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## A Supplementary Sport? Towards a Historical Analysis of the Development of Badminton in New Zealand, c. 1870–1939

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### ABSTRACT

Although badminton has been played in New Zealand for approximately 150 years it has received only minimal attention in scholarly discussions of sport. This paper evaluates the historical development of badminton in New Zealand between 1870 and 1939. It argues that from the last quarter of the nineteenth century badminton was initially played alongside games such as croquet and tennis in mostly private venues as a form of upper-class recreation. It then gained a wider appeal primarily as a winter sport that could be played by tennis players during the off-season. During the interwar period it was promoted as a suitable form of recreation for women because it was non-contact and believed to be not overly strenuous. Although its construction as a useful winter sport for tennis players and a suitable game for women helped badminton achieve a position as a niche sport, such characterizations hindered its further development because it was seen as a supplementary sport to tennis, the then dominant racket sport in New Zealand. Moreover, in comparison to its contemporary racket sports badminton was often criticized as an inferior game. Accordingly, it occupied a somewhat ambiguous place in New Zealand's sporting hierarchy.

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Investigating ‘minor’ sports, such as badminton, offers valuable insights into both the development of those codes and the dominant sporting culture. By investigating marginalized activities, the processes by which mainstream sports attain and maintain their position can be better understood. As will be discussed, by virtue of its categorization as one form of racket sport, evaluating the historical development of badminton offers a window into how sporting hierarchies were constructed in New Zealand. Badminton has a long history in New Zealand and is also significant as a sport played by both men and women from the outset. To date, however, possibly because of its status as a minor sport, it has received minimal scholarly discussion. With tennis and croquet, it is acknowledged in *Women Together* as one of the earliest sporting activities in which

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women took part.<sup>1</sup> It is also fleetingly mentioned in *Sport and the New Zealanders: A History*, as an illustrative example of the diversification in sport in the two decades following World War Two.<sup>2</sup> There is a short one-page entry on badminton contained within a broader story on 'indoor sports' in *Te Ara, the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*.<sup>3</sup> The New Zealand Badminton Federation compiled a booklet for its fiftieth jubilee celebration in 1978 and Richard Vallance published a history of the game in New Zealand in 1979.<sup>4</sup> There have also been a number of club histories published.<sup>5</sup> Most of this literature focuses on the development of badminton after the 1930s. A 2009 report conducted by Paul Spoonley and Catherine Taiapa on 'Sport and Cultural Diversity' in Auckland includes some insightful analysis of badminton in the context of Asian participation in sport, but its focus was understandably contemporary rather than historical.<sup>6</sup> Although there are some sport and club-specific texts in New Zealand, these do not assess in detail the wider historical context within which badminton developed from its introduction to New Zealand during the 1870s until the country's entry into international competition in 1938. This was a transformative era in which sport in New Zealand changed from being primarily localized in nature in the 1870s to being administered by national sports organizations and being integrated into both the education system and international sporting networks by 1939.<sup>7</sup>

The sparse historical attention afforded badminton is in marked contrast to tennis and squash, both of which have been discussed in considerable detail in both specialist sporting histories and in scholarly discussions of sport.<sup>8</sup> As will be elaborated, this is in part attributable to these codes having a higher profile and in a historical sense, to tennis becoming the earliest of the racket sports to be organized at a national level.

While badminton was, and still is, considered a minor sport within New Zealand, the historical achievements of its exponents are considerable. In both 1960 and 1972, New Zealand's Uber Cup squad reached the semi-finals after beating Australia in the qualifying round. Moreover, New Zealand has participated in badminton at the Commonwealth Games since its introduction in 1966 and has secured two silver and nine bronze medals in the last 14 editions of the Games.<sup>9</sup> In 2005, New Zealand's mixed-doubles pair Daniel Shirley and Sara Runesten-Petersen, won bronze at the 2005 International Badminton Federation (IBF) World Championships, and they became the first, and to date the only, competitors from the Oceania Badminton Federation to have clinched a medal at the World Championship. New Zealand is also one of only 21 nations in the world to have won a medal at the World Championships.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is no overstatement that New Zealand is one of the foremost performers of the sport in the Oceania federation (which comprised 17 members in 2023).<sup>11</sup> In addition, New Zealand was among the nine member nations that founded the IBF in 1934, and in 1986, Ian Palmer was elected as the 14<sup>th</sup> president of the IBF. To date, Palmer is the first and only person from the Oceania federation to be elected IBF President.<sup>12</sup> Given the achievements noted above, it is interesting to consider why badminton took such a long time to become established as a competitive game in New Zealand. In this examination of its historical development, four principal explanations are advanced. First, prior to World War One, badminton was positioned primarily as a social activity. Second, when it was promoted as a competitive sport during the interwar period it was as a winter sport to be played in the off-season for tennis and there was also a wider pattern of presenting

the game as a supplementary sport to other activities. Third, the positioning of badminton as a supplementary sport placed it in at best a middling position within the wider sporting hierarchy. Finally, advocacy for badminton as a women's sport marginalized its appeal to a wider audience.

