

## Arizona HERstory Presents: Ina Gittings

**Kaely Monahan** [00:00:03] Interest in women's sports, particularly at the college level, is skyrocketing. According to a report by Nielsen, an information, data and market measurement firm, the 2023 women's NCAA tournament drew nearly 10 million viewers for the final game, and that's up 103% from the previous year. But interest in women's sports wasn't always this strong. Welcome to Arizona. Her story on Valley 101. This is our special series that explores the lives of women who made an impact on our state's history. I'm Kaely Monahan, podcast producer, and I'm so excited to share this project with you. Today's featured female is one you might recognize Ina Gittings. Longtime listeners of Valley 101 may remember her story. It's one of our favorites, and we wanted to present it to you as part of this year's herstory. When we think of women's sports, moments like this may come to mind.

**UA Women's Basketball clip** [00:01:20] Reese got the second to drop. It's an eight point Arizona lead. Connecticut needs threes. They need them in a hurry-- they're not gonna get 'em! The steel from the 80! And the celebration is on for Arizona! It's all cosmetic at this point!

**Kaely Monahan** [00:01:41] That, of course, was the 2021 Women's Final Four game between the University of Arizona and the University of Connecticut. But just go back a few decades and women's sports sounded a bit more like this.

**Vintage reel of women playing sports** [00:01:56] The electrical engineers bright sparks. Do you have challenged the munition workers, the great guns to a football match? That's right. Tuck it in to stay off to the powder away from me saying I shot, I do. First, the Great Guns in dark shorts swing into action, and then come the Bright Sparks and light shots. And what is one male ref among so many?

**Kaely Monahan** [00:02:17] That is a clip from British Pathé's archives of two soccer teams in 1943, England during the height of the Second World War. And it was by the early 20th century when ideas of modern exercise started to become more mainstream, especially for women able to attend college. But exercise programs for women were very different from those for men who could develop their skills with competition in a variety of sports. Early on, women's fitness programs, if you could even call them that, were designed to help women develop poise and grace rather than improving their physical health. It often involves developing correct posture, learning to dance, and other light physical activity, generally with a focus on creating healthy future children. It must also be said that these exercises were reserved for women of a certain social class and race. White women from well-to-do families could afford to give their daughters these graceful lessons. But not every woman saw these classes and posture, walking and dancing as useful or even fair. In the late 1800s into the early 1900s, the push for women's physical education and inclusion in sports was taking shape. And at the forefront of that push in Arizona was Ina Estelle Gittings, born on January 14th, 1885, in Wilber, Nebraska. Ina was one of six children born to Curtis Kinzie Gittings, or C.K., as he went by, and Emma Kate Thompson Gittings.

**Pamela Stuart** [00:03:58] One would not think that that's where, you know, great, great people come from. But, her family had been in the Nebraska Kansas area, originally from further in the Midwest.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:04:09] That's Pamela Stuart, a historian at Arizona State University's College of Integrative Sciences and Arts. Ina story has become something of a passion project for her as she's preparing to publish a book about Ina's life. And yes, it's Ina not Ina Gittings.

**Pamela Stuart** [00:04:28] You know, there's an interesting story there because although she was adamant for as long as far back, but especially in Arizona, while during her time in Arizona that she was Ina. And she would make that clear again and again and again. However, she had a much younger brother who was about 20 years younger than her. Surprise. And, he, because of his age, you know, he was able to sort of tell stories longer than, you know, other family members. And he told his daughters, who are still alive that, originally everyone called her Ina, and at some point she became Ina. And I think that also speaks to, for whatever her reasons, like, no, this is who I am and here's here's who I'm going to be from here on out. But when that was and why, I don't know. And that's the only, source I have for that from the beginning.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:05:21] Ina was strong, confident and full of gumption. But how did a woman from small town Nebraska end up in a slightly bigger town in Arizona? Well, she was a pioneer in every sense of the word.

