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Ross Walker

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Transforming Scottish Basketball: Exploring the Student Impact, 1890s–1930s

Ross Walker 

Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport, University of Stirling, Stirling, UK

ABSTRACT

The 1930s were a transformational era for Scottish basketball. This article discusses the impact of American students in the development of basketball in Scotland. It documents their role and efforts from their arrival in 1929 until the beginning of World War II in 1939. It rests upon two arguments: the impetus to develop basketball in Scotland required support from protagonists hailing from origins where the sport was popular; and the Scottish university ecosystem provided the optimal platform, foundations and infrastructure to enable the growth and participation in basketball. Prior to the enrolment of American students at Scottish universities, basketball existed on the periphery of the sporting landscape and made limited progress in Scotland. It is contended that students in conjunction with other prevalent cultural and societal shifts helped transform basketball from a recreational and social activity to a competitive sport. During the process, the students helped change the gendered stereotype associated with basketball in Scotland, prompted increased media coverage, improve playing standards and contributed to the growth of the game overall. Through American students' heightened knowledge of basketball, they helped Scots develop a passion for the sport and assisted with codifying and standardizing the rules whilst establishing competitions and teams.

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Sports ranging from association football and bowls to rugby and shinty are and have been prominent features of Scotland's sporting landscape.¹ In Scotland, sport manifests the identities of individuals and groups alongside the nation and imagined Scottish community, serving as a popular manifestation of Scottishness and what being Scottish means.² Having historically existed on the periphery of Scotland's sporting landscape, basketball has featured less prominently in this centric.³ However, recent research proliferating the unique relationship between basketball and Scotland recognises the country's role in influencing the devisal and creation of the sport through the Scottishness of Dr. James Naismith.⁴ Furthermore, the game has a long-standing history in Scotland, dating back to 1895.⁵ Yet, knowledge of Scottish basketball is limited because the game's growth until the 1930s was slow, mirrored by its

CONTACT Ross Walker  ross.walker1@stir.ac.uk  Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport, University of Stirling, Stirling, UK.

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marginal development and uptake, particularly before World War I (WWI).⁶ Since penetrating Scotland, basketball was predominantly played by girls in public and private schools alongside social and youth organizations including the Girl Guides.⁷ The 1890s–1930s reflects the sport's ongoing transition from a 'girls' game' to a 'man's sport' with the former undermining basketball and determining its reception.⁸ This key factor, among others, led to the game becoming marginalized to the aforementioned sports, played only within select institutions and organizations in pockets of demand nationwide.⁹ To progress, basketball required support from those with the ability and means to develop it.

When compared to curling, golf and Highland Games, basketball has received reduced attention due to its minority sport reputation.¹⁰ Although, research to date has shown basketball around the First and Second World War to be widely played.¹¹ Literature has also identified the 1930s as a transformational era for Scottish basketball.¹² Within current sport historiography, few materials credit international student's influence upon the development of any sport. Aside from sources focusing upon graduates of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) International Training School at Springfield College, Massachusetts, no literature covers other university cohorts for impacting the dissemination and formalization of basketball in Scotland or worldwide.¹³ Whereas the role of the YMCA and Mormon missionaries in developing basketball has been acknowledged.¹⁴ Yet, current research shows the transportation and progression of the game to be community and country dependent.¹⁵ British basketball historiography accredits physical educationalist, Madame Österberg, and businessman, Charles Proctor, for incepting basketball in Britain.¹⁶ This rationale necessitates further investigations into the main protagonists responsible for developing basketball in different environments. With minimal research documenting Scottish university sport, and the influence of American students on basketball in Scotland acknowledged but not searingly explained, this article explores this relationship further.¹⁷

An absence of diverse literature inhibits the construction of a history of Scottish basketball. While limited accepted wisdom remains to be supported or challenged, it leverages the value of additional research to generate increased subject-related knowledge.¹⁸ Through supplementing work on Scottish basketball, gaps about how university students helped transform the sport and the importance of the university system are filled. This is achieved through assessing factors including the students' development of structured competition and undertaking public demonstrations and coaching sessions. Also, by highlighting how part of the sport's wider development stemmed from Scottish universities before spreading to society. The examples along with the overall narrative provide insights into the Americanization of sport but also the integration of different cultures through sport along with the associated intricacies and nuances of the actions and context. The original case study thus supplements literature on processes of cultural transfer through discussing various vectors.¹⁹ Given that the concept of Americanization features throughout the article, it is defined as the action of transferring and instilling American cultural components in a new host community.²⁰ Through this lens, the findings add to discussions around sporting modernities, sport in Scotland, Scottish-British basketball and basketball historiography more broadly. It also builds upon prior research highlighting how the sport's

beleaguered development in Scotland differs from other nations.²¹ Previous Scottish basketball accounts showcase such exceptionalisms through cross-gendered matches between men's and women's teams due to competition shortages.²²

The research documents the efforts of students from 1929–1939, the period when basketball formalized and became institutionalized in Scottish universities. It begins by outlining the history of basketball in Scotland prior to the arrival of American students post-WWI before detailing the evolving contemporary context around sport in the Scottish universities. Based on the findings, two arguments are put forth. The first proposes that the impetus to grow basketball in Scotland required support from protagonists hailing from origins where the sport was popular. The second maintains that the Scottish university ecosystem provided the optimal platform, foundations and infrastructure to enable the growth of basketball. Students in conjunction with other cultural and societal shifts helped transform basketball from a recreational and social activity to a competitive sport. During the process, they changed the gendered stereotype associated with basketball in Scotland, prompted increased media coverage and contributed to improved participation. Through American students' heightened knowledge of basketball, they helped Scots develop a passion for the sport and assisted with codifying and standardizing the rules. While some components such as impractical facilities and gender disparities reflect common issues across the evolution of sport, a unique antithesis around the development of secondary sports in Britain through Scottish university basketball are provided.