Although badminton is not widely discussed in the sporting histories of New Zealand, there were numerous references to it in contemporary newspapers. Therefore, newspaper publications digitized by Papers Past, a digital repository of New Zealand and Pacific newspapers, periodicals, letters, and selected government publications, are the principal source of information for this paper.<sup>13</sup>

### Development of Badminton in Its Modern Form

Badminton is derived from earlier games involving bats and shuttlecocks dating back at least hundreds of years. According to Viney and Grant, its immediate forerunner was the game of battledore and shuttlecock. This was a children's game involving a battledore – an implement to remove dirt from clothes – and a shuttlecock, reportedly so named 'because it reminded people of a weaver's shuttle travelling back and forth'.<sup>14</sup> References to 'battledore and shuttlecock', appeared in New Zealand newspapers from the 1850s, both as a metaphor for back and forth exchanges between political opponents, and, from 1855, as items for purchase.<sup>15</sup> It is generally agreed the birth of the modern form of badminton was in the 1860s.<sup>16</sup> The earliest recorded reference to badminton in a New Zealand newspaper is a brief article in Auckland's *Daily Southern Cross* in 1874 on a 'grand Badminton tournament at Lucknow' in which the winner of first-prize, 'the Hon. Miss Baring', was awarded a 'gold negligée'.<sup>17</sup> By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, badminton was actively promoted throughout the 'British World', a term commonly used in reference to Britain, the British Empire and North America.<sup>18</sup> The Badminton Association of England, established in 1893, 'embarked on a mission to promote the sport in other countries'.<sup>19</sup> It was seen as a particularly suitable game for women, along with croquet. A newspaper article reflecting on the progress of women in sport suggested that by the late nineteenth century, 'croquet and badminton were the only games considered at all ladylike' amongst the middle and upper classes.<sup>20</sup> Despite its status as a suitable game for respectable citizens, regular badminton competitions took longer to become established in New Zealand than other British colonies. The Auckland *Sun* commented in 1927 that whereas 'badminton has captured the fancy of sportsmen in other parts of the Empire', New Zealand 'is now the only Dominion where it is not extensively played'.<sup>21</sup> Badminton was introduced to Vancouver in the late 1890s, with its governing body established in 1921. The first national championships were held the same year in Montreal.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in South Africa, the earliest badminton association, the Western Province Badminton Association, was created in Cape Town in 1924.<sup>23</sup> Among the dominions, New Zealand was a relatively late adopter of badminton.

### Overview of the Development of Badminton in New Zealand

The development of badminton in New Zealand reflects its early history as a British colony. New Zealand was formally incorporated into the British Empire after the

signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) on February 6, 1840. In the period under review, New Zealand's population increased from approximately 100,000 in 1840 to about 1,500,000 in 1939 with the ethnic composition changing from predominantly Māori (the indigenous people of New Zealand) to predominantly European (people of European ancestry comprised c. 95% of New Zealand's population in 1939 and Maori 5%, with peoples from other ethnicities less than 1%).<sup>24</sup> With New Zealand actively promoted as a 'Britain of the South Seas', British games, such as badminton, were transplanted to New Zealand. The presence of British games in New Zealand was celebrated as proof that Anglo-Saxon culture and traditions could be successfully recreated in its colonies.<sup>25</sup> Although it is not known when exactly badminton was first played in New Zealand, an advertisement from Wellington for badminton equipment can be found in 1874 and the earliest reference to a game seems to be in Dunedin in the same year.<sup>26</sup> However, it was not until 1927 that the national association was formed. By comparison, the New Zealand Lawn Tennis Association was founded in 1886.<sup>27</sup> Previously, badminton was played primarily in the private homes of the middle and upper classes and, as will be discussed, these fixtures were essentially social in nature.<sup>28</sup> The earliest clubs were formed in the 1890s, but prior to World War One they were few and far between. The earliest reference to a badminton club appeared in 1893, when the Thorndon Badminton club was formed 'for the purpose of supplying healthful and legitimate recreation and amusement for the young of both sexes.'<sup>29</sup> Vallance suggests a badminton club was formed in Auckland in 1900 with games being played at St Mary's Hall in Parnell.<sup>30</sup> The next reference to a badminton club was in 1903 with the formation of a club at Eltham.<sup>31</sup> Another club, simply referred to as 'the Badminton Club' appears to have been formed in Wellington prior to 1913, but aside from the four aforementioned clubs, there are no other newspaper records of badminton clubs in New Zealand prior to 1914.<sup>32</sup> The sport gained impetus in the 1920s, commencing with the formation of clubs in Auckland in 1922, Napier in 1924, and Whanganui in 1925.<sup>33</sup> In 1927, the badminton clubs in Auckland, Whanganui and Napier combined to form the New Zealand Badminton Association, known today as Badminton New Zealand. In conjunction with the formation of the association, New Zealand also witnessed its first badminton national championship in Whanganui in the same year.<sup>34</sup> The event was open to both men and women, categories including men's and women's singles, men's and women's doubles and mixed doubles.<sup>35</sup> The following edition of the New Zealand badminton championships in Napier saw great success with around 160 entries received for the competition.<sup>36</sup> However, players were principally from three regions, Napier, Auckland and Whanganui. Auckland made a particularly successful appearance at the 1928 national championships, having its clubs represented in every final and winning the mixed doubles and men's singles.<sup>37</sup> By the 1930s club competitions were established in many urban centres and there were some interclub matches between localities (although there was no formalized national interclub competition at this time). It is difficult to state precisely why badminton gained momentum in the 1920s, although four general factors can be identified: the endeavours of dedicated enthusiasts; the emergence of motor transport; relatively favourable economic conditions, and a trend of diversification in New Zealand sport.<sup>38</sup> Complementing these general factors, 'muscular Christianity' played a

