by the example we set.”⁸⁶ In 1962, MIA leaders Joseph T. Bentley and Florence Jacobsen considered any dance with

“intimate dance positions in poor taste and must be avoided if we are to maintain church standards and keep dance as part of our MIA program.”⁸⁷

In 1923, MIAs became responsible for social activities, and dance was an important element. Instructions for dance directors appeared in the *Improvement Era*. Church leaders insisted that ward directors be responsible for all dances held in the buildings. So wards started some new ideas to encourage teenagers to come to meetings. For example, some wards started having a dance after MIA. That practice was discontinued because the meetings ran too late for students, but the MIA planned monthly activities and many of these included dance.⁸⁸

Gold and Green Balls

Dance took place on several levels in the LDS Church. Besides the monthly MIA activities, the highlight of a ward’s activity calendar was the annual Gold and Green Ball. (Gold and green were the MIA colors.) While the Gold and Green Ball focused on the youth, everyone over fourteen attended. Fathers often danced with daughters and mothers with sons. The goal was to learn social grace. During the intermission, dancers performed a choreographed number as a “floor show.” This could be couples waltzing or square dancing. It could also be girls doing a line dance.

Ned B. Roueche, who later served as a General Authority, remembered he had not attended church meetings for years when a woman asked him to perform with her in a floor show. He explained, “Dancing was a hobby of mine,” and he had studied ballroom techniques. He learned the dance and arrived to perform. Roueche was surprised when theirs was the only performance. But “it was an exciting experience, and I thoroughly enjoyed the evening.” The next Sunday he went to church. Eventually he served a mission. Looking back he recalled, “That evening so long ago when I was invited to share my talent, the door opened to a wonderful new world of friends and activity in the Church.”⁸⁹

Stakes also held Gold and Green Balls. In 1937 the Los Angeles Stake presented a pageant at a Gold and Green Ball "woven around the theme: 'America, land which is choice above all other lands.'" Each ward presented a time period from the Book of Mormon to the present. The final group was "America as a Land of Destiny to which all nations will come." With a thousand people who attended, the article concluded, "All in all this was probably the highest expression of MIA recreational activity in the history of the Los Angeles Stake."⁹⁰

A 1930 *Improvement Era* handbook included Gold and Green dance activities. The MIAs in three Nephi, Utah, wards worked with the Juab Stake Board for a 1930 ball. The groups decorated the Arlington Pavilion with the MIA colors and included “an artistic canopied throne in green and gold for the Queen of Colors.” Those who arrived before 9:00 p.m. voted for the queen because the Juab Stake believed “that the Queen should not be chosen by tardy guests.” Once the queen was selected, she was crowned. “A tiny but dignified crown bearer” carried the crown in and “tiny flower girls in butterfly dresses scattered flowers on the line of march.” The “ladies in waiting,” those not selected as queen, arrived with her and then after the crowning the Queen and the attendants received “bouquets of sweet peas and rose buds.”⁹¹

The four wards in Rexburg, Idaho, worked with the Fremont Stake to plan a similar dance. The ward and stake leaders wore outfits to set them apart from the rest of the dancers. “The young men from one ward wore gold-colored shirts with green ties and the ladies gold and green collars and cuffs.” Each ward had selected a queen and two attendants who were all introduced and crowned. The Queen of Attendance was chosen based on the percentage of MIA members attending the dance. Six “graceful couples” danced a floor show number “the Gold and Green Caprice.” The report also included similar descriptions of the East Jordan, Utah, Stake, the Twin Falls, Idaho, Stake, and the California Mission.⁹²

Dance Festivals

Stake, regional, and all-church dance festivals provided another level for those who especially enjoyed dance. For these festivals couples or groups of dancers learned routines. They performed them with others who had learned the same dance. In March 1953 a St. George, Utah, newspaper announced a regional dance festival in the Dixie Sun Bowl, a football stadium at Dixie Junior College, on May 9. After the event, the paper declared, “No details [were] overlooked” and “all this [was] done without charge which [was] another reminder that the best things in life are free.” The thousand dancers from southern Utah and Nevada created a “glorious spectacle . . . not matched anywhere in all the world.”⁹³