Researching Scottish Basketball

The issues around researching the history of basketball in Britain-Scotland are not new.²³ Until a more in-depth and widespread historiography of British basketball emerges, arduous approaches to collating information are required. To locate empirical materials about Scottish basketball, *basketballscotland*, the National Archives of Scotland and the National Library of Scotland were contacted about their historiographical records. The University of Edinburgh and University of Stirling Archives were also visited. However, no insights were gleaned. The author develops the narrative around university basketball through creating a historical database comprising empirical sources from two methods. The first utilizes accounts from former Scottish basketball personnel.²⁴ While neither focus on basketball during the 1930s, more so basketball post-World War II (WWII), they collectively provide insights to the background of Scottish basketball alongside the university sport ecosystem including cost and facilities.

The second and main method gleans knowledge from reports in local newspapers such as the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* and *St. Andrews Citizen*. These are accessible online through newspaper repositories, predominantly the British Newspaper Archive but also *Edinburgh Evening News* and *The Scotsman*. They were discovered through refining the search period to the specific years of publication and location to Scotland. Nine individual and collective terms formed the search criteria. The individual searches consisted of three separate variations for the game, 'basketball', 'basket ball' and 'basket-ball'. These individual variations were also combined with 'college' and 'university'. Overall, the searches returned 2,374 documents. Most were irrelevant as

the word 'ball' linked to other sports. The Archives filtration system ordered the sources based on relevancy and helped reduce the number to the fifty-two drawn upon. A sleuthing approach was adopted to scan each source for applicability.

While Scottish basketball requires an archive, the available materials are beneficial. Given that basketball was reported overall, this indicates the game was worth publicizing with contemporary news outlets prioritizing sports which sustained readership.²⁵ The contemporary print media extracts help pinpoint differences and similarities across diverging areas through reflecting local and regional identities and points of interest.²⁶ Although, the specific columns utilized lacked author details, background information, critical depth, a geographical spread incorporating the west of Scotland, particularly Glasgow and surrounding areas, and were often short in narrative. A gender bias and male dominated perspective is also present while materials were typically descriptive and provided surface level information, requiring secondary sources to expand upon the analysis. Subsequently, information is drawn from existing sources discussing Scottish and British basketball.²⁷ Additional perceptions are gleaned from authors discussing the Americanization of sport, and Scottish culture, society and sport.²⁸

The Foundations of Basketball and University Basketball in Scotland

Basketball spread to and across Europe from America through ludic diffusion. This involves factors relative to the cultural, economic, political, social and technological circumstances of each context and nation.²⁹ In each country, different protagonists catalyzed this process. Having watched an exhibition in Canada in 1892, Charles Proctor introduced basketball to the Birkenhead YMCA upon returning to Merseyside.³⁰ Despite arriving in Britain a year after the sport was created, the game arrived in Dundee, Scotland, in 1895.³¹ A multidimensional process involving four groups translocated basketball to Scotland, including graduates of Hampstead College, Mormon missionaries, Scottish-based YMCA workers and Scottish sojourners.³² Despite multiple entry points, the sport struggled to progress.³³ By the arrival of basketball, modern sports such as golf had developed earlier and held dominant positions, while the YMCA which played a key role in progressing basketball worldwide was committed to association football.³⁴ Furthermore, the contemporary gender ideologies associated with basketball, particularly its 'girls' game' reputation, led to men being offput.³⁵ Initially, the game was played through an adapted version of basketball which was specifically designed for girls in 1892 by Senda Berenson to align with the Victorian ideologies and sporting restraints for women.³⁶ These connotations corresponded with and led to basketball being replaced by netball which quickly established improved foundations within Scottish training colleges for women.³⁷ Lastly, basketball relied on being voluntarily accepted, adopted and maintained, whereas other sports such as athletics were concurrently professionalizing.³⁸

To grow, basketball in Scotland required a dedicated group with the necessary means, knowledge and understanding to provide impetus, but also organize and structure the sport. Prior to WWI, no evidence records basketball being played in Scottish universities. The first known source was produced by the *Daily Record* in 1919, documenting a match between American students from the University of

Edinburgh and University of Glasgow with the former emerging victorious.³⁹ As the first group to play basketball in these institutions, this entails the American students incepted basketball within Scottish universities. This statement is corroborated by the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, *Evening Telegraph*, and *St. Andrews Citizen* with the former stating that basketball was ‘introduced to Scottish universities by American students’ who subsequently formed teams.⁴⁰ Further information recording basketball in higher education ecosystems throughout the early-mid-1920s does not exist. While the *Daily Record* article showcases the likelihood that basketball was played in and by Scottish universities post-WWI, this indicates the game was undertaken informally between American students. The subsequent narrative discusses the impact and role of students in helping develop and transform basketball in Scotland from 1929–1939 when their involvement was chronicled by local newspapers.

