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Women Like Me - Athletes

One of our goals, always, with Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America was that every woman could find "someone like me" in the book. During one of our speaking engagements (at the Kansas City Public Library), one little girl (about 10 years old) asked if there were any swimmers in the book. Another little girl (about the same age) asked if there were any soccer players. They were both looking for girls (women) like them. And, of course, the answer was yes. For we well recognize the important of sports for women, especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This month, we profile swimmer Gertrude Ederle and soccer player Mia Hamm.



Gertrude Ederle

The first woman to swim across the English Channel, Gertrude Ederle had already won a gold medal in the 400 meter freestyle relay and bronze medals in the 100 meter and 400 meter freestyle races in the 1924 Paris Olympics. She thought of the idea of swimming across the English Channel in 1925, but did not succeed in her first attempt as the water was too rough. In 1926, she was successful. Although not everyone believed that women could swim the Channel, her time of 14 hours, 31 minutes for the 35-mile distance broke the previous record (held by a man) by almost two hours. In addition, her time stood as the women's record for the next 35 years. Her endurance, athletic strength and skill were at the time quite unexpected for a woman. Her victory came at an enormous cost: as a result of her Channel swim, she suffered back injuries and permanent hearing impairment.



Mia Hamm

Ederle had begun swimming as a young child; she began competing as a teenager. Over her lifetime, she achieved twenty-nine U.S. and world swimming records. After her active swimming days were over, she developed breakthrough techniques for teaching people with hearing impairments how to swim. Ederle's swimming accomplishments expanded opportunities for women in athletics. She has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

Mia Hamm is cited as the world's best all-around women's soccer player, anchored by her contributions to the U.S. women's soccer team's gold medal in the 1996 Olympics. Hamm was the youngest player ever to play for the U.S. National Team (at age 15). She retired from competitive soccer in 2004 after 17 years, 2 World Championships, and 2 Olympic Gold medals. Her records in appearances and goals, MVP awards and overall performance put her at the top of the sport. She has scored more international goals than any player of soccer - male or female. Hamm has been inducted into the Soccer Hall of Fame as well as the Alabama and Texas Sports Halls of Fame.

We are proud that everyone can find "someone like me" to serve as a role model in our book. Like Ederle and Hamm, our amazing foremothers and colleagues of today demonstrate that women have done and continue to do amazing things to make our society and our lives better.

Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America
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