In the 1960s, Kathy Hoffman danced at a festival held at Ricks College in Rexburg, Idaho. Salt Lake YWMIA leaders sent material, and the girls made their dresses. She was glad to learn to sew and make modest-length dresses in the miniskirt era. After learning the dance, the girls traveled

by bus. It was “symbolic” for her to be able to learn the dance in a small group and then dance with a crowd. She also thought it was “cool” to see everyone in the matching outfits. Dance was Hoffman’s connection to the Church; her family was inactive, but the bishop and his daughter supported her in church activities.⁹⁴

June Conference Dance Festival

In 1928 the MIA added a dance contest to June Conference. At first it was a competition. All members were invited to enter, and they were judged on dance steps, position, and rhythm. After tryouts, the winners came to Saltair, a recreational facility on the Great Salt Lake. Mormon church leaders built the first Saltair in 1893 to create “a wholesome place for recreation” and a place where non-Mormons could see that Mormons had fun. The church sold the resort in 1906 to a group of Mormon businessmen. The first pavilion burned in 1925 but was replaced the next year. Although the LDS Church did not own the resort, it was a favorite place for dances including the dance festival.⁹⁵

In 1936 the First Presidency asked the MIA to “create higher ideals among young people” in all recreation including dance. So in 1939 the MIA published a dance manual. The dance instruction included (1) rhythm awareness, (2) positions, (3) poise, (4) relaxation, and (5) knowledge of steps. The manual explained, “If one has the fundamentals of the dance forms--waltz, tango, fox trot--well grounded, one can easily pick up the popular variations.”⁹⁶

In 1937 dancers participated in local stake festivals and then sent couples to the church festival to do the fox trot and waltz. That year “Mutual Messages” announced plans for the “church-wide dance festival” on June 11. So that everyone would be dancing together for the same length of time and at the same tempo, the instructions carefully spelled out how long and how fast each dance should be performed.

1. Fox trot to “Aloha Oe” (“Farewell to Thee”). Each stake or mission could enter eight couples.
2. Original waltz to the refrain of “When It’s Springtime in the Rockies.” The dance committee focused on waltz techniques during the year and each stake and mission created an original waltz. These units could send two couples. The dance would be sixty-four measures (the refrain repeated twice) and the tempo would be ninety-six counts a minute.
3. Floor Show Demonstrations. The General MIA would review fox trot and waltz dances

developed for floor shows. Two would be selected for the festivals. Others would be performed during the reception two hours before the festival.

4. Original fox trot to "Gypsy Sweetheart." Two couples from each stake or mission could participate. The dance was thirty-two measures (the refrain twice) and the tempo was fifty-six beats a minute.

5. Centennial Waltz to refrain of "Ciribiribin." The committee explained, "In order to give added color and beauty to the Festival it has been decided to do this number in Spanish costume." Each stake or mission could have one or two couples, but only those in costume could take part.

6. Hawaiian Group. A group from the Oahu Stake and a "native number."

7. "Gleam Waltz" to "Let me Call You Sweetheart." Eight to ten couples from each stake and mission could participate. "This will be the finale and the big mass dance of the evening."

The article asked stakes to plan a "strong Stake Festival which will be a miniature of the big Festival." It concluded, "Let us all begin now to dance" because it "will put color and life into the program of your spring months."⁹⁷

The dance festival continued to grow. In 1947 for the Utah pioneer centennial, the festival moved to the football stadium at the University of Utah to accommodate all the dancers and the audience. Clayton Bishop took part that year and described the steps the dancers went through to be able to participate. The stake leaders called Bishop and his wife to be dance instructors in Wayne County, Utah, in 1947. The couple traveled to Gunnison, Sanpete County, to learn the dances from MIA field secretary W. O. Robinson. Bishop recalled, "He would teach the people the dances he wanted to do at the dance festival." Then the Bishops returned to the wards in their stake and taught the dances. They selected one couple from the four towns in Wayne County to go to Salt Lake City.

The dance festival was a highlight for Bishop. "It was really exciting to participate with so many people [10,000] that knew the same dance" including dancers from Alberta, Canada. "I always loved to dance, but these were a little different. The women had the big skirts on, and the men were all dressed up. I'll never forget marching on. They were playing 'Carry On' [an MIA song]. We all stepped together. It was fun. We looked up at the old flag and saw it waving. It was a thrill to even be on the football field watching so many of us doing the same step at the same time." The Bishops learned seven or eight dances. "It was amazing how [Robinson] would call a number and we would

all step to the tune.”