The Arrival of American Students

In October 1929, the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* reported that increased numbers of American students, predominantly medicine undergraduates and basketball enthusiasts, were enrolling at Scottish universities.⁴¹ Among the reasons to leave the US, American public educational institutions experienced severe cuts to funding throughout the late 1920s and 1930s due to the economic downturn caused by The Great Depression.⁴² This prompted students with the financial means to study overseas. Whereas a motivational factor to study in Scotland was reflected through the establishment of the Scottish Council for Research in Education in the late 1920s.⁴³ The Council was an institute for educational research and one of the first worldwide, springboarding the reputation of Scottish higher learning establishments globally.⁴⁴ This coincides with the influence of Scottish universities alongside the staff who were at the forefront of higher education across many old and new disciplines.⁴⁵ Within Scottish institutions, academics were developing unique specialisms, particularly in medicine with Scotland pioneering some modern practices.⁴⁶ The educational traditions of Scotland were also more distinct from its means of approach to examination whilst being more democratic than England and other countries.⁴⁷ The diverse motivations ranging from economic to educational factors prompting people to leave America and move to Scotland represent those largely afforded to students with the necessary financial means to cover the associated costs of studying in a foreign country.

Modernizing the University Sport System

Ongoing changes within the education system enabled basketball to thrive in the Scottish universities. While sport previously existed in higher education settings, institutions now actively increased their support to help university students participate in physical activities.⁴⁸ Appeals were launched to improve facilities and student welfare funds were established to finance sporting and social activities with the University of Glasgow securing over £100,000 (approximately £5.2 million in 20250 from fundraising.⁴⁹ By comparison, the entire institution concurrently received roughly £125,000 in government and private donor grants.⁵⁰ In 1929, all Scottish universities

except Aberdeen added a fee to the matriculation costs which was paid into the Physical Welfare Fund.⁵¹ In return, all students were provided free admission to the Athletic Club to encourage greater sporting engagements.⁵² Covering the cost of participation helped people overcome the pay-to-play system which existed in Scottish sport and concurrently inhibited mass involvement.⁵³ By 1930, Scottish university sport incorporated a new, modern system which funded athletic activities. Furthermore, staff were expected to duly support with the process to ease students' hesitancy to periodically forgo their studies.⁵⁴ The system also maintained facilities, provided resources, introduced compulsory medical exams and levies for athletic domains whilst earmarking Wednesday as the specific sports day.⁵⁵ Through selecting Wednesday afternoon as the official day for sport, this made student's involvement more convenient through removing lectures.⁵⁶

The improved sporting system was supplemented by appointments of Directors of Physical Training across various Scottish universities such as Aberdeen and Edinburgh.⁵⁷ The Directors were responsible for assisting traditional games along with developing and adopting new forms of training.⁵⁸ Many directors were former army instructors and officers such as Lieutenant Stark and Colonel Campbell who later helped coach basketball classes and umpire matches in Dundee and Edinburgh.⁵⁹ Having previously undertaken courses in physical training through the armed forces, sporting organization and ideology, these personnel were highly knowledgeable about developing sport.⁶⁰ They were also experienced sport practitioners whereby in instances where competitive structures did not exist, they were encouraged to help establish new ones.⁶¹ Underpinning the decision to appoint directors was the belief that physical exercise must balance intellectual exertion because the fitter the body, the better the brain would perform academically.⁶² The notion that sport produced broader non-sporting outcomes and served tangible benefits was a commonality shared between the army and universities, albeit the former seeking to generate soldiers.⁶³ Universities were ideal environments to incept and grow basketball because trained personnel were purposefully hired within the athletic departments to help promote and oversee new sports and increase opportunities.

Through the improved accessibility and availability of equipment, facilities and resources, higher education institutions were optimal places for basketball to develop in Scotland.⁶⁴ Out with this ecosystem, participants played outside or turned to church, civic, co-operative, drill, school, and town halls, which required makeshift equipment.⁶⁵ Unlike the general public, having access through the university minimized competition with other sports and groups for indoor public spaces.⁶⁶ It also provided funding to acquire provisions such as balls, free standing hoops and athletic vests for matches.⁶⁷ These items enabled greater access and at a cheaper cost compared to basketball opportunities out with the university.⁶⁸ Yet, the students and public faced common restrictions whereby indoor facilities in Scotland were not developed for basketball.⁶⁹ For example, the University of Edinburgh's indoor hall had an infrastructural pillar in the middle of the court to support the ceiling.⁷⁰ Other facility related issues consisted of gymnasia comprising small spaces that were often wider than longer and obtained no marked boundaries.⁷¹ Basketball was subsequently modified to suit the hosts circumstances, fulfil participants needs and fit the environment.⁷² Outside of the university grounds, the unorganized nature and substandard

facilities marginalized basketball as these factors were considered off putting by society.⁷³ While university's shared similar issues with the broader Scottish sport system, higher education environments were better suited to basketball overall.