significant role with Reverend H.W. (Bunny) Austin and Archdeacon Creed-Meredith both from Whanganui influential in the formation of the game there and Reverend Fitzgerald forming the Avonside Club in Christchurch in 1929.<sup>39</sup> Both the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) were especially active in the promotion of badminton throughout New Zealand, one example being the introduction of badminton into the Waikato by Mr W. Eyre, a physical instructor to the Hamilton YMCA in 1930.<sup>40</sup> The YWCA also further expanded the sport by incorporating badminton, together with a range of other sports, into its activities.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the many interprovincial sporting competitions introduced among the members of YWCA, the first in 1936 where hockey, basketball, and badminton were played, further promoted the sport to a wider audience.<sup>42</sup> The support of Church leaders was particularly important as their endorsement gave both moral respectability to badminton and, at a practical level, access to Church halls as venues.<sup>43</sup> Unlike tennis, where the New Zealand Maori Lawn Tennis Association was founded in 1926, badminton does not seem to have been actively promoted among Māori communities.<sup>44</sup> There were, however, some prominent Māori players. T.D. Newton won the Auckland Badminton Championship in 1930 and the women's doubles at the national championships in 1932.<sup>45</sup> Badminton was also played at St Stephen's, an Auckland School established for Māori boys.<sup>46</sup>

Although in badminton's early years, Auckland, Whanganui and Napier were the only regions to host a club, the rapid emergence of new clubs occurred following the formation of the New Zealand Badminton Association and the successes of the national championships. Throughout the early development of badminton in New Zealand, many clubs were established with the help of immigrants. For example, badminton in Auckland 'was started seriously' by two very capable players, Eric Dart from Canada and his wife.<sup>47</sup> In addition, the formation of the New Zealand Badminton Association was proposed by prominent players overseas; some notable names include Reverend R. Creed Meredith who came to New Zealand in 1924 from the diocese of Birmingham, the 'prime mover' in the formation of the association as well as its first president.<sup>48</sup> By 1931 New Zealand reportedly had 50 badminton clubs and around 1400 players.<sup>49</sup> Finally, 1938 witnessed the inaugural playing of the Whyte Trophy, a badminton contest between New Zealand and Australia, so-named because of the award donated by Mr and Mrs D.O. Whyte (Mr D.O. Whyte was vice-president of the New Zealand Badminton Federation Management Committee).<sup>50</sup> The year 1939, Whyte asserted, marked 'the most important day in the history of New Zealand badminton' when the first New Zealand badminton team toured Australia. Their visit was endorsed by Australian-born Minister of Internal Affairs, W.E. Parry, who stated 'there is no better ambassador for peace than sport.'<sup>51</sup> Parry was a keen supporter of badminton, extolling it as a 'wonderful form of physical recreation and exercise.'<sup>52</sup> His enthusiasm may explain why badminton was being played in New Zealand's prisons and mental hospitals from the late 1930s, a development which may also have been stimulated by the 1937 Physical Welfare Act of which Parry was a key supporter.<sup>53</sup> However, despite the development and progression of badminton in the interwar period, in reality, it remained a minor sport. By the mid-1960s, there were approximately 10,000 badminton players, compared to 2000 in squash, 39,637 in tennis and 13,998 in table tennis.<sup>54</sup>

In order to explain why badminton remained a minor sport, it is useful to examine how the sport was represented in newspapers. Its name may have been a factor because the term 'badminton' was popularly associated with activities outside of the sport. From the widely read *The Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes Series* and *Badminton Magazine* to the festive horse racing event of the Badminton Hunt to the well-liked refreshing Badminton Cup drink at a private junction or gatherings, the word badminton had a number of meanings in the daily lives of New Zealanders.<sup>55</sup> The use of 'badminton' for the game was derived from the name of the Duke of Beaufort's principal country house in Gloucestershire (which is also where the Badminton Hunt took place).<sup>56</sup> This array of meanings may have confused a casual observer as to what the game actually was.<sup>57</sup> At a more prosaic level, tennis was linked to the key pathways of Imperial and New Zealand sport – provincial and international competitions were held much earlier than badminton, interprovincial competition having begun at least as early as 1883 and international competition from 1896.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, because it was not widely played in schools and until the 1920s there were very few clubs, badminton remained outside what Greg Ryan identifies as the pyramid of New Zealand sporting participation – the progression from school, to club, to provincial and, finally, national representation.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, prior to 1939, badminton was largely drawing from a pool of people already engaged in sport and therefore it needed to create a niche for itself. As indicated, four main trends influenced its development. Initially it was primarily seen as a social activity. When it was subsequently played at club and interprovincial level, it was generally characterized as a supplementary sport for off-season tennis players. Accordingly, it occupied an at best middling place in New Zealand's sporting hierarchy. Moreover, a perception that it was primarily a women's game further contributed towards its status as a niche sport.