It was a spiritual moment for Bishop when despite rain during the rehearsals and at the start of the final program, the rain stopped after the amen on the opening prayer. He enjoyed meeting the other dancers. “On our first dance, the first night, we all mixed up, and we were just having a ball.” He remembered the stadium was filled “right to the enth degree.” A live orchestra was on the west side. The members had microphones so the dancers could hear the music. Bishop said everyone “wanted to dance,” and the program continued until after midnight. “The orchestra quit first and got tired. But we just still wanted to dance.”⁹⁸

The festival was always a big draw. Over thirty thousand saw the 1952 festival, and organizers estimated that fifteen thousand people who wanted to attend were turned away. The two-hour program featured Maori dances, waltzes, ballets, rumbas, and square dances. The event gave “dancers fun and thousands of spectators enjoyable entertainment.” The *Church News* description that year applied for all the years. “The great field flood lights were turned off while the large groups [would find] their places on it for the next dance.” During the break, “Skillful small troupes of dancers with mesmerizing splashes of fanciful color, excitement, and designs achieved high dancing honors.” The event started with a flag ceremony and an opening prayer. It ended with twenty-seven hundred “Junior Gleaners and Gleaners all dressed in white formals” dancing to a recording of the Tabernacle Choir singing “Carry On.” The article concluded, “To a man, everyone, of course throughly enjoyed the great show.”⁹⁹

Because the 1952 dance festival was so successful, the dancers performed on two nights in 1953. Over fifty thousand spectators watched the nine thousand dancers highlighted by the three-thousand participants in the all-girls dance.¹⁰⁰ Each year was similar. In June 1963, seven thousand dancers performed eleven sections based on the theme “Beyond the Blue Horizon.”¹⁰¹ In 1971 admission was 50 cents for stadium seats and one dollar for chair seats.¹⁰²

In 2006, Sara Lee Gibb, dean of the College of Health and Human Performance Administration and a professor of dance at Brigham Young University, recalled a typical all-church dance festival when she was a youth and later when she helped plan the performances. As a teenager, she recalled, “It was exciting for us. I grew up right under the Grand Tetons. To come from that little valley and to be able to come to Salt Lake was always quite exciting.”

Later she was asked to help plan the activities. She remembered that the dance festivals were always “very well organized as they had to be. There were thousands of people participating.” She guessed there were often “five or six hundred” dancers on the field at once “in circles, squares, and different formations. They would just fill the field with that. They’d have ten or twelve numbers plus the stage things. Then they usually had a narration with it, so it was a beautiful program.” According to Gibb, the festival had “all kinds of different rhythms. There would be Latin rhythms, there would be two step kinds of things, and there would always be a group of waltzes.”

Getting ready for the event took effort. Gibb remembered, “A typical day at the All-Church Festival was pre-regimented. They had a lot of people to help.” Assigned people explained the mapping on the field to the wards and stakes. The dances “were all done in formations and very interesting. That also made it complicated to rehearse because we had people going different ways and lots of threading through. Sometimes they’d do ribbon things that would highlight what the formations were.” The purpose was “to create something that would be really visually exciting from a distance.”

Gibb remembered the practices when she was a teenager. “I think it was probably a two-hour show. Our piece was three, four, or five minutes.” For her, the rehearsals were “really long days. It was usually quite warm in the sun, and we were outside. I actually remember seeing a few people faint here and there from the heat.” She remembered being provided a lunch. “It was pretty much a dayful.” Then there was another practice the evening before the festival.¹⁰³

As with Gibb, Shauna Gee performed a square dance at the June Conference dance festival when she was a sophomore in high school. In 2005 Gee still had her costume: “pink and white checks [with] little bloomers.” She remembered practicing and wondering how the program would work out. “We came out and took our places marked where we needed to be. We had to remember this was where we had to go when it was time for us to square dance.”¹⁰⁴

Gee said that her grandmother came to watch. “She thought it was such a cool thing.” Gee continued, “I remember being thrilled that night going out there and everyone dancing and looking so cool. I remember seeing the other groups and everything moving so smoothly. It was fun to do the dance.” Gibb said the two performances were sold out because “it was very popular with non-Mormons. They tried to come in and see us too because it was such a great spectacle.”¹⁰⁵

