In my last column, we covered athletics from the University at Albany’s founding as the New York State Normal School to 1906. This installment will cover the years 1907-66 – a time when the school evolved first into a college, and eventually into the University at Albany, one of four State University of New York university centers.

As the institution grew and changed, so did its athletics programs. In 1909, State opened its new campus, which we now call the downtown campus and which included basement space for a gymnasium. While basketball could be practiced there, however, the narrow space and the close placement of supporting columns ruled out competitive play. In 1927, NYSCT President Abram Brubacher complained to then-Gov. Alfred E. Smith that the columns for the planned Page Hall gymnasium were too close to the floor. According to College of the Empire State (French and French, 1944), Smith “pounded on

1912: The first letters are awarded to the women’s junior and senior basketball teams.

Intercollegiate baseball, which appears to have disappeared after 1900, makes a comeback, with opponent RPI posting a 14-10 victory over State. Despite the loss, baseball would become a mainstay of the men’s intercollegiate athletics program at State for the next 60 years.

1914: State Normal College becomes the New York State College for Teachers (NYSCT).

1916: Football is played for the first time as an intermural sport, with the Upperclassmen posting a 20-0 win over the Freshmen.

1924: The women’s varsity basketball team plays its first two intercollegiate games, losing the first to Russell Sage but defeating Sage 45-32 in a rematch.

1909: The men’s varsity basketball team plays its first intercollegiate games, competing against Albany Medical College, Union College and two local high schools.

Physical Education is added to the curriculum. Professor Fanny A. Dunsford, A.B., heads the Department of Physical Training.

An Athletic Association is formed to promote all sports, but principally “basket ball.”

Coach Joe Garcia (center) is pictured with the 1952-53 Wrestling Club.
his desk and declared that the college would take the gymnasium with posts, or not … at all.”
Whether or not the incident actually occurred that way, it became a legend around campus.

To a great extent, facilities determined the numbers and types of sports played. But other factors, such as a 1930s change to admission standards to ensure that at least one-third of the student body would be male and the post-World War II influx of former GIs, also had an impact. World affairs even played a role. For instance, competition in intermural football and hockey, begun in 1916 and 1917, respectively, was discontinued during World War I. Both sports were later revived, but hockey was dropped in 1921. Football returned as an intercollegiate sport in 1922; played its final season in 1924; returned in the 1940s on an intermural basis; and was reintroduced as a club sport in 1970.

Here’s a look back at the 20th-century evolution of sports and athletics at UAlbany’s predecessor institutions.

1932: The Girls’/Women’s Athletic Association acquires its own lodge, Camp Johnston in Cambridge, N.Y. The association will own the lodge until 1965.

1949: NYSCT’s intercollegiate athletic teams, known as Albany State or the Pedagogues, adopt the “Pedswin” (or “Pedguin”) – designed by Paul Kirsch ’51 – as their mascot.

1951: In March, a wrestling team coached by Joseph (Joe) Garcia defeats Albany Business College, 5-1. Garcia goes on to head extremely successful wrestling and soccer programs.

1962: NYSCT becomes the State University of New York at Albany, one of four SUNY university centers.

1966: SUNYA’s relocation to the uptown campus in western Albany provides additional space for athletic facilities, facilitating the expansion of sports and recreational programs.

1945-49: Several sports, including women’s swimming and fencing, men’s softball and golf, and bowling, are introduced. Most of the women’s outdoor games are played on Alumni Field, between Pierce and Sage halls. NYSCT expands its sports facilities in 1945 with the acquisition of 10 acres of St. Mary’s Park. The soccer team, formed in 1949, practices there; later, tennis courts will be built at the site. In 1966, the land is sold back to the city for construction of Albany High School.

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