### Badminton as a Social Activity

Badminton was first introduced to New Zealand, much like tennis and croquet, as a middle and upper-class social activity to form social networks and promote interactions between members of the opposite sex from similar class backgrounds.<sup>60</sup> This is a likely explanation for badminton rackets initially being sold alongside croquet equipment.<sup>61</sup> The earliest recorded badminton game in New Zealand was at a picnic at Portobello for employees of Dunedin manufacturing firm Sargood, Son and Ewen where it was noted that 'for the ladies a croquet ground was improvised' while those 'who preferred athletic efforts' enjoyed other activities such as quoits and badminton.<sup>62</sup> Another early description of badminton as a social activity appeared in 1878 in reference to croquet and badminton being played at a 'large and fashionable garden party' at Eliza Cowie's residence in Bishop's Court, Auckland.<sup>63</sup> The historic connections between badminton, royalty, and wealthier sections of society, have been noted in literature on the worldwide development of the game.<sup>64</sup> Reference to these connections in New Zealand newspapers, such as an article entitled 'How Royalties Amuse Themselves' in the *Bruce Herald* in which badminton was noted among the outdoor sports liked by the Queen of Holland, lent the game social capital in its formative stages.<sup>65</sup> In addition, an article in the *Otago Witness* included an excerpt from the

*Book of the Horse*. The article, entitled 'Hints to Lady Riders', specifically underlined six conditions as prerequisites to mastering the equestrian art and being in fair condition which included being 'able to dance all night' and play 'badminton without inordinate fatigue'.<sup>66</sup> The connection between badminton and upper-class recreation was especially evident in the society pages of the *New Zealand Graphic and Ladies Journal*, a periodical aimed at a refined middle and upper-class constituency.<sup>67</sup>

By the first decade of the twentieth century, more references appear that are related to badminton in middle-class contexts. It was promoted by church and community groups, possibly in the hope of forming social networks and promoting interactions between members of the opposite sex from similar class backgrounds. At a social event hosted by the Anglican Men's Society in Hamilton, for example, 'one of the features of the evening was a Badminton Court, kindly lent by Mr and Mrs D. Hay', in which both men and women competed.<sup>68</sup> Such social events even occurred in places where organized clubs were not established. The *King Country Chronicle* recorded that badminton 'has been played for years on Dr Will's green' in Te Kuiti, and those who had the opportunity to receive an invitation from Dr Will became 'experts in the game'.<sup>69</sup> Badminton equipment was among the items 'a strong men's committee' inherited at the Clifton Social Institute, located in rural Rangitikei, in 1920 for the purposes of providing winter entertainment to men and women of the region.<sup>70</sup> Courtesy of the generosity of Mr and Mrs A.G. Askin, the Presbyterian Women's Institute in Geraldine availed themselves of the grounds of 'Raukapuka' for a 1929 garden party at which badminton together with tennis and croquet added to the 'success and pleasure of the function'.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, badminton was regarded as one of the means by which people in the neighborhood were brought together.<sup>72</sup>

Many news stories portrayed badminton as a catalyst to finding a potential partner. Some stories had an exotic setting, which may have enhanced the appeal of the game in certain social circles. One story in the *Christchurch Star* related the luxurious life of a wealthy European lady in India. Reportedly, she began her day with a visit to the badminton courts, and with the newest fashions she was wearing, attracted 'plenty of candidates of the opposite sex eager to teach her badminton, and every one's racket is at her disposal'.<sup>73</sup> In an earlier article from 1880, badminton, along with tennis, was praised as a recreation that in England allowed 'innocent, unrestrained intercourse' between 'young men and maidens' thereby overcoming the 'stiffness and formality' of social settings.<sup>74</sup> Stories along the same lines but with a New Zealand focus also appeared. The *Christchurch Star*, possibly reflecting broader concerns about the social lives of young women in urban spaces, stated that lonely girls could join a badminton club and other clubs to both 'fill in her spare time pleasantly' and 'form new acquaintances and widen her social outlook'.<sup>75</sup> In a similar vein a later article in the *Auckland Star* suggested the key purpose of the game was 'to help lonely girls make friends', and the main advice given was to join a badminton club or other social clubs.<sup>76</sup> The author further provided her own experience stating that 'I belonged to a club of considerable size which regularly produced one engagement a year at least, either during the tennis or badminton seasons, and many of the young members getting engaged now are children of parents who met each other playing on the same courts'.<sup>77</sup> Therefore badminton, like tennis, was regarded as effective in fostering romantic relationships between suitably matched couples.

