

William G. Morgan
Father of Volleyball

Born in 1870 at Lockport, New York, William G. Morgan spent his childhood years attending public school and working at his father's boat yard on the banks of the Old Erie Canal. In 1891 Morgan entered Mt. Hermon Preparatory School in Northfield, Massachusetts, and it was there he developed a friendship with James A. Naismith, who was destined to be the originator of basketball. Naismith was impressed with young Morgan's athletic skills and encouraged Morgan to continue his education at the International Young Men's Christian Association Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts (now called Springfield College). While at Springfield, Morgan participated on the college's famous football team which played championship ball under the leadership of Alonzo A. Stagg, one of the "Grand Old Men of Football". In 1894, after graduation, Morgan accepted the position of physical director of the Auburn, Maine YMCA. The following year he accepted a similar post in Holyoke, Mass., and it was here the story of Volleyball began.

At the Holyoke YMCA (now the Greater Holyoke YMCA), Morgan had the opportunity to establish, develop and direct a vast program of exercises and sport classes for male adults. His leadership was enthusiastically accepted and his classes grew in numbers. He came to realize he needed a certain type of competitive recreational game in order to vary his program. Basketball suited young people but seemed to be too fast paced for many participants. At that time, Morgan knew of no similar game to volleyball that could guide him.

He developed a new game from his own sports training methods and his practical experience in the YMCA gymnasium. Describing his first experiments he said, "In search of an appropriate game, tennis occurred to me, but this required rackets, balls, a net and other equipment, so it was eliminated – but the idea of a net seemed a good one. We raised it to a height of about 6 feet 6 inches from the ground, just above the head of an average man. We needed a ball; and among those we tried was a basketball bladder but this was too light and too slow. We therefore tried the basketball itself which was too big and too heavy." In the end, Morgan asked the firm of A. G. Spalding & Bros. of Chicopee, Massachusetts to make a ball. The result was quite satisfactory.

Early in 1896 a conference was organized at the YMCA Training School – Springfield College – bringing together all the YMCA Directors of Physical Education. Morgan was invited to give a demonstration of his game at the new college stadium. He took two teams, each made up of five men, to Springfield. The captain of one team was J.J. Curran and the other, John Lynch. The captains were, respectively, Mayor and Chief of the Fire Department of Holyoke. Morgan explained the new game, which he called "Mintonette", was designed for gyms or exercise halls but could also be played in the open air. The object of the game was to keep the ball in movement over a high net from one side to the other.

After seeing the demonstration and hearing the explanation, Professor Alfred T. Halstead suggested the name be changed to "Volley Ball" since the object of the game was to "Volley" the ball. Morgan agreed and provided the conference delegates with a copy of his handwritten rules as a guide for the use and development of the game. A brief report of the new game and its rules was published in the July 1896 edition of "Physical Education" and the rules were included in the 1897 edition of the first official handbook of the North American YMCA Athletic League. In 1917 the rules appeared in the Spalding Athletic Library Publication.

Although Morgan left his YMCA career and later was associated with General Electric and Westinghouse, he maintained a keen interest in the game he conceived and stated in a 1932 article for the "Winged Acorn", published by the Athens Athletic Club, Oakland, California, "It seems like a dream to me when I think of the origin of Volleyball and its development...I hope its usefulness will continue."

Morgan lived to see volleyball become one of the most popular sports in the world. In 1928 he witnessed the establishment of the United State Volleyball Association. In 1938 he was honored at the Springfield College Alumni Dinner as the inventor of Volleyball.

William G. Morgan died at his home in Lockport, New York on December 28, 1942. Yet the game he invented continues to draw attention to this modest, inventive, and generous man. In 1951 the United States Volleyball Association, at its 23rd annual meeting, presented a scroll to George Morgan, William's son, in memory of his father's contribution to the world sport. In 1985, William G. Morgan was honored with the distinction of being the first inductee of the Volleyball Hall of Fame in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

- *Courtesy of the Volleyball Hall of Fame, www.volleyhall.org*

The Contributions of the YMCA to the Creation and Expansion of Volleyball

The YMCA has contributed to every aspect of the game of volleyball from the birth of an idea to its development as a world-class sport.

The Greater Holyoke YMCA's physical director, William Morgan, invented volleyball in 1895, in Holyoke, Massachusetts. The Greater Holyoke YMCA continues to run adult volleyball leagues.

The game was unveiled at a physical director's conference at the International YMCA Training School (now Springfield College) in 1896. Two of Morgan's teams arrived by trolley car to demonstrate the game before the 29 directors. It was also there that the name of the game was changed from "mintonette" to volleyball upon the suggestion of Dr. Alfred T. Halstead of the Springfield faculty.

The first rules were written by Morgan and were then studied annually; and when necessary, revised by a committee of physical directors. Printed rule were presented in 1897 along with other sports information and regulations in the first edition of the Handbook of the Athletic League of the YMCA's of North America. In 1916, the YMCA and the National Collegiate Athletic Association in the Spalding blue cover series issued the rules jointly.

The first two decades following the origin of the game were marked by its rapid spread to Canada, South America, the Orient, Cuba, and Europe. Such YMCA men as Franklin Brown carried the game to Japan, Elwood Brown to the Phillipines, Henry J. Sims and Jess Hopkins to South American, Max Exner to China, Dr. John Gray to Ceylon and India, and Christopher Scaife to Siberia.

The Brooklyn Central YMCA conducted the first National United States Tournament in 1922; and the YMCA has continued to host a national tournament still. When the U.S. Open Tournament came into existence, the YMCA teams dominated play for many years.

The United States Volleyball Association was formed in 1928, composed of a dozen organizations that promoted volleyball. The YMCA continues to promote the game of volleyball at more than 2000 locations in all fifty states with volleyball programs open to men, women, and children of all ages.

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