While dance provided an activity for women, men also enjoyed the festivals. Mel Olson from Afton, Wyoming, played high school basketball and ward softball. But he also danced in the 1960s. He recalled attending ward, stake and regional dances. But the “gigantic” festival was in Salt Lake City. “It was cool to be involved in dance.” He compared the dance festival to a Brigham Young University program called “Christmas Around the World.” The participants “had different numbers and different regions. . . . It was a fun thing in the dance area for people to be involved with.”¹⁰⁶

Dance Stories

R. Christine Ollerton

R. Christine Ollerton, a dance professor at BYU, started dancing as a young girl to overcome the effects of polio. As a teenager, her ward bishop called her and a teenage boy to be the dance directors. They were responsible for monthly dances, which included arranging for music and refreshments and planning mixers to get everyone involved.

Besides the ward dances, Ollerton taught dances for a stake dance festival. Couples went from there to a regional and then to the all-church festival. Ollerton recalled, “The stake leaders directed [the stake festival]. As ward leaders we just had to make sure our ward was there and in costume. The stake festivals were exciting and fun. It was enlightening and insightful.” The dances were “more a ballroom type” although there were “novelty or specialty dances also.” Ollerton recalled, “It wasn’t competitive” to go to the next level. “If you participated, obeyed, and kept the rules, got the costumes, and knew the piece, you went.” The rules were “to maintain church standards, be to rehearsals, obey the leaders, and cooperate. . . . The kids pretty much followed those rules. Either that or they eliminated themselves somewhere along the way.”¹⁰⁷

Naomi Reynolds

Naomi Reynolds remembered her Hemet Ward performed in the Southern California Regional Dance Festival. The ward dance directors, Joseph and Bernice Sly, worked with the MIA General Board Dance Committee. Bernice choreographed the unique dances. The youth had “many rehearsals” and “traveled many hours.” They did “formal ballroom dances, folk dances, and classical formations. The costumes were beautiful and appropriate. The young people displayed dignity, charm, cooperation, team work, and patience.”

Reynolds recalled that the regional festival was so large the local MIA leaders leased a large

facility each year such as the Pasadena Rose Bowl, the Los Angeles Coliseum, or the East Los Angeles Stadium. She summarized, “These performances were so phenomenal. I would like to classify them as a big part of a ‘golden era of LDS cultural events.’”¹⁰⁸

Kathy Hoffman

Kathy Hoffman’s father had been baptized into the Mormon Church but did not attend church meetings. Still his name was on the church records. Church members visited the family and took Kathy to Primary. She wanted to join the Church like her classmates there. Kathy took the lessons and was baptized when she was nine. The MIA program was a turning point in her life. She was very shy, but taking part in drama and dance activities gave her confidence.

All these activities provided a safe haven for Hoffman, “Here we were living in the 1960s, which was a difficult time to be a teenager. Everything was falling apart. There were so many bad things going on. People were experimenting with stuff. . . . It was so good to have that group that when you were there you just felt comfortable and you felt secure in doing what the gospel was teaching you was right. . . . I don’t know if I could have survived my teenage years without the support of that group.”¹⁰⁹

David Smart

David Smart grew up in Rexburg, Idaho, in the 1950s. The dance activities gave him social activities and dates. Ward dances for Smart were “very romantic.” The entire ward attended and performed the latest dances including the swing. Smart remembered going to the dance festival in Salt Lake City. In preparation, the couples practiced in the Rexburg Tabernacle basement once a week. It was a weekly date for him. The instructor, Lola Pearson, carefully taught the steps “in a very elementary way.” After the twelve to fifteen couples learned the routine, they performed it at floor shows around Rexburg. Then they rented a bus and went to June Conference. They stayed at a motel and went to the University of Utah football stadium for rehearsals and performances. A highlight was when MIA leader Ruth May Fox attended a practice, and the group sang her church hymn, “Shall the Youth of Zion Falter.”¹¹⁰

V. Gale Lewis

V. Gale Lewis did not take part in sports, but the LDS dance and drama program helped her in the 1970s. She started attending seminary with her friends and joined the Church when she was

fifteen. She participated in drama and dance shows. One of her favorites was a show that demonstrated dances through the decades. She also took part in regional dance festivals at the San Jose State University football stadium.

