

NDP's Gym Meet marks 90 years

Baltimore City was marking the bicentennial of its 1729 founding. Babe Ruth, a favorite son, was in the midst of a six-year run as the American League home run champ. The worst stock market crash in United States history was six months off.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore celebrated the 25th anniversary of Archbishop Michael Curley's ordination to the priesthood with a fete at the Fifth Regiment Armory, where, according to the Catholic Review, congratulations were extended by Gov. Albert C. Ritchie and Mayor William F. Broening. Father Godfrey Holbein, a Baltimore native, was among three Passionist missionaries "slain by Chinese bandits on the road near Chenki, China April 24, 1929."

That was the scene in Baltimore April 28, 1929, when the students of Notre Dame Preparatory School held their first "Gym Meet," what has grown into a much-anticipated tradition at the all-girls school.

The spirited competition began when the school shared a Charles Street campus with what was then The College of Notre Dame of Maryland. Its participants included School Sister of Notre Dame Kathleen Feeley, class of 1946, who remained on campus to attend what is now Notre Dame of Maryland University, which she served as president, 1971-92.

In an email exchange with the Review, Sister Kathleen recalled a "gymnastics exhibition in which certain selected students did solo exercises: parallel bars; the horse; swinging from rings that fell down on ropes from the ceiling. ... They achieved certain points for each one, and this all added to the cumulative score for the class."

She also recounted "the chorus of our Gym Meet song as seniors," a portion of which follows.

The seniors are moving in -

The seniors are moving up -

The seniors are moving on

To win that cup!

The 2011 book “50 Years on Hampton Lane” that chronicled NDP’s move to Towson referenced the evolution of the Gym Meet.

“Before the Hampton Lane doors opened in 1960, Gym Meet was a calisthenics competition that, at one time, included gymnastics. During the five decades on the Towson campus, the event has evolved into an exercise in leadership and teamwork in which the girls put to the test their skills and talents in march, dance, song, and aerobics.”

NDP’s four upper classes begin preparing for Gym Meet the previous fall, when they select themes and captains. All aspects are directed and produced by students, who practice routines and activities after school and on weekends.

According to the school, the week leading up to Gym Meet includes the Sports and Fitness Center being “transformed with posters, decorations and signs provided by each class.” The formal competition is preceded by a special liturgy for students and faculty; seniors attend Mass the Saturday night of Gym Meet.

Gym Meet traditions include Mary Bartel, chairwoman of the Physical Education/Health Department, serving as faculty moderator for nearly 30 years. Last year the junior class won the coveted Silver Cup for the first time since 1985. It will defend that honor March 8-9.