Basketball was accepted into the Scottish university sporting ecosystem because the environment likewise embodied amateurism and supported sports with similar mentalities.⁷⁴ The game was originally founded by Naismith under the onus of helping people.⁷⁵ While basketball was contemporarily commercializing and professionalizing in America, it maintained some elements of its initial amateur athletic tradition, particularly in colleges and universities.⁷⁶ Although used for proselytization, it also remained amateur in nature in the YMCA.⁷⁷ Similarly to other sports embraced after WWI such as badminton, basketball fitted within the traditional athleticism of inter-university competition, which remained central to university life until the 1960s.⁷⁸ Sport in the diverse forms and opportunities that basketball represented was important in the university setting.⁷⁹ This was because higher education institutions needed to be real communities with a proper feeling of pride and mutual loyalty between the students and each individual university.⁸⁰ Sport was thus valuable, providing feelings of communality alongside social and organizational focus with the ideology one of recreation for health and self-development.⁸¹ The amateur ethos through sport reflected and helped attain these outcomes because it placed greater emphasis on personal satisfaction, team play and good sportsmanship rather than monetary or performance gain or prompting anti-social behaviors such as gambling and violence.⁸²

The Evolving Relationship between Basketball, Culture and Society

The ability to manifest basketball in the Scottish universities was not only underpinned by the educational system, but also broader social transformations around sport and basketball. This involved unilateral shifts across culture and society which enabled the necessary changes for basketball to develop from 1929–39.⁸³ The first entails the state's increased emphasis on welfarism through providing structured and organized sport programs which intentionally used basketball to achieve non-sporting outcomes such as social development and leadership.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the incorporation of basketball by more popular sports such as Celtic Football Club who used it for training, motivated non-traditional basketball participants to indulge.⁸⁵ The incorporation of basketball within the armed forces training regimes led to widespread introductions and helped contest the sport's former effeminate reputation.⁸⁶ These shifts coincided with society throughout the 1930s favouring more athletically demanding sports, leading to a greater demand for basketball.⁸⁷ Such factors highlight how the inception of basketball by the American students in universities aligned with more extensive social changes. While the higher education system offered a foundational basis for the game to be undertaken, these broader influences collectively provided an opening for basketball to be embraced by the current student cohort alongside society.

Among these educational, societal and sporting changes, basketball was embedded within the national Keep Fit movement in the 1930s. This program was the British Government's campaign to promote health and exercise that spread throughout

Scotland.⁸⁸ Aiming to promote fitness and good carriage, particularly through improved posture, free basketball classes and recreational games were enacted daily in gymnasiums nationwide for men and women.⁸⁹ The logic: the fitter the body, the sharper the mind.⁹⁰ From the approximate 10,000 students currently enrolled across all four Scottish universities, the University of Edinburgh had 218 people attending these new classes and a further 500 undertaking similar exercises out with the university setting.⁹¹ The Keep Fit movement revealed how unhealthy and unfit Scotland was with people sacrificing their wellbeing for careers and education.⁹² While this initiative proved popular, its fee-based nature among general society was problematic, conflicting with personal budgets, especially among groups with reduced funds who required recreation most but cost prevented participation.⁹³ For the common good of the student body, fees were covered through institution's matriculation funds which also developed spaces to undertake classes.⁹⁴ This program links to the long tradition of sport as a form of philanthropic exercise in American sport as highlighted through the example of powder-puff football where since the early twentieth-century high school and college girls have dressed as American football players and played touch football games.⁹⁵

Based on the evidence put forth in this overall section, during a period which offered limited opportunities to play basketball in Scotland, institutions such as the University of Edinburgh became hubs for the sport.⁹⁶ Articles in the *Dundee Courier* and *Edinburgh Evening News* discuss how the game was one of the student bodies most popular activities, cementing itself as a core sport.⁹⁷ Until now, athletics, boxing, hockey, golf, rowing, swimming, tennis and water polo were the main university activities.⁹⁸ Another column in the *Edinburgh Evening News* notes how the sport was making 'good progress' in the university system.⁹⁹ While 479 student members of the University of Edinburgh Athletic were physically active either through clubs or Keep Fit sessions, 1700–1800 students remained inactive.¹⁰⁰ Despite under a quarter of students engaging in sport, the progress mentioned highlights how basketball went from a marginally played game in Scotland without a presence in higher education institutions to featuring somewhat broadly within university sport programs. This happened due to two reasons. The first regards the aforementioned cultural, educational, societal and sporting shifts within Scottish society. The second stems from people unfamiliar with the game being immersed in basketball culture and environments through interacting with and observing those with expertise who subsequently transferred their culture passion for the sport to new participants.¹⁰¹ Having previously outlined the first point, the second is discussed in the succeeding section.

Developing Scottish Basketball

When the American students descended upon Dundee and St Andrews last winter, they brought with them the game of basketball. They were not daunted by Scottish ignorance of the sport, and they formed unofficially a club which played several matches with teams from other Scottish universities.¹⁰²

As highlighted by the *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, prior to the arrival of increased American students at Scottish universities, Scotland was not fully *au fait*

with basketball. However, students sought to create their own opportunities. The following context details five ways students helped transform basketball in Scotland.

Scottish University Basketball League

Students introduced the first national Scottish basketball competition. The first competitive inter-university basketball league match was played between Aberdeen University and Dundee Medical College at Marischal College in Aberdeen in December 1929.¹⁰³ This fixture catalyzed the annual inter-varsity and inter-city-varsity games between Scotland's contemporary higher education institutions, Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and St. Andrews.¹⁰⁴ Newspaper articles showcase fixtures were not confined to inter-university contests, but also intra-university and inter-faculty bouts.¹⁰⁵ This was because most universities had teams representing different academic disciplines ranging from medicine to science.¹⁰⁶ Varsity and junior varsity teams were also created, and represent the American influence but also the growing interest in the game as further opportunities were required to meet demand.¹⁰⁷ These internal student versus student and student versus staff games helped strengthen university communitarianism through forming increased social bonds and interactions.¹⁰⁸ Another element representing the Americanization of the sport links to the practicalities of play. Games were played under American rules with the first fixture comprising eight players from Aberdeen and nine from Dundee.¹⁰⁹ The code of conduct resembled the official rules for men established by Naismith.¹¹⁰ For international participants, basketball became a pillar of connectivity, enabling the American students to remain in contact with their fellow countrymen at different institutions. With universities acting as a staging post for competition, this allowed participants, many of whom previously played basketball, to compete against people of similar or greater abilities to help maintain and potentially develop the standard of Scottish basketball.