Lewis's ward sponsored a debutante ball for senior girls. Their fathers escorted the girls to the stage. Since her father was not a church member, he chose not to attend. Instead she got her boyfriend's father, a member of the high council, to walk with her. Lewis and her nonmember mother made and decorated the cake for the dance; Lewis remembered her embarrassment when the master of ceremonies made that announcement as she was escorted in. Looking back, she felt, "We looked silly." But the experience had a lasting impact because it created a sense of "fellowship" for the girls and the ward.¹¹¹

Summary

The YMMIA and the YWMIA leaders encouraged young Mormons to develop testimonies and strong bodies. These goals were encouraged through sports such as basketball, softball, volleyball, tennis, golf, and relay races. While basketball and softball dominated, other sports and activities were also important for the youth. Dance in particular provided an opportunity to bring young men and women together. Though young women also played team games or sports, they did not compete in the all-church tournaments. They did take part though in the tennis and golf tournaments.

The MIA all-church programs continued to flourish until the 1970s, when the General Authorities ended them. The next chapter discusses the reasons why the programs were phased out along with recent plans to return to some activities.

1. *Deseret News* clipping in possession of author, nd..
2. J. L. and Mary Thornton Oral History, interviewed by Jenny Harris, 2003, 8, LDS Sports and Recreation Oral History Project, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. (Unless otherwise cited, all oral histories come from this collection.)
3. *Improvement Era* (October 1970):35.
4. LaRue C. Longden, "June Conference 1951," *Improvement Era* (May 1951):327.
5. YMMIA Committee, *YMMIA Athletic Handbook, 1952-53* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1952), 17. Copy in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. (Hereinafter referred to as *YMMIA Athletic Handbook* with year.)
6. A *Church News* article announced the first annual all-church horseshoes tournament in connection with the all-church softball. Those wanting to participate had to submit an application signed by their bishop and division athletic supervisor. The players provided their own horseshoes and paid their own expenses. *Church News*, July 18, 1959, 15. Doug Hardy discussed playing horseshoes. Doug Hardy Oral History, interviewed by Gary Huntington, 2003, Orem, Utah.
7. YMMIA Athletic Committee Files, 1942-1971, Church History Library, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. (Hereinafter referred to as LDS Church Library.) Used by permission.
8. William T. Odeneal, "The History of Volleyball," *Championship Volleyball by the Experts* (West Point, NY: Leisure Press, 1982), 11-19; Don Schondell and Cecile Reynaud, eds., *The Volleyball Coaching Bible* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2002), viii-ix; <http://volleyball.org/history.html>. The *Coaching Bible* sets the first NAIA championship in 1969 won by Earlham College of Richmond, Indiana.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Earl Esteban Veloria, "The History of Volleyball on the Island of Hawaii" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974), 1-2, 12-20, 27-33, 41.
12. Ibid.
13. William D. Murray, *The History of the Boy Scouts of America* (New York: Boy Scouts of America, 1937), 520; Robert W. Peterson, *The Boy Scouts: An American Adventure* (New York: American Heritage, 1984), 101; *Improvement Era*, August 1931, 621. While vanball is mentioned in some publications, there are no clear definitions or explanations of the game.
14. "Explorers," *Improvement Era* (March 1936):178.

15. "Explorers," *Improvement Era* (December 1936):787.
16. "Explorers," *Improvement Era* (January 1938): 49.
17. "Explorers," *Improvement Era* (March 1938):181.
18. "Explorers," *Improvement Era* (January 1939): 48; (March 1939): 177.
19. "Explorers," *Improvement Era* (May 1941):304.
20. "Explorers," *Improvement Era* (April 1942):240.
21. "Report of MIA Activities," *Improvement Era* (July 1950):550.
22. YMMIA Athletic Department, Church Record 15/1, LDS Church Library.
23. *YMMIA Athletic Handbook, 1952-53, 50-64; 1958-59, 23.*
24. Judy Donaldson Oral History, interviewed by Jenny Harris, 2003, Salt Lake City, Utah, 7; Henry Whiffen Oral History, interviewed by Jenny Harris, 2003, Orem, Utah, 9.
25. Donaldson Oral History, 7; Athletic Committee Files, 1942-1972, Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association, Church Record 14/20, Church History Library. Used with permission.
26. Ibid.
27. Donaldson, 15.
28. *Improvement Era* (July 1962):502; (May 1964):562; (July 1965):600; (June 1967):15; (July 1967):74; (July 1968):6; (June 1969):122; (July 1970):58, 64; correspondence from Joseph K. Borger, in possession of author; Veloria, 19-20.
29. Whiffen, 1-5.
30. Ray Hale Oral History, interviewed by Gary Huntington, 2003, Salt Lake City, Utah, 4.
31. Whiffen, 14.
32. Donaldson, 9.
33. Ray Oaks Oral History, interviewed by Justin Flake, 2003, Boise, Idaho, 5.
34. Donaldson, 9; Dale Christensen Oral History, interviewed by Michael Cannon, Orem, Utah, 5.
35. Whiffen, 8-9.
36. Ibid., 4. 13.