The status of badminton as a primarily social sport both helped and hindered its development. On one hand, it created a niche for it in the sporting sphere, albeit a constrained one, while on the other, it detracted from attempts to position it as a serious sporting code. Its reputation as a 'mild and occasionally flirtatious game' did not create a constituency for badminton among the sporting public.<sup>78</sup>

### Badminton as a Winter Sport

The positioning of badminton as a winter sport was another constraining influence on the game. Tennis's status as the leading racket sport meant it was viewed as a desirable summer recreation. Badminton, by contrast, was seen as a sport which could help tennis players retain their fitness over winter. It was introduced to New Zealand specifically as a winter sport, following the trend of many other countries that had already taken up the sport. Countries such as the United States,<sup>79</sup> Canada,<sup>80</sup> Denmark,<sup>81</sup> all saw the need of an indoor winter game, and badminton conveniently satisfied their demand. In terms of practicality, badminton was a suitable and affordable sport to play in wintertime. The *Franklin Times* argued that badminton is 'the sort of sport to circulate the blood and make one warm on cold winter evenings.'<sup>82</sup> That badminton could be played indoors enhanced its appeal as a winter sport and a number of newspaper articles noted it could be played wherever a local hall was available. The *Evening Post* reprinted an article from Melbourne newspaper the *Argus* in 1907, discussing suitable winter sports for women. Activities such as ice or roller skating and golf, were deemed 'too expensive for everyday exercise.'<sup>83</sup> By contrast, badminton, along with fencing and netball (then referred to as basketball) was presented as an accessible winter sport. It simply required a 'large room, such as the hall attached to many churches' and there were many such places available in New Zealand.<sup>84</sup> In Dunedin, for example, the *Otago Daily Times* recorded Mrs R.H. Bligh teaching badminton classes on Wednesday and Saturday at the Choral Hall, which had had a court marked out. Moreover, the article extolled the virtues of badminton as a game which could be learned in 'three to four lessons' and 'should present no difficulties to those who could play lawn tennis.'<sup>85</sup> The notion of badminton as an accessible sport was reinforced by reports of 'pop-up' venues, such as illustrations of a badminton court being put up on the roof of the Whitehall Theatre in London.<sup>86</sup> By virtue of its links to community organizations and their facilities, badminton was democratized to some degree in New Zealand.

In addition to its purported physical benefits, badminton also offered opportunities for spectatorship. Exhibition matches were often played in places where badminton was new to introduce the sport to the local population while at the same time providing entertainment for attendees. Even in places such as Auckland, where badminton was adequately established by the mid-1920s, exhibition matches would still be arranged at the start of the badminton season for the benefit of new members.<sup>87</sup> Exhibition matches would often receive large attendances, and many, after watching the matches, declared themselves to 'soon be an addition to the playing strength of the teams.'<sup>88</sup> Many such exhibition matches were followed by some form of light or savoury supper provided by 'the ladies.'<sup>89</sup> Therefore, in the gloomy months of winter

in New Zealand, badminton provided an entertaining, usually indoor, activity for players and spectators.

Similar to its characterization as a primarily social sport, the positioning of badminton as a winter sport had a constraining effect on the game. It created a space for the sport but also limited opportunities for potential expansion. Badminton was not widely played during summer as badminton clubs only opened during winter.<sup>90</sup> In addition, by virtue of being a winter game, the badminton season overlapped with rugby union, the national sport of New Zealand. This may well have hindered its potential to raise its profile because rugby union dominated the attention of the sporting public.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, many prominent badminton players stopped practicing during summer meaning that few progressed to an elite level.<sup>92</sup> In part this was attributable to the dominant position of tennis and illustrates another limiting factor in badminton's development, namely its media positioning as a 'supplementary' sport to other racket sports.

### **Badminton as a Supplementary Sport**

Although badminton was introduced to New Zealand as a distinct sport, it was quickly associated with tennis. Local newspapers described badminton as the 'sister game to tennis' in 1927 and 'the younger brother of lawn tennis' in 1931.<sup>93</sup> Though the rules, skills required, and strategies between the two sports differ, the resemblance of having to 'knock some object from one side of the net to the other'<sup>94</sup> allowed many to conclude that 'badminton is [virtually or just] a fine indoor tennis game.'<sup>95</sup> Such attitudes remained dominant in New Zealand during the timeline examined in this paper and, perhaps, even until today.

The earliest reference that connects badminton to tennis can be traced to an article in 1882 that alludes the fact that badminton was 'arranged as in lawn tennis' with reference to the using of a net.<sup>96</sup> It was some time, however, before badminton was reported as being useful to tennis players. In 1906 it was said that the game of badminton 'has at last found favour with a tennis club in Wellington.'<sup>97</sup> From then on, the link between badminton and tennis became widely reinforced, and as argued previously, became one of the two main promotional methods for badminton. Prominent tennis players such as Dorothea Lambert Chambers (seven-time Wimbledon Champion),<sup>98</sup> S.H. Smith (two-time Wimbledon champion),<sup>99</sup> A.L. Stedman (New Zealand and Auckland champion),<sup>100</sup> and many more were all quoted in newspaper articles promoting badminton. Furthermore, such promotional methods were used repeatedly by badminton clubs themselves. As a result, badminton's connection to, or dependence on, tennis grew rapidly.

