



Dear Friend,

With the Olympics now underway, I am inspired to see more than 5,000 female athletes coming together to show commitment to reaching their highest levels of personal potential, something we want for all women. This year's Games are poised to be the most women-centered Games in history.

2020 ONE



Did you know that women competed for the first time at the 1900 Games in Paris, France? Of a total of 997 athletes, 22 women (2.2%) competed in five sports: tennis, sailing, croquet, equestrianism and golf. At the 2016 Games in Rio, 45% of the participants were women. According to the International Olympic Committee, women will now make up 48.8% of the total field of 2020 Olympians.

These athletes serve as a reminder of our power to overcome hurdles that might stand in our path. Through our international service projects, such as [Let Us Learn Madagascar](#) and [Ending Child Marriage](#), Zonta is dedicated to providing girls with opportunities to dodge these challenges. We have learned from these projects the importance of "play" and how being active can benefit both the physical and mental health of girls.

As we tune in for the excitement of this year's Olympics, we know personally from our experience at the 2018 Yokohama Convention that all athletes will be greeted with some of the best hospitality from the people of Japan. With the spirit of Zonta, and the Games, let us join together in enabling women and girls to pursue their dreams, no matter the obstacles that might lie ahead.

Warm regards,

Sharon Langenbeck, Ph.D.  
President



P.S. You will find me watching the women's synchronized swimming. What's your sport of choice?

Firsts for  
Women



In honor of the Olympics, we proudly highlight a few of the historical "firsts" women athletes have made in the history of the Games by breaking records and glass ceilings.



Hélène de Pourtalès



Herma Szabo



Halina Konopacka

**Switzerland, 1900**

First woman to compete at the Olympic Games and to become an Olympic champion.

**Austria, 1924**

First woman to become a Winter Olympic champion for the ladies' singles figure skating competition.

**Poland, 1928**

First woman to become a Polish Olympic champion in athletics by winning the discus throw.



**Lori Fung Methorst**  
**Canada, 1984**

First woman to win the rhythmic gymnastics competition.



**Carina Vogt**  
**Germany, 2014**

First woman to win the gold medal in ski jumping.

[Follow @firstsforwomen](#)

To follow along with more Olympic "firsts" and other groundbreaking accomplishments for women around the world, follow our new Firsts for Women Instagram account!

## The importance of "play"

When children play, there is more happening than what we can see. During their activities, children are learning critical skills like how to explore, invent, create and collaborate with others. These skills will be with them in every stage of life, from their childhood school days to their adult workdays.

However, there are many daily activities that cut into playtime, including overscheduling activities and taking on large time commitments for chores and family needs. Children who are tasked to fetch safe water for their families do not have the time for play. Others growing up in war zones do not even have a safe environment to play. [According to UNICEF](#), "When times are tough, active play also helps children deal with adversity. The pleasure and connections children tap into when playing together or with adults are a powerful antidote to the stress that can build up in a child who's endured trauma."

Through our projects like [Let Us Learn Madagascar](#) and [Ending Child Marriage](#), providing communities resources that will carve out time for children to engage in their education and peer groups through play or sport ensures their health and well-being.

### Let Us Learn Madagascar

According to the [2018 report from UNICEF](#), "[Getting into the Game](#)," education-focused sport for development programs can "address the challenges education systems face by contributing to positive educational outcomes, such as student engagement, attendance, their overall enjoyment in school, and improved behavior and relationship with teachers and peers which are key for a positive teaching and learning environment."



As a result of the Let Us Learn Madagascar project, more than 125,000 children in all public lower secondary schools have benefited from sports equipment and learning materials. Additionally, a sports field was built as part of the construction project at a Marolinta secondary school with support from Zonta International.

[Learn more](#)

### Ending Child Marriage

Social inclusion is linked to sport and play. Also reported in "[Getting into the Game](#)," sports develop skills, reduce socio-economic inequality and focus on girls' empowerment while also giving the availability and

suitability of safe spaces for marginalized groups to convene, interact and participate in social life.

The Global Programme to End Child Marriage is fostering links with the education sector to enable out-of-school adolescent girls participating in community safe spaces to be registered and targeted to support their enrollment in formal schools. Nepal organized various after-school activities, such as peer-led homework groups, learning camps, life-skills camps, quiz contests and sports activities, aimed at promoting girls' inclusion and boosting their learning.



In Ghana in 2018, as part of the Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) campaign, UNICEF implemented an MHM education package in 252 schools, reaching a total of 22,203 school children. This work informed the development of MHM guidelines for schools in 2019, which also form part of the national guidelines on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools. At WASH camps, UNICEF supported life-skills education, MHM education and health and hygiene promotion through play and sport, media/advocacy skills and empowerment.

[Learn more](#)

Through donations to the Zonta Foundation for Women, Zonta improves women's lives, their children's lives and the communities in which they live and work. Thank you for making gender equality a reality for women and girls worldwide.

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