**Pamela Stuart** [00:05:36] Over the course of her life, in addition to Nebraska, she spent time homesteading as well as teaching in Montana, then also in Oregon, where she was a reconstruction aid trainer during World War one, basically teaching the first generation of physical therapists. And so she did that, and then she went to Turkey for about a year and a half to work with refugees there. Sort of in that extension of her medical work with the Army Corps during World War One. And then, was hoping to get her job back in Montana. That did not happen. And so someone that she knew, the, you know, they used to have the women's, the dean of women, at universities, and someone that she knew from Montana had come to University of Arizona, and she was the one that helped her make that connection and come to, Arizona.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:06:35] The year was 1920, when Ina set foot on the U of A campus in Tucson. The First World War was over. White American women were given the right to vote. Arizona celebrated eight years of statehood, and the whole country was celebrating the end of the war by roaring into the 20s. At this time, women's sports and physical education were still in their infancy.

**Pamela Stuart** [00:07:13] Especially leading up to her lifetime. But during her lifetime, that sort of end of the 19th century, there were absolutely women in particular who were advocating for women's physical health.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:07:25] That included pushing to get rid of or change what women could wear while being active during the early 1900s. Attention to women's physical health grew from upper society's interest in birthing healthy babies. And while not explicitly mentioned during that time, the messaging here didn't necessarily include minority women or those of lower social classes.

**Pamela Stuart** [00:07:47] A lot of these discussions were very racialized. They're talking about wanting to produce good, strong white babies, middle class especially. And so, you know, how can we have healthier white middle class women that are going to give birth to these, you know, babies? And so but women sort of got their foot in the door in that way. And again, we're talking about, you know, who who's really pushing back or middle class

people who aren't out working on the ranch or the farm or formerly enslaved during the Jim Crow South or, you know, whatever it may be that is physical labor. And so that idea of, you know, how do you make the case? Yes. It might be just, hey, girls, just like her on the vacant lot, right? They they're playing until they're told. And she writes about this until they're told, like, okay, enough of that. Now you need to become a lady. And so there are women who, for health reasons and using the language of motherhood and producing good babies, are already sort of on the stage, arguing for more physical activity for girls and young women.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:09:08] Ina was coming of age during this time. Her interest in physical education started as a girl. Stories from her family recall how she would play with her brothers outside. She wasn't one to be coddled in the drawing room working on needlepoint.

**Pamela Stuart** [00:09:23] But one of the things she said was. And I'll quote her mother tried to make a lady out of me, but with four brothers, I was usually drafted into a baseball game on the vacant lot. That's how I got my start in physical education. And then she added, I guess the nearest I ever came to living up to my mother's ambition was when I made Phi Beta Kappa at the University of Nebraska.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:09:46] She graduated with her bachelor's of physical education in 1906 from the University of Nebraska, before setting off on her journey across the western U.S.. When she came to Arizona, there wasn't much by way of women's physical education. The course catalog at the time had a class called Physical Culture available for women, and it's been described as a precursor to women's P.E..

[00:10:15] It clearly states that this is not about strength for women, but it's about attractive womanhood and that they would work on poise, grace, and carriage.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:10:25] That's Kathleen LaRose, better known as Rocky.

**Rocky LaRose** [00:10:29] My maiden name was Rock and field, and I don't know. Ever since the beginning, they've been teasing me and calling me Rocky. My dad was rocky to at times, so somehow I became Rocky Junior with no sons of the family.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:10:42] Rocky is one of the first women to go to the University of Arizona with a full sports scholarship when title nine passed, and she then went on to serve as the deputy director of Arizona Athletics for 34 years before retiring in 2013.

**Rocky LaRose** [00:10:56] I was a title nine, baby. I'm part of the first generation of American women to ever step on the field, representing their university in varsity sports. One of the first, as you mentioned, to get a full ride scholarship. And, you know, was there right when title nine was born. So I look back on my time at that. I had a front row seat to the evolution of women's sports.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:11:31] Ina had passed away before Rocky came to the U of A. But her influence was still strong on campus.

**Rocky LaRose** [00:11:38] I'm so grateful to Ina Gittings and Doctor Mary Roby, who preceded me, obviously, and is my legacy. They're my legacy, too, to provide the opportunities that I was able to, encounter and to achieve.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:11:52] Rocky says that when Ina arrived on campus, she took one look at the university's program for women's physical education and torpedoed it.

