

# In 1911, female sports fans were seen but not heard

"Girls should be quite as enthusiastic over college athletics as boys, and it is often quite impossible to restrain excited shrieks . . ." *Bloomington Weekly Courier*, Oct. 13, 1911.

Back in the woman's-place-is-in-the-home days, certain standards of behavior were expected of females, including restraint at athletic contests. The suggestion that females should sit quietly in the stands while the team they favor is struggling on the field seems ridiculous to us today.

Not so in 1911. The *Bloomington Weekly Courier* took notice of the issue because it came up at the University of Minnesota and got into the national news. Naturally, the newspaper decided to take a look at what is happening on the subject at



## Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

Indiana University.

The *Courier* began by quoting the University of Minnesota dean of women. "Athletic enthusiasm, when properly conducted, is perfectly proper, but girls should be careful to keep their voices low, remembering that shrieks tend to distract rather than to assist."

What was the proper way for females to react to the fierce struggle on the field? "There are well-bred, womanly ways of showing enthu-

siasm. A girl can and should show her appreciation of what the man who represents her college is doing on the athletic field, but she should be careful to do it in a wholesome womanly way," said the dean.

Having stated what that dean said, the *Courier* proceeded to editorialize about IU girls in what looked like an ordinary news story.

Explaining that up to this time the IU women had tended to restrain themselves while sitting on the bleachers, the *Courier* noted, "... yell leaders (all male at that time) have found it difficult to get much response from a section where there were many girls."

Apparently, it was not lack of excitement on the part of the coeds. It was rather prompted by female con-

ditioning, which called for dignity and decorum. As the *Courier* put it, "This fact is not due to lack of enthusiasm on the part of the girls, however, but merely to the decree of custom, which seems to have placed its ban on girls cheering at athletic events."

The editor of the newspaper may have taken a quick and rather unscientific poll of female opinion, because he wrote that, "In Indiana University, as everywhere else, girls take both sides of the question, but the majority seems to be with those who would enjoy the *privilege* of expressing their enthusiasm."

The *Courier* pointed out to its readers that females take an active interest in athletics while in high school and find it hard to restrain themselves at the games when they

get to college. "Besides, they cannot get so interested in a game or feel so inspired over it if they have to sit passively by, saying nothing."

Within limits, the *Courier* endorsed female cheering at athletic events. The "permission" was couched in these words, "It should not be considered unwomanly for a girl to show her interest in an athletic contest by the proper kind of cheering, and while such expressions of enthusiasm would be entirely out of place at other times, they are quite in place at times of excitement on the track or gridiron."

The solution, according to the newspaper was "an organized body of girls who will join in the college songs and yells at athletic functions just as the boys do."