The status of badminton as a 'supplementary' sport was based on the notion that badminton existed for the purpose of providing a complementary activity to tennis. An advertisement in 1929 perfectly summarized the reason for playing badminton. The advertisement stated: 'If you can't play tennis in winter ... you can still keep fit and in form, even though the tennis courts are under water. For those whose tennis is confined to the summer months – BADMINTON [original capitalization] is the ideal indoor game!'<sup>101</sup> Badminton was presented as a corrective to developing poor technique in tennis. Without ongoing practice in racket sports, tennis enthusiasts

argued, 'all the old bad habits come back, and that sparkling play seems lost forever'.<sup>102</sup> Maintaining physical condition and coordination over winter was a key motivation for many tennis players who played badminton. Therefore, it is no surprise that in the early establishment of badminton clubs, members were mostly from the tennis community. The notion that badminton was played during the winter and put aside in summer characterized its positioning as a 'supplementary' sport. Arguably, many tennis players, its main constituency, did not regard badminton as an individual code in its own right, but rather, a complementary game to be played in the wider process of advancing their tennis career.

The benefits of badminton to tennis players were well recognized in newspaper publications, and many discussions on badminton appeared under sections on tennis or lawn tennis. Tennis players considered badminton 'an excellent sport for keeping tennis players fit through the winter months' as well as a 'great help to the overhead work' [that is, playing overhead shots in tennis].<sup>103</sup> One newspaper report argued that because a tennis player had played badminton during the winter they ought to be in 'good fettle' for the coming championship.<sup>104</sup> However, contrary to the general agreement that playing badminton was beneficial for a tennis career, opposing views were projected as well. It was suggested that after playing badminton in the winter Miss M'Kane, the winner at Wimbledon in 1924, 'was not accustomed again to the use of the heavier tennis racquet' and thus failed to perform well at the 1925 edition of Wimbledon.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, one article speculated that the playing of badminton during the winter was 'fatal to tennis form' as the players' 'drives become less vigorous and the service balloony'.<sup>106</sup> What is apparent is that badminton was widely presented as an activity to maintain the physical wellbeing of a tennis player while marginally advancing their skill or technique in their regular play of tennis. Badminton was repeatedly portrayed as an activity that would 'keep one fit, both mentally and physically'.<sup>107</sup> Arguably, participation in badminton by many tennis players came not from their appreciation or enthusiasm for the sport itself, but rather its utility as an elective activity that benefited their wider tennis playing.

The notion that badminton was a supplementary sport was not limited to the tennis community. Other organized sports also praised badminton as being especially beneficial, and many regarded it as a 'good training for most games'.<sup>108</sup> One gymnastic instructor in New Zealand wrote: 'Everybody should realize the value of Badminton as a form of training for boxing, football and running; in fact, almost every sport can be improved by including Badminton in the preparation, for it calls for such complete co-ordination of brain and muscle'.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, while many acknowledged 'its own value as a sport', they continued to highlight it as a 'valuable form of training for other branches of sport'.<sup>110</sup> As a prominent instructor at one of the Dominion's largest technical schools put it: 'having taken part in every sport (with the exception of miniature golf), I have come to the conclusion that half an hour's solid badminton gives a quicker and better preparation than any other game I have played'.<sup>111</sup>

The positioning of badminton as a supplementary sport was also, in some instances, advanced by badminton clubs themselves. One club president by the name of Dr Clinch claimed, '[badminton] is a fine weather pastime and valuable especially for

lawn tennis players who are desirous of “keeping their eye in” during the off season.<sup>112</sup> To some degree, these historical perceptions have endured. The Badminton New Zealand Museum, located in Auckland Badminton Hall, opened in 2017. It included material on the history and development of badminton in New Zealand and donated material from three former New Zealand badminton champions. The headline of the article covering the opening of the museum, however, referred to ‘New Zealand’s first racket sports museum’, marginalizing its primary role as a repository for historic badminton items.<sup>113</sup>

### The Place of Badminton in a Hierarchy of Sport in New Zealand

In conjunction with tennis players regarding badminton as a supplementary sport, the notion that badminton occupied a low position in the hierarchical pyramid compared to other racket sports should be considered in the context of its development in New Zealand. Though some experts deemed badminton useful as a supplementary sport, others were much more critical. In an era obsessed with classification, the action of ranking different sports and games was a common practice in newspapers. One expression of this was discussion on the relative ‘strenuous levels’ of different racket sports in order to determine the superiority and inferiority of particular sports. For example, one article specifically included arguments that aim to ‘dispose the idea that Badminton is no more strenuous than ping-pong’,<sup>114</sup> while others asserted that ‘table tennis is the fastest and most strenuous.’<sup>115</sup> In addition, other articles also commented that badminton ‘is believed by some to be even more strenuous than outdoor tennis’<sup>116</sup> and likewise ‘much more strenuous than Rugby football.’<sup>117</sup> Such comparative analysis contributed to the fostering of a conceptual hierarchy of sport in New Zealand. Major sports, such as cricket and rugby, by virtue of being well established and widely endorsed by key opinion formers, were much less likely to be influenced by arguments about their place in the hierarchy than minor sports like badminton which needed positive publicity to promote their development.

