

Ask Geoff

By Geoff Williams, University at Albany Archivist

After publication of my last column, Doug Nielson '53 wrote to say he was sure soccer started at the New York State College for Teachers in 1949. I thought the soccer program began in the early 1950s, but he is correct.

Doug's inquiry, and the University's 10th-year observance of NCAA Division I competition this fall, got me thinking about the history of UAlbany athletics. A little research uncovered some interesting facts, as you'll see in the timeline, which also offers some collegiate athletics "firsts" from other schools, as well as a few historical highlights from our University's first 62 years.

Athletics evolved slowly from the time of UAlbany's founding as the New York State Normal School in 1844 until its designation as the State Normal College nearly 50 years later. But that was par for the course: Few schools or colleges had sports programs until the late 19th century.

This installment of "Ask Geoff" covers the period when our institution was a two-year school. I'll include soccer in my next column, which will trace University athletic programs from 1907 on. Meantime, enjoy this look back at the beginnings of UAlbany athletics, and of collegiate sports, in general.

Timeline: Normal School/College

1844: The New York State Normal School is founded at 115-21 State Street in Albany, a temporary building that lacks athletic facilities. Its 1849 move to a "permanent" site at Lodge and Howard streets does nothing to rectify the situation.

1859: Amherst and Williams colleges compete in baseball, the oldest intercollegiate sport.

1869: Depending upon your definition of the sport, the first intercollegiate football game pits Rutgers College (now Rutgers University) against the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), in a more rugby-style match ... or

1885: The school's relocation to Willett Street – which also has no gym – allows students to use Washington Park athletic facilities and paves the way for a school athletic program.

1858-62: Normal School students briefly participate in lunchtime calisthenics. After the start of the Civil War, faculty members Rodney G. Kimball and Albert N. Husted lead male students in military drill. Both practices are abandoned when the men and their faculty leaders depart for Union Army service with the Normal School Company.



1874: ... Harvard against McGill, in a game more closely resembling football as we know it.

1890: The Normal School becomes the State Normal College. Despite the name change, the college maintains a two-year curriculum and is really a "semi-graduate" school of education.

Physical Culture is now a curriculum requirement at the college.

Just before the Civil War, Normal School students engaged in midday calisthenics, as this 1858 class schedule notes.

12.40 to 1.15.....	Sub-Juniors, No. 2, Arithmetic,.....	Mr. Husted.
	Calisthenics and Sub-Lectures.	
	Seniors, Chemistry,.....	Prof. Orton.
	Sub-Seniors, No. 1, Drawing,.....	Miss Ostrom.
	Sub-Seniors, No. 2, Analysis,.....	Prof. Jewell.
1.15 to 1.55.....	Juniors, No. 1, Algebra,.....	Prof. Plympton.

Below: The Normal School moved to Willett Street in Albany in 1885.

Right: An early State baseball team was pictured in the 1900 *Neon*, the Normal College's first yearbook.



Athletics, 1844-1906

1893: Charles Kilpatrick, a student at the practice-teaching high school (later the Milne School) establishes himself as the college's first star athlete, outdistancing 32 competitors from other schools in a mile-long footrace.

1898: State begins intercollegiate competition, playing Oneonta Normal in baseball games May 21 and May 30 in Oneonta. In both contests, Oneonta pulls ahead in the ninth inning to post victories of 7-6 and 5-3, respectively. (Information from *The Oneontan*, June-July 1898)

1905: The New York State Regents approve the college's transition to a four-year liberal-arts institution that will educate high-school teachers.



1897: Normal College boasts three new sports: baseball, and club sports bicycling and tennis.

In October, students create an Athletic Association committed to creating a "Winning ball team." Further mention of the association, however, disappears until 1909.

Castleton-on-Hudson (N.Y.) defeats Normal College 5-2 in the college's first baseball game. An unnamed *State College Echo* reporter attributes the loss to poor coaching. The student newspaper blames poor sportsmanship by the Castleton team and the umpire after a June 5 rematch brings State another loss.

1904: Student and faculty donations create a gymnasium – for use by both men and women – at 100 Willett Street, adjacent to the college.

1906: The main school building is destroyed by fire in January. Until September, classes will be held in temporary quarters, leaving no space for extracurricular activities, such as athletics.

To submit a question for "Ask Geoff," e-mail gwilliams@uamail.albany.edu.