Traditions

The American students created new university sporting traditions through incepting America versus Scotland basketball games.¹¹¹ Until 1929, there was no inter-continental matchups in Scottish university sport. This stems from other imports such as American football having not yet been introduced to Scotland or higher education institutions.¹¹² Other popular sports in America such as ice-hockey had also not been adopted by the Scottish university sporting system.¹¹³ However, Scotland versus England rivalries existed and added to the university's sporting prominence but were more common in cricket and rugby.¹¹⁴ Yet, traditions were important to university life. The foundations of some institutions such as St. Andrews were based on long-standing customs, which were later supplemented through sport events such as annual regattas.¹¹⁵ Basketball aligned with these traditions, particularly the modern ones that highlighted the value of team games alongside gymnasium-based physical training.¹¹⁶ The relevant activities which ensued allowed the American students to showcase their sporting talents, maintain culture and attach themselves to the university's identity.¹¹⁷ For Americans, basketball helped acculturation within Scottish society and form closer attachments to institutions through familiar and Americanized means.¹¹⁸

Public Demonstrations

Students provided public basketball displays nationwide. As newspaper articles evidence, university teams' regularly performed at charity events, dances, fundraisers, gala weeks and conducted general exhibitions.¹¹⁹ One example was the annual two-three day 'Assault-at-Arms' held by the University of Edinburgh in aid of the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.¹²⁰ From 1931 onwards, basketball was incorporated to increase attendances, raise additional funds for the hospital and encourage greater activity levels through its reputation as being a new and exciting game to observe.¹²¹ Partaking in initiatives relating to ideologies surrounding health and broader social dimensions helped basketball gain attention, admiration and approval as a sport among society. This was through its formal inclusion which highlighted an element of prestige, but also notoriety because their performances appealed to spectators.¹²² Student involvement in community affairs and undertaking fundraising or charity-related activities was commonplace amongst university sport teams overall.¹²³ It formed part of the student's broader corporate and social development to build towards the later goal of entering the workplace.¹²⁴ Some university teams thus operated under the auspices that playing basketball was good preparation for life after education.¹²⁵ These behaviors were reflective of Americans' actions in new host environments more extensively, regularly undertaking basketball displays to generate income and support local communities, institutions, organizations, and people.¹²⁶

Community Coaching

American students coached basketball and implemented programs in their local communities.¹²⁷ According to former Scottish basketball personnel, some initiatives were continued by locals and became the foundations for community basketball clubs, especially in Edinburgh.¹²⁸ The rationale for undertaking coaching sessions links to basketball being employed by Americans in Britain for socialization.¹²⁹ Basketball was used to help American's integrate within their new host environment to expedite comradeship through sharing their culture with locals.¹³⁰ Equally, Americans were invited by local organizations such as the YMCA to conduct basketball sessions to provide social interaction and learning opportunities for both groups.¹³¹ While the local group benefited from the basketball knowledge, American's received valuable connections and contacts.¹³² The American students' communal efforts spurred three outcomes. Firstly, they galvanized basketball in new and struggling areas such as Aberdeen which were previously unacquainted with basketball.¹³³ Secondly, American's brought a solid grounding and enthusiasm for basketball which was non-existent in Scotland and spread to locals, subsequently developing interest among new demographics.¹³⁴ Thirdly, basketball-related knowledge was spread and affirmed through first-hand interactions and distributing American-based literature, mainly newspapers and magazines.¹³⁵

Performance Success

In the late 1930s, Scottish university basketball teams entered British tournaments. These opportunities established them as top national competitors.¹³⁶ The capability of

Scottish university basketball was epitomized on the 5 and 6 April, 1939, when Scotland's top clubs went head-to-head with England's best.¹³⁷ Hailing from the University of Edinburgh, the Edinburgh All-Stars defeated England's national champions, London's Resident Americans (Mormon missionaries), 31–28 before 2000 people at Earls Court Stadium, London.¹³⁸ Such attendances continued into the succeeding games at Earls Empress Hall and Harringay Arena where London defeated Glasgow Medicals 28–25 and 26–22.¹³⁹ These teams participated in British tournaments because in England, basketball was expanding quicker, offering better opportunities for structured and more challenging competition.¹⁴⁰ This stemmed from the national basketball association for England and Wales being formed in 1936 and concurrently undertaking efforts and initiatives to grow the game.¹⁴¹ One means of achieving the association's organizational aims was through creating elite competitions which simultaneously served commercial, cultural and political purposes.¹⁴² This was achieved by showcasing American popular culture through using the best teams from across Britain to generate income from spectators and gather national media attention to the sport.¹⁴³ These tournaments also helped fulfil university aims such as Edinburgh's who wanted to maintain their sporting reputation, cement physical education among their student cohort and encourage more international students to enroll.¹⁴⁴ Aside from external organizational motivations, through entering and winning UK-wide competitions, this helped generate credibility, legitimization and respect for basketball in Scotland whilst gathering national exposure and publicity for the game.¹⁴⁵ The ability to win this event was accredited to the growing presence and influence of Americans, particularly students, whose basketball backgrounds and expertise improved playing standards.¹⁴⁶

The Student Impact on Scottish Basketball

This enthusiasm has now borne fruit, and the new sport is rapidly becoming popular among non-American students. There has been a large increase in the membership of the club, and this season it receives the official recognition of the University Athletic Union ... The notion that basketball is a soft game will not be held by anyone who seen the American students.¹⁴⁷

Based on the available empirical sources, seven areas regarding the student impact on Scottish basketball have emerged. The forthcoming discussion outlines their role in the process and the outcomes.