Badminton enthusiasts, like many other sports enthusiasts, found themselves partaking in this wider movement of ranking sports. Mr P.B. Davidson, then president of the Manawatu Badminton Association, ranked badminton as the ‘third fastest of all games’ only falling short of hockey and lacrosse.<sup>118</sup> Another example was the repeated citing of comments made by Mr J.F. Devlin, a successful badminton player from Ireland who regularly toured New Zealand to promote badminton: ‘Mr. J.F. Devlin, the present all-England singles champion, considers Badminton more strenuous than any game he knows, and he plays tennis, golf, hockey, and football.’<sup>119</sup> This statement appeared in the *Evening Post*,<sup>120</sup> *Evening Star*,<sup>121</sup> and twice in the *Southland Times*.<sup>122</sup> Devlin continued to be widely quoted during the 1930s.<sup>123</sup> Statements of this nature suggest a conscious desire to demonstrate badminton was not a lesser a game than other racket sports.

Historical perceptions of badminton as a ‘childish’ activity, dating back to its derivation to the children’s game of battledore and shuttlecock, may have been another factor diminishing its standing in the New Zealand sporting hierarchy. One of the earliest articles referencing badminton in New Zealand, published in 1875,

characterized it as 'awfully childish'.<sup>124</sup> This notion persisted into the 1930s. A 1933 article on the growing popularity of badminton in Christchurch's *Press* recalled it was previously known as 'battledore and shuttlecock' and 'was once a favourite sport for children'.<sup>125</sup> It stated that only through the 'substitution of the name badminton' that 'adult dignity has been satisfied', and that the game had progressed to a stage where it could rightly be regarded as a sport for all ages.<sup>126</sup> Even advocates of the sport, such as Reverend Austin, referenced its historic development as a children's game and as 'a graceful game from grandmother's days', when introducing badminton to the public before proceeding to extol its virtues.<sup>127</sup> He went on to claim that the 'smartness of the pace leads to a far greater use of wiles and strategy in Badminton than in tennis' thereby asserting the superiority of badminton, but it is revealing that in doing so he felt the need to correct what he regarded as common misperceptions of the game.<sup>128</sup>

Many comparative references to badminton and tennis in newspapers positioned badminton in an inferior position to tennis, albeit with a qualified recognition of its utility. A 1931 article on the history of the game stated that although 'the game of badminton has had an immense growth within the last few years, and, being a fine game, ranks only just below lawn tennis'.<sup>129</sup> Introducing the game to Auckland readers in 1929, the *Sun* suggested that 'in reality, badminton is fundamentally a form of indoor tennis', before acknowledging the perception that because the shuttle was made of cork and goose quills it was 'beneath the attention of the red-blooded sportsman of 1929'.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, the playing of badminton by tennis players was often caused by restrictive weather conditions or other reasons. It was reported by the Christchurch *Star* that a group of tennis players who, due to the rainy spring season, had to cancel their tennis session in great disappointment, ended up playing badminton on their 'wet Saturdays'.<sup>131</sup> Such comments reinforced the notion of badminton as a second-choice racket sport, which would only be played when it was not possible to play tennis.

While many tennis players suggested badminton was best seen as a supplementary sport to tennis, some accounts were extremely critical. An individual writing under the name 'H.N.W.' in the *Manawatu Standard* in 1938 claimed that 'badminton is quite a good game which gives capital exercise, but it is not in the same class as squash' and in a later issue stated that 'I consider chess better than draughts, bridge than whist, poker than nap, and also squash than badminton'.<sup>132</sup> However, in his last contribution to the *Manawatu Standard*, he concluded by saying that 'If no better game is available, by all means they should play badminton', and that he can only wish that badminton players 'see the error of their ways' and take up other sports.<sup>133</sup> Comments such as these arguably reinforced the notion that badminton was a menial and lesser deserving sport.

Discussion over the place of badminton in New Zealand's sporting hierarchy had a mixed impact. On the one hand, it provided exposure and so potentially increased its popularity. On the other hand, critical accounts of the sport reinforced its lesser place in the New Zealand sporting hierarchy. Even advocates of badminton engaged in these discussions as a means of introducing their sport to the public and distinguishing it from other racket sports.

## Perceptions of Badminton as a Women's Sport

Badminton, like its fellow racket sports, tennis, squash and table tennis was played by both men and women in New Zealand from the outset. However, the participation of women in badminton, served in some cases to position it as primarily a women's sport, thereby limiting its broader appeal. Prior to 1939 sport in New Zealand was primarily a male domain to which women were partially admitted. Despite these constraints, the interwar period did see a significant expansion in the sporting opportunities available to women. Whereas hockey and tennis were the main sports for women prior to 1914, netball became the dominant women's team sport in New Zealand during the interwar period. It was widely endorsed by key figures in the educational and religious establishments as an ideal game for young women because it was non-contact and could be played in a limited space.<sup>134</sup> Much like netball and tennis, badminton was viewed as a suitable sport for women because it was non-contact and was represented as a game which could be played in a 'feminine' manner. The first reference of badminton as a women's sport in New Zealand can be traced as early as 1882 when Auckland's *Star* included an article from a 'Washington correspondent' stating that badminton 'is rather more of a ladies' game than tennis proper, as it makes less demand upon the muscles, but depends chiefly upon the agility of the players.'<sup>135</sup> Another early reference to badminton was an 1885 article in the *New Zealand Mail* which told the story of Madge who was considered the best tennis player of her age and was advised by her doctor to reduce regular play as she 'had overdone the business.'<sup>136</sup> Upon the doctor's suggestion to take up badminton as an alternative, which she regarded as 'stupid and cruel', Madge reflected 'How could he mention shuttlecocks in the same day with tennis balls!'<sup>137</sup> Here, the endorsement of badminton as a sport came with the aforementioned qualifiers that it was a supplementary sport to tennis.