**Music lyrics:** [00:12:01] I'm rolling. I'm always keeping my focus. Kickin' down the door till it opens. I won't rest, nor cause the wheels of emotion. Drinks are making it. While my eyes are wide open. Hustler.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:12:12] Ina introduced track swimming, archery, and horseback riding into the curriculum as well as team sports. There are many amazing photos of Ina and her students participating in sports and either long skirts or bloomers. One in particular shows a young Ina at the University of Nebraska pole vaulting. Keep in mind, women's pole vaulting wasn't even accepted as an Olympic sport until the year 2000. Take a chance.

**Music lyrics:** [00:12:42] Take a moment. Give you what you got. You got to fight. Take a shot. Take a chance. Take the moment. Give you what you got. You got a fight.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:13:00] Ina never bought into the stereotype of the time that the ideal woman shouldn't compete. Here's Pamela again.

**Music lyrics:** [00:13:07] When she got to you, of all they had was a little dance program, and she's like, we need to be outside. We need to use big muscles as she turn them, and we need to be doing a lot more. And she knew that it was better for women's health and their minds and, you know, everything else.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:13:25] And despite fierce pushback from the male leaders of the time, Ina laid the groundwork for women's sports at the U of A.

**Rocky LaRose** [00:13:32] I credit her completely.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:13:35] This is Rocky again.

**Rocky LaRose** [00:13:36] It's interesting, though, back in the early days, how it started to evolve. You know, she's the one who organized the WAA.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:13:44] That's the Women's Athletic Association.

**Rocky LaRose** [00:13:47] She's the one who came to the conclusion that there needed to be participation awards and formed, a point system that would allow women to receive letter jackets. Now, they were clearly not varsity letter jackets. In fact, the University of Arizona voted that there needed to be a circle around the A to indicate that this was a woman's leather jacket and not a varsity award.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:14:16] Ina was not only a believer in women's sports, but she was not afraid to go up to bat for her athletes.

**Music lyrics:** [00:14:22] She fought tooth and nail to build that department. She she had and I'll quote, she would battle anybody. She scratched the department up from nothing. You know, she pushed against the grain. She did what she had to do. And, you know, it's very clear that the male administrators, whether the hallowed Mikael or otherwise, you know, we're not fans, but she would go head to head and do what she had to do for her students.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:14:53] Pamela, as the Ina also instilled in her students the confidence to fight for themselves. She wanted them to be their own advocates, even though she would gladly roar on their behalf. Of the many stories lingering on campus, ones about the clashes between Ina and James Fred McKale, also known as Pat McKale, are legendary. As Rocky tells it. McKale was not a fan of women's sports at all.

**Rocky LaRose** [00:15:26] She had strong beliefs in sport participation for women, and she made that happen on campus. She was up against, many that disagreed with her, as you can imagine, including our very first, director of athletics, Pop McKale. Our basketball arena is named after Pop, and this was before her time. But legend has it that Pop McKale became so angry hearing that there was going to be a women's basketball game in the old hearing gym, that he ordered a football player to flood it with fire hoses the night before the game. So I've always heard that that's kind of what Ina stepped into when she got here and that, it's unfortunate that we don't have any video of her and McKale going at it, because I heard that could be quite the show.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:16:26] I did search high and low for any video or audio recordings of Ina as a firecracker of a woman. I wanted to hear her voice, but like Rocky says, there aren't any known recordings. Pamela says Ina was her own PR machine and that she spoke often and easily to the press. She wrote many letters to the local papers and even did radio spots in the 1930s.

**Pamela Stuart** [00:16:49] And I really hoped that some of that might have survived. But what I ended up learning a bit about radio and basically it was always just destroyed after the fact.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:17:00] During her career in Tucson, she served on many academic and civic committees, including the Women's Overseas League, the Red Cross, and the Arizona Education Society. She earned her master's degree in 1925 from the U of A as well.

