For much of the 19th and 20th centuries, the majority of women’s athletic contests took place within colleges and universities, rather than between them. Perhaps it is for this reason that documentation of collegiate sport has traditionally accorded limited attention to women’s collegiate sport, giving the impression that it was nonexistent (Gerber, Felshin, Berlin, & Wyrick, 1974). One consequence of this practice has been the misconception that women’s competitive sport emerged in U.S. colleges and universities only after the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. We hope to rectify this false impression, particularly with respect to the women’s sport program at Bowling Green State University.

The Bowling Green Legacy
BGSU was established in 1910 and opened its doors to students in 1914. Most of these students were women, and they began to compete in organized sports almost immediately. Two literary clubs, the Wilsonian Society and the Emerson Society, were established in 1914. Soon after, both societies formed women’s basketball teams, and highly competitive games between the two were scheduled during the year. Following these early athletic endeavors, hundreds of BGSU women competed in sports such as archery, softball, baseball, golf, tennis, field hockey, volleyball, fencing, basketball, soccer, bowling, gymnastics, track and field, lacrosse, swimming and diving, and synchronized swimming. These athletes, in concert with the coaches and administrators who led them, established and sustained a strong women’s athletic presence at BGSU, one on which current athletics opportunities for women are built. These pre-Title IX athletes, coaches, and administrators were, in every sense of the term, “forward Falcons.”

Although the early BGSU women’s athletics teams were characterized as “clubs,” by the 1960s most of them clearly had become varsity intercollegiate teams. They represented BGSU in competitions with teams from other universities, their coaches were full-time employees of BGSU, they practiced on a regular basis, they were administered through an official university unit, and media reports of their activities referred to them as “varsity” and “intercollegiate” teams. The obvious conclusion, therefore, is that although Title IX did create numerous new opportunities for the women of BGSU, the foundation had been laid long before the law was enacted.

In the years following the passage of Title IX, BGSU female athletes began to receive a greater degree of recognition and respect. Along with this post-Title IX validation of women as bona fide intercollegiate competitors, however, an institutional memory loss also occurred. Forgotten were the hundreds of women who had competed...
prior to the implementation of Title IX. Forgotten were the many coaches, who had volunteered to coach and officiate and had spent countless unpaid hours teaching skills and strategy, setting up fields, holding practices, and scheduling competitions so that BGSU women who wanted to compete were given opportunities to do so. Forgotten also were the administrators who organized the program, oversaw policies and, in later years, meted out meager finances for the teams. These forgotten athletes, coaches, and administrators had been forward in their thinking and forward in their actions, overcoming many obstacles to sustain and advance athletics programs for BGSU women.

To their surprise and delight, well-deserved recognition was given to these forward Falcons on February 4, 2005. At this time, the BGSU Department of Athletics, with the assistance of a committee of former coaches, acknowledged BGSU’s pre-Title IX women athletes at a celebration aptly titled, *The Leadership Years.*

In the presence of over 500 friends and family members as well as university faculty, staff, administrators, and attendees at an academic conference being held at BG, more than 200 Falcon alumnae received their long-overdue varsity letters. Special recognition was also given to their coaches and administrators, without whom they would not have been able to compete.

**Purpose and Organization**

The purpose of this book is to document and preserve the history and accomplishments of the BGSU athletes, coaches, and administrators whose vision made current BGSU women’s athletics programs possible. It is intended to celebrate the past, not to serve as a record book.

The book encompasses activities that occurred between 1914 and 1982, the years during which most BGSU women’s sports teams were coached by female physical educators, and
the program was administered according to standards recommended by organizations composed primarily of women. In 1982, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), a governing body for men’s intercollegiate sport, elected to include Division I women’s programs under their purview. This action ultimately led to the demise of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), the national governing body for women’s intercollegiate sport. Since then, BGSU women’s athletics accomplishments have been well-documented; consequently, we did not include them in this book.

We begin with a chapter that provides an overview of women’s collegiate sport in the 20th century, nationally as well as at BGSU. The organization of this chapter is based on the structure provided by Uriel Simri (1983). Chapters 2 through 14 briefly describe specific BGSU teams that enjoyed varsity status at any time between 1914 and 1982. Chapter 15 highlights legacies of the forward Falcons in the form of named spaces and awards as well as some of the numerous accomplishments of the coaches, athletes, and administrators of the women’s program. Chapter 16 incorporates poignant memories and reflections of numerous individuals who participated during the time periods covered in the book. Finally, the Epilogue presents images from the 2005 Leadership Years Celebration and the Title IX conference. Throughout all of the chapters are comments and reminiscences from athletes, coaches, officials, and administrators, as well as many photographs and clippings, thus providing a narrative and visual history of women’s athletics at Bowling Green State University from 1914 through 1982.

Forward Falcons reveals that, without question, countless college women have always wanted to compete in sport. During the time periods covered in the book, some women’s desire to compete was so strong that they were willing to challenge prevailing social norms to do so. The idea that women of previous decades were not interested in sport is a myth that the stories in this book happily and undeniably debunk. We are hopeful that current and future generations will learn from these stories and will gain renewed respect for the pioneers who paved the way for the extraordinary intercollegiate athletics opportunities enjoyed by contemporary female athletes.

We are hopeful that the information in the book is accurate. If, however, you find errors of omission or commission, please bring them to the attention of Steve Charter, University Archivist (scharte@bgsu.edu), who will take your suggestions under advisement. We will keep all suggestions and accompanying documentation on file with a copy of Forward Falcons in the BGSU Center for Archival Collections for use by researchers.

And now, we go forward, Falcons...