Changing Narratives

The introduction of the game through universities helped change the narrative around basketball in Scotland. Through the higher education system, American students reportedly started a 'basket ball craze', shifting the sport's positionality from peripheral game to more central.¹⁴⁸ While the term 'craze' overemphasizes the impact, it reflects how basketball was more extensively played across cities and towns with universities, and afore small crowds comprising low three figures.¹⁴⁹ The main transformational shift involved helping change the societal belief that basketball was not a 'girls' game', but a sport for all.¹⁵⁰ While the influence of American soldiers during

WWI assuaged the effeminate reputation among service personnel, public perceptions altered upon witnessing basketball played by American students in Scotland.¹⁵¹ This was achieved through showcasing basketball to be an exciting, fast-paced and tough yet clean sport, contrasting previous notions of basketball lacking more critical and enticing elements of speed and skill.¹⁵² The student's performances highlighted how basketball aligned with concepts of masculinity through exhibiting characteristics of aggression and vigour during displays.¹⁵³ Whereas the prior practicalities and code of conduct comprised more effeminate traits as the game was played under women's basketball rules, which removed snatching of the ball, overexertion, and individual domination.¹⁵⁴ Another factor supporting the shift stemmed from basketball in America having been institutionalized within the collegiate system.¹⁵⁵ This development was supplemented by the game's contemporary professionalization through competitions such as the American Basketball League for men.¹⁵⁶ These transformations coincided with the contemporary internationalization of basketball during the 1920s and 1930s, particularly the creation of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) which was simultaneously structuring itself and the sport more broadly.¹⁵⁷

Standardizing Basketball

Through organizing the game and conducting basketball activities, the American students helped congruently regulate the sport in Scotland.¹⁵⁸ In its infancy, basketball in Britain was modified to accommodate each ecosystem's circumstances with simplified Americanized rules.¹⁵⁹ Due to facility issues, participants in Scotland experienced multiple adapted variations of basketball as the sport was altered to fit different spaces.¹⁶⁰ This led to local regulations being implemented regarding court type, and player numbers being altered to enable participation.¹⁶¹ These irregularities made establishing basketball difficult as no standardized set of rules were unilaterally followed and no clear understanding of the game was developing.¹⁶² Rather, local regulations had an adverse impact because the uncoordinated and informal undertakings of basketball partially confined it to the sporting periphery as vested sportspeople sought participation in more organized and structured activities such as association football.¹⁶³ In countries unfamiliar with the game and where it was played inconsistently across diverging regions, the American influence helped create greater consistency for the sport.¹⁶⁴ Through being led by people with knowledge of basketball, the Americans helped modernize the game and promote greater integration of one regulated set of rules.¹⁶⁵ Knowledge of basketball's code and practicalities were disseminated and instilled during public engagements.¹⁶⁶ The standardizing practices of American students meant people no longer needed to find another activity and were less put off by the dysfunctional nature and image of basketball in Scotland.¹⁶⁷

Increased Media Exposure

By the early-mid-1930s, print media more regularly published articles about basketball, particularly relating to university teams. These included, but were not limited to: *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, *Dundee Courier*, *Evening Telegraph*, *Edinburgh Evening*

News, *St. Andrews Citizen* and *The Scotsman*. Insights gleaned from the British Newspaper Archive reveal that prior to WWI, basketball columns published annually across Scotland were in single figures and only sustainably increased in the late 1920s. This coincides with the increased presence of American students and the emergence of basketball in Scottish universities. Whereas during the 1930s, the number of basketball articles rose from low double figures to low three figures by 1939. Depending on the individual article's context and newspaper's size, reports were spread across different pages, albeit predominantly located centrally in sport sections, typically found in the middle or at the end of newspapers.¹⁶⁸ This is reflected in the higher page numbers of the newspaper articles used to construct this research that reinforces this positioning. When developing newspapers, columns are strategically placed whereby a central space increases readership and readability through more convenient positioning and the margins obscuring less information.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, by publishing extracts within certain categories, this targets specific groups such as the sport section appealing to sport enthusiasts.¹⁷⁰ The increased coverage and focus on university basketball reflects a growing interest in the game and that editors and journalists wanted the sport to receive attention. Contemporarily, newspapers only published sports sustaining impetus and which elevated company profits.¹⁷¹ Additionally, journalists were rarely dispassionate observers with many affiliated in some capacity and articles reflected this relationship through built-in bias.¹⁷² Overall, press coverage was crucial as it constructed public opinion, which either undermined or enabled the development of sport.¹⁷³ The improved media attention helped set the foundations for the broader national efforts in the late 1930s to grow basketball through radio broadcasts and distributing books *en masse*.¹⁷⁴