37. Ibid., 13
38. Richard Ball Oral History, interviewed by Jenny Harris, 2003, Salt Lake City, Utah, 4,5.
39. Kenneth Erickson Oral History, interviewed by Michael Cannon, 2003, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2, 8.
40. David Olson Oral History, interviewed by Fred Washburn, Orem, Utah, 2004, 1-4.
41. "Report of MIA Activities," *Improvement Era* (July 1950):550.
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44. H. B. Martin, *Fifty Years of American Golf* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1936), 14-15.
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50. Moss, 181.
51. Afton Bradford Bradshaw, "Tennis in Utah—The First Fifty Years, 1885-1935," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 52(Spring 1984):179-191.
52. John D. Giles and Helena W. Larson, "The M Men-Gleaner Silver Jubilee," *Improvement Era* (March 1947):180.
53. *YMMIA Athletic Handbook, 1952-53*, 41-42; 1958-59, 11; 1971-72, 11; *Deseret News*, August 12, 1951, 10A; August 15, 1951, 5.
54. Church News Staff, *The Church in Action, 1971* (Salt Lake City: Church News, 1972), 27.
55. *Deseret News*, August 25, 1954, C3; August 28, 1954, 6A; September 2, 1954, 1C, C3.

56. YMMIA Athletic Committee, Church Record, 15/1, Church History Library; *Deseret News*, August 25, 1964, C3; August 28, 1964, 6A; September 2, 1964, 1C, C3; *Improvement Era* (September 1969):27; (September 1970):36, 69.

57. Donaldson, 9.

58. Thornton, 10.

59. *YMMIA Athletic Handbook, 1952-53, 65-66; 1971-72, 10-11*; YMMIA Athletic Committee Files, Church History Library. Used by permission.

60. For example,

1959--Alpine Country Club and Wasatch Mountain State Park

1963 Meadowbrook Golf Course

1964 Willow Creek Golf Course

1965, men played, Willow Creek; women, Meadowbrook

1967 Alpine Country Club

1968 Alpine Country Club

1969 Alpine and Wasatch Mountain

1970 Alpine and Wasatch Mountain

Very short announcements of the golf tournament appeared in the church magazine. See *Improvement Era* (October 1959):41; (September 1963):787; (October 1963):826; (September 1967):712; (September 1965):748-49; (September 1966):808; (September 1967):60; (October 1967):79; (September 1968):89; (October 1969):78; (October 1970):35; *Church News*, August 3, 1968, 12; August 15, 1968, 15.

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65. Donaldson, 9.

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70. *Church News*, May 28, 1952, 3; June 4, 1952, 6; June 14, 1952, 8.

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72. Karl E. Wesson, "Dance in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1940" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975), 8, 11; Barbara Ehrenreich, "Meanwhile: I am, therefore I need to dance," *International HeraldTribune Opinion*, June 4, 2007, <http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/06/04/opinion/eddance.php>, retrieved August 1, 2007; J. B. Jennings, "A Backward Glance at Dancing," *Improvement Era* (June 1936):380-381, 384-385; E. Louis Backman, *Religious Dances in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine*, R. Classen, trans. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1952); Marilyn Daniels, *The Dance in Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).

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84. Wesson, 13-17.
85. Dance, 1958-59, Church Record 13/51, Church History Library.
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99. *Church News*, June 14, 1952, 13.
100. Ibid., June 20, 1953, 15.
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102. YMMIA Circular Letters, Church Records 15/7 June 1, 1971, Church History Library
103. Sara Lee Gibb Oral History, interviewed by Mary Mudrick, 2006, Provo, Utah, 1-6.
104. Shauna Gee Oral History, interviewed by Lisa Christensen Gee, 2005, Provo, Utah, interview in process.

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107. R. Christine Ollerton Oral History, interviewed by Lisa Christensen Gee, June 6, 2005.
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