The notion that badminton was primarily a women's sport persisted. A 1928 article discussing the uptake of the game in New Zealand noted 'to the man in the street it is "an old woman's game"', before stating those who played the game knew this was not so.<sup>138</sup> The *Alexandra Herald and Central Otago Gazette* stated in 1938 that even after several decades following the introduction of badminton to New Zealand, 'many people are still under the impression that Badminton is a modified form of lawn tennis, intended for the benefit of the women of an earlier generation.'<sup>139</sup> Moreover, many of the accounts of women playing badminton referred to prominent middle and upper class women, which may have given the impression it was primarily a game for the wealthier sections of society. Prominent women such as Lady D'Abernon,<sup>140</sup> the Queen of Holland,<sup>141</sup> Miss Daisy Kennedy,<sup>142</sup> and many more were cited in New Zealand newspapers as exponents of the game. Lady D'Abernon was both a nurse anaesthetist and British ambassador to Germany as well as a well-respected woman,<sup>143</sup> and Miss Daisy Kennedy was a well-known violinist who toured New Zealand in 1919 and 1920.<sup>144</sup>

During the interwar period, badminton became linked to then popular notions of female beauty in New Zealand, being praised for its allegedly slimming effect.<sup>145</sup> The *Otaki Mail* commended badminton as 'a particularly graceful game',<sup>146</sup> while the *New Zealand Herald* referred to it as the 'latest beauty cure'.<sup>147</sup> It was argued that

badminton was a means of keeping the body fit and crucial to the maintenance of a slim figure. The highlighting of its allegedly slimming effect perhaps suggests badminton may have been aimed at the middle and upper class women who were worried about their physique and had the time and means to exercise.

Nonetheless, following the expansion of badminton and local clubs, the participation of badminton by women grew extensively. Moreover, it is important to note that following the improvement of living conditions as a result of the improving New Zealand economy, especially during the inter-war period, women's participation in sport grew considerably.<sup>148</sup> By 1920, over 20 per cent of New Zealand women were in paid employment which gave them the means to pay for club memberships.<sup>149</sup> Articles referencing the health benefits of badminton to women reflected historic concerns regarding women's sport that 'vigorous exercise would damage their ability to have and raise children'.<sup>150</sup> Maintaining modesty and genteel behavior was still expected from women playing sport, even in the context of greater female participation in sport during the interwar period.<sup>151</sup>

In this context of increasing female participation in sport, badminton was favourably regarded as a game which promoted women's health while retaining their femininity. An article in the *Dunstan Times* published a variety of sports that allegedly, 'do not destroy feminine beauty', and named badminton as one of the best sports in this regard.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, the article concluded that women 'should not strive to rival men on the sports field but choose only those games which are compatible with their femininity'.<sup>153</sup> The *Sun* similarly argued that a feminine game like badminton, not played at excess, 'may retain our graceful figures, our fun, and our tempers!'.<sup>154</sup> Prominent British dietician Cecil Webb-Johnson's observation that 'there are many games and sports which do not destroy feminine beauty. Badminton is one of the best' was relayed to readers of the *Western Star*.<sup>155</sup> 'Every Lady's Journal' in the *Gisborne Times* cited prominent England cricketer Jack Hobbs' statement that badminton was an ideal sport for women sport because 'it is not exhausting, yet is just strenuous enough to be classed as an athletic game'.<sup>156</sup> Indeed, Hobbs went on to endorse the game as one of the few sports he believed it was suitable for married women to play stating 'the most searching test for a game for women is: "would you like your wife to play the game habitually?"' and in response to that question he believed 'badminton is one of the regretfully few that survive that test'.<sup>157</sup> The popular positioning of badminton as a women's sport both helped and hindered its development. On the one hand, it contributed towards the development of badminton as a niche sport. On the other hand, it arguably worked against the game developing a broad-based constituency.

During the interwar period in New Zealand, badminton progressed from a primarily private social activity to a nationally organized sport which selected its inaugural international representatives. The expansion of badminton was one part of a wider diversification of sport in New Zealand during that period but also reflected the determined efforts of local advocates and overseas exponents to promote the game. The support of churches and, to a lesser degree, the physical welfare initiatives of the First Labour Government also gave the sport social respectability, government endorsement and access to venues. Despite their efforts, however, the progress of badminton was limited. A significant factor here was its ambivalent relationship with

tennis, which was firmly established as the premier racket sport in New Zealand, both as a community game and in terms of provincial and international representative opportunities. Because it drew largely on tennis players as a constituency, badminton was played as a winter sport and consequently became characterized as a supplementary sport to tennis. Moreover, as the game became established it was increasingly compared to other racket sports including tennis and squash which had the effect of placing it as one sport within a wider sporting hierarchy in New Zealand. Finally, its positioning as a women's sport created further marginalization because netball became firmly established as the premier women's winter sport during the interwar period and the perception of badminton as a women's sport may also have limited its appeal to men.

## Notes

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### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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