Raising Awareness

Through exhibitions, the students helped raise awareness of basketball in Scotland. The broadest reaching display involved students from the University of Edinburgh partaking in basketball matches against an English side comprising Americans with stateside reputations at the Highland and Agricultural Society's 108th Show at Saughton Mains, Edinburgh, in 1939.¹⁷⁵ Two games were played across two days in June as the main event in the society's largest arena.¹⁷⁶ With the overall exhibition attracting over 100,000 people and knowledge of the show being published in print media country-wide, these students helped deliver basketball to one of the largest ever recorded national basketball audiences.¹⁷⁷ These performances led to journalists labelling basketball as the fastest game on grass and being publicized as an exciting game to watch.¹⁷⁸ The American influence enticed large crowds to watch basketball matches, which were only available in newsreels or feature films at the cinema.¹⁷⁹ The addition of an American commentator who explained the intricacies before, during and after the game also helped inform knowledge bases and gather interest.¹⁸⁰ These experiences led to spectators during and post-matches seeking interpretations from American observers or the players themselves, and journalists reviewing the games by writing feature articles promoting the sport.¹⁸¹ Americans played a key role in explaining and growing American pastimes overseas, particularly in Scotland, leading to a greater

appreciation and understanding among these new groups.¹⁸² The student's performances were an effective means of spreading advertency around basketball nationwide as the event resultantly drew public and media attention.¹⁸³

Growing Participation

Through working alongside the National Fitness Council and YMCA to institutionalize and organize basketball, university teams were recruited to help grow participation.¹⁸⁴ Throughout the summer of 1939, the University of Edinburgh basketball teams' underwent multiple demonstrations throughout the city with one exhibition played afore 750 people at Saughton Park.¹⁸⁵ By showcasing basketball as an appealing and exciting sport, the university team's role was to entice young males struggling to access recreational activities and retain physical fitness and health into playing in public spaces.¹⁸⁶ From May–July, more than 7500 people attended these demonstrations.¹⁸⁷ During the process, 150–200 new participants started attending the twice-weekly sessions at various locations across Edinburgh and the results of a national survey reported that a further 300–400 people were now playing basketball regularly.¹⁸⁸ While participatory rates were low, all sports in Scotland struggled due to the popularity of association football, which during basketball's infancy had over 560 clubs.¹⁸⁹ Although, the average attendances of the demonstrations rivalled the lower rated semi-professional and professional association football teams such as East Stirling and Falkirk which attracted crowds between 200–3000.¹⁹⁰ Similarly to other sports, spectatorship and participation was prompted based on the player's prowess, status of the clubs and size of the catchment areas.¹⁹¹ While the National Fitness Council spearheaded the organized movement to popularize basketball, their successfulness depended on the university team's involvement which determined the extent of society's engagement. Through the student's efforts, the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* wrote that 'enthusiasm for basketball has reached fever pitch'.¹⁹² Such statements reflected the students value to the broader efforts to develop Scottish basketball.

Expanding Opportunities

Through playing basketball in Scottish universities, this led to more extensive participatory basketball opportunities for society. By the late 1930s, basketball existed within most higher learning institutions including Robert Gordon of Aberdeen, the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, and Jordanhill College of Physical Education in Glasgow.¹⁹³ Alongside new higher education ecosystems, through recognizing the lack of opportunities for continued involvement post-graduation, this motivated some former students to establish new teams in different locations nationwide.¹⁹⁴ This provided a basis for long-term participation and increased competition through Scottish basketball now having more clubs.¹⁹⁵ The creation of community teams' post-graduation reflects the wider process of Americanization that spread through the university ecosystem and into society. Americans transferred their cultural components to Scotland and by interacting with locals, it later survived and remained through the host community who maintained these practices.¹⁹⁶ It was also further developed by Americans who remained or newly immigrated and settled.¹⁹⁷ Whereas increases in former pupil

clubs helped create life-long affinities to Scottish universities whilst strengthening the schools' identity and image through expanding the university's boundaries alongside their influence on life after education.¹⁹⁸ By operating under the affiliated institution's name, this enabled access to facilities and resources.¹⁹⁹ Playing basketball in higher education environments led to further developments for Scottish basketball through the university ecosystem generating interest and motivating graduates to establish greater opportunities for more people and enable long-term participation.²⁰⁰

Women's Basketball

The student impact was not entirely positive. One overarching issue that emerged from the narrative entails limited information regarding women playing basketball in higher education institutions. While the Keep Fit classes offered opportunities for women to participate informally, the clubs were only for men.²⁰¹ No conscious effort was made by males to include women or to grow the game for the university's female students. This coincides with insights from the Scottish university's basic athletic framework, which was established in the 1890s.²⁰² When women joined the sporting ecosystem, they entered a male-dominated landscape and were left to assume responsibility for organizing their own sporting affairs.²⁰³ For example, a Women's Athletic Club existed at the University of Edinburgh, but they had to find their own grounds.²⁰⁴ Thus, a male-dominated games tradition existed in Scottish universities, which marginalized women and had minimal direct co-operation unless it served to benefit men.²⁰⁵ This was reflected at the University of St. Andrews where out of the 232 students participating in sport, less than ten percent were female with only 20 women engaging.²⁰⁶ Despite the unequal opportunities and unlike their male counterparts, women actively helped support male sport teams and at events through providing hospitality.²⁰⁷ The female sporting experiences in Scottish institutions comprised similarities to American colleges. In both environments, participants endured hostilities and were somewhat excluded by males who upheld the contemporary gender ideologies and perceptions of femininity that did not correlate with the masculinity men attached to sport.²⁰⁸ Similarly to America and other Scottish sports, basketball for women was not developed in equilibrium with the men's game.