**Pamela Stuart** [00:17:14] She was right about so much stuff. And, you know, she was also, oversaw the Arizona Fiscal Education Association, usually not president because a man, you know, had to do that. And so she was connected and went to conferences. She was always struggling to get money to attend conferences from UVA. And the men, of course, could go, and she'd have to figure out the cheapest way and the cheapest room. And, you know, so she was limited in, in a variety of ways. But she, you know, people around the country wrote her letters. So it's fun to see that sort of documentation of, I read your article and you are absolutely right. The girls love competition and you're on the right track. I'm so glad to see this published, you know, that sort of thing, which is pretty cool.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:18:04] But there's more to Ina than just her interest in women's sports of physical education. She also belonged to the Tucson Writer's Club. Recently, during her research, Pamela discovered some of Ina's poetry through her grand niece. Some of it was written during her time in Turkey after World War One. Others appeared to be poems written to women.

**Pamela Stuart** [00:18:24] So one of the things with her, and I've talked to family and also just all of my research, I think in our parlance, we would probably she would probably categorize herself as a lesbian. However, that's not the language that was used then, because that meant you were mentally ill. That's not how women who were women, associated women or however we might phrase it, that's not the language they were using.

But I will say, you know her. It's her grand niece who, made rather clear than she knew her mother, which would have been, you know, sister in law didn't particularly care for Ina because, as she put it, her lifestyle. And she clarified in that her being a lesbian. So, you know, again, there are also always a lot of questions that, you know, do you have, as it were, the smoking gun.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:19:12] There was also a handful of boxes full of love letters written to Ina, but sadly, those disappeared into the trash. Pamela says that according to a family member present, when Ina's belongings were assessed in 1966 after she had died, the boxes of letters were destroyed, some of them evidently revealing personal relationships regardless of her sexual orientation. Ina was beloved by her students and supporters of women's sports. Past students said she always had the mantra COBI -- Chests Out! Bottoms In!

**Music lyrics:** [00:19:49] You can't hold down. I'm a riser, and I'm rising up to standing by. Oh. Oh, you can't hold me down. I'm a fire and my wings are gonna spread tonight, Oh!

**Pamela Stuart** [00:20:04] If you had her as an advocate, you knew you were in good hands. So for all of those countless students whose lives she affected, who weren't necessarily P.E. majors, you know, it's just, fascinating to think of how many lives she, you know, affected and how everyone I talked to who knew her at all, they were just like, oh, she was just amazing. Like she was hard or we didn't want to get in trouble with her, but, you know, and like, she's that person that everyone remembers. And that's special.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:20:39] For Rocky, who is quite literally an inheritor of Ina's legacy, Ina Gittings is a true grandmother of her career.

**Pamela Stuart** [00:20:46] I always think of Ina as the birth of women's participation in sport. I mean, she is the one. She came on this campus. She fought hard for women to be able to participate in sport. And I always thinks it's I think it's wonderful that the university has not recognized that legacy by naming the former women's P.E. building and then the physical Education building, the Ina Gittings Building on campus. But not only that, Tucson recognizes the great things that, you know, getting started by naming a major corridor here in Tucson, Ina Road. Of course, the controversy is that we all mispronounce her name, right. It should be Ina Road, but I don't think we're ever going to be able to change the whole Tucson community to say, Ina Road. But, you know, she homesteaded out here off of Iron Ore Road. She had about 40 acres. And I love that Tucson has recognized her legacy.

**Music lyrics:** [00:21:40] You can't hold me down! No, you can't hold me down!

**Pamela Stuart** [00:21:51] She came here in 1920 as a pioneer, as a rebel and a fearless experimenter.

**Kaely Monahan** [00:22:03] Special thanks to both Rocky LA Rose and Pamela Stewart for sharing their stories and research on Ina Gittings with us. Make sure to visit [azcentral.com](http://azcentral.com) to see some incredible photos of Ina, including one of her pole vaulting in an Edwardian style dress. Arizona her story continues next week with my fellow producer Amanda Liberto. She'll be telling the story of Maria Urquides, a Tucson teacher that spearheaded the bilingual education system in Arizona. In fact, she became known as the mother of bilingual education and was a leader in the emerging bilingual education field during the 1930s. Nationally recognized for her work in equality and education, Maria was called

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