Evaluating the Student Impact on Basketball in Scotland

From 1929–39, American students studying at Scottish universities played a key role in transforming Scottish basketball. Given the required funding, knowledge, resources and training to develop a marginalized game, alongside the confinements students faced from educational and career development commitments allied to the general underdeveloped nature of Scottish basketball, their contribution was impactful. Based on the evidence provided, the impetus to develop basketball in Scotland arguably required support from protagonists hailing from origins where the sport was popular. The American students helped convert basketball from a recreational and social activity to a competitive sport. Furthermore, the university system provided the optimal platform, foundations and infrastructure to enable the growth of the game. These institutions offered cost-effective and regular access to university owned facilities and

resources whilst funding equipment and memberships, helping make participation in basketball accessible, available and sustainable. This created a secure and stabilized environment for Scots to try basketball and learn from passionate people with the necessary knowledge to manifest the game. Additionally, the refined quantity of Scottish universities pinpointed the competition and kept the initial growth of the sport manageable. Overall, the students' efforts alongside the work of other active people and groups helped catalyze a chain effect leading to sustained participation in the sport. In the process, they established a legacy for basketball within the Scottish universities and broader Scottish basketball community which remains today. Through the student's developments, they introduced the basic framework for the Scottish basketball system, which was established post-WWII.

While the landscape of and system around the Scottish universities was beneficial, some drawbacks existed. Although funding and support was offered, university sport depended on volunteerism to function, meaning students assumed various roles from coaches to secretaries. However, given the reduced investment and marginalization of basketball, this was arguably to the sport's benefit, especially when undertaken by those with the necessary knowledge. While helpful, the game only received periodic exposure as it was not played year-round, only during semester time which varied depending on different university calendars. Despite the university students incepting the first sustainable annual and national basketball league in Scotland, this was an exclusive competition that did not incorporate teams from broader society. This subsequently capped the overall growth of the sport due to the limited number of contemporary higher education institutions in Scotland, hence why some clubs entered British competitions. Furthermore, the opportunity to play basketball was only available to enrolled students whereby, upon graduating, they left the system. Unless clubs or individual personnel established multiple teams for current and former pupils, membership fluctuated annually whilst the sport overall experienced mass drop-out rates. Lastly, due to the exclusion of women or lack of support for women, it can be stated that basketball reinforced the male-dominated sporting hierarchy which concurrently existed in Scottish and university sport and contributed to the contemporary societal gender inequalities.

While American students helped transform the sport, this must be understood within the contemporary context. When compared to pre-established and more popular sports such as association football, golf and rugby, basketball remained marginal, secondary to these traditional pastimes as it was still not subject to widespread participation. However, the American students did popularize basketball within select pockets and demographics throughout Scotland, particularly within larger cities such as Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow. They also developed the sport significantly within the university system. However, it remained secondary to education and working towards employment after graduation.²⁰⁹ Furthermore, the transformation of basketball existed within a larger process where diverse aspects of American popular culture simultaneously washed over Scottish society during the 1930s. Additionally, the efforts of the university students contributed to the collective ongoing development within society and was subsequently complimented by other protagonists such as the armed forces. In some instances, the role of these alternative institutions and organizations, particularly the British Government and National Fitness Council,

enabled the efforts of the students through providing the necessary legislation, openings and platforms to catalyze transformation and impact society. Although, the importance of the students cannot be underestimated because these different groups required each other to achieve their individual and unilateral objectives. Subsequently, the students fulfilled a key role within state and council initiatives as no other experienced or reputable basketball teams existed to do so. These collective efforts set crucial foundations to later establish basketball in Scotland. Given Scottish basketball had made limited progress prior to American students arriving in terms of infrastructure, knowledge, opportunities and participation levels, the progress can be deemed considerable.

In the case of Scotland, the university basketball context retains similarities with other countries where higher education institutions were internationally renowned and comprised diverse student cohorts, such as the University of Cambridge and University of Oxford in England. While diverging factors have been outlined, the research does not provide a fully adequate framework to understand the transformation of basketball, but also notions around the modernization of the sport more generally. Additionally, basketball's relationship with the wider national, international and sporting ecosystem led to the growth of the game. There are potentially more influences impacting upon the development of basketball along with a more extensive narrative connected to the American students, especially within other universities throughout Britain and worldwide. Furthermore, the broader influence of American and Scottish culture and society upon the sport during this period alongside its early protagonists has only been briefly unearthed and requires further exploration. This can also be said for the concurrent internationalization and institutionalization of basketball whereby the progress of the game in Scotland was a small part of the ongoing global movement towards establishing the sport worldwide. Further research is key to helping distinguish each internal actor's contribution from other demographics and organizations, particularly the Armed Forces and National Fitness Council, which were also active. It also assists with assessing the extent of external international non-sporting and sporting influences such as the formation of FIBA or Americanization of British-Scottish culture and society.

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Notes on Contributor

Ross Walker is a Lecturer in Sport Management at the University of Stirling, formerly a Lecturer in Sport Development at the University of the West of Scotland and a Global Fellow at the Academy of Sport, The University of Edinburgh.

ORCID

Ross Walker  <http://orcid.org/0009-0000-0495-4934>