

The oldest sports library in the world celebrates 200 years

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Abstract

The article relates the 200 year history of the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences in Stockholm, Sweden, from its founder, Pehr Henrik Ling to its present status as the oldest sports library in the world. The authors describe the library's humble beginnings to its important role nowadays as an integral part of the School's sport education curriculum.

Key words: libraries; library services; sports.

The Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences

The Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences (GIH) was founded in 1813 by Pehr Henrik Ling, which makes it the oldest University College in the world within its field. The background to the foundation of GIH was the changes in society at the beginning of the 19th century in Europe; the Napoleonic wars changed the map of Europe, also affecting Sweden; Sweden ceding Finland to Russia in 1809, and entering into a union with Norway five years later. The governance of Sweden was in turmoil, and strong voices arguing for a strengthened military defense and the education of the citizens were heard. Under these circumstances an increased interest in physical exercise as a means to physical enhancement of the population was envisaged.

The founder of GIH, Pehr Henrik Ling (1776-1839), was born in southern Sweden, and spent a long period of

his life in Copenhagen, Denmark, where his interest in gymnastics began (*Figure 1*). In 1804 he was employed as teacher of fencing at the University of Lund (Sweden), where he also taught gymnastics and sport. In 1813 he moved to Stockholm with two assignments; as a teacher at the military academy at Karlberg and – primarily – as the manager of the new school of gymnastics GIH (then GCI), proposed and drafted by himself.

Ling also had a literary interest, writing poetry and fiction, and was elected a member of the Swedish Academy. At the same time he became more and more interested in medicine, and became a member of the Swedish Society of Medicine. Ling wrote very little on gymnastics, and his book *Gymnastikens allmänna grunder* (*General Foundations of Gymnastics*), where his most prominent ideas on gymnastics were expressed, was published posthumously.



Fig. 1. Pehr Henrik Ling



Fig. 2. Physical therapy at GIH

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At GIH the Ling gymnastics was developed, mainly thanks to P H Ling's son Hjalmar, who systematized the ideas of his father into what is traditionally called Ling gymnastics (or Swedish gymnastics). Parallel to the pedagogical gymnastics physical therapy was developed at GIH, which in 1934 moved to the medical university Karolinska Institutet (*Figure 2*).

The original form of gymnastics, the Ling gymnastics, is characterized by its breadth: it included the four parts represented in ancient Greece: esthetic, medical, military and pedagogical gymnastics (*Figure 3*). Ling gymnastics started spreading internationally already in the 1830'ss, culminating around 1900, and was considered the leader in its field, together with German gymnastics (Turnen) and the English competing sports. Interest in and knowledge about Ling gymnastics decreased after World War II when competing sports took over.



Fig. 3. Swedish gymnastics at GIH

The students and educational programs

From the start of GIH the students were members of the armed forces only, but the number of civilians increased slowly, both among students and staff. The first women were admitted as early as the 1860's.

Today the University College offers degree programmes and courses preparing for the teaching profession in Physical Education as well as for a career in sports coaching or preventive health. It offers a high level of teaching, primarily within the areas of human biology, physical education and pedagogics/didactics. The degree programme has a duration of two to four years and presently, about 650 (FTE) students are enrolled. In 2013 a new study program on Sports Management will be launched in collaboration with Södertörn University in Stockholm.

Another specialty of GIH since the turn of the last century has been the courses in outdoor life, where hiking in the mountainous areas of Sweden has been one of the highlights, as well as skiing and skating. In later years the emphasis of the educational programmes has changed to a greater focus on theoretical issues, and the connection between theory and practice.

Research and collaboration

GIH is characterized by its multidisciplinary subject fields, with sports, physiology, biomechanics, and sports pedagogy as the main subjects, but also comprising sports history as well as public health, psychology, ethnology and law. GIH researchers publish widely, and their research can be found in the institutional repository DiVA, together with all student theses since 2005 (1).

In 2011 GIH was granted permission to start post graduate studies, for PhD and Master programmes. A total of 25 PhD students are currently doing research at GIH, and the first PhD student will defend his doctoral thesis in 2013. This also means that GIH can award honorary doctorates, and the first to receive an honorary doctorate is Pia Sundhage, graduate of GIH, and gold medalist as the coach of the US Olympic women's football team in 2012.

The University College has established close co-operation with the research departments at the Karolinska Institute and Stockholm University. Formal contacts with the Swedish Sports Confederation and its local organizations as well as with schools are of considerable importance to education and research (*Figure 4*).



Fig. 4. The cycle ergometer was developed at GIH

The surroundings

GIH is centrally located next to the world's first National Urban Park (the Ekopark), which has both natural and cultural values and also offers excellent opportunities for sports and recreation. One of the closest neighbours is the 1912 Olympic Stadium which gives the area a special atmosphere. On the other side of the campus area you will find sports grounds, a tennis stadium, equestrian stadium, and close by the Swedish Olympic Committee and the Swedish Sports Confederation are situated.

The library

The GIH Library is the oldest sports library in the world, and was founded in 1813 by P H Ling himself. The collection has grown by acquisitions and donations from, among others, L G Branting, the father of the Swedish Prime Minister Hjalmar Branting (1860-1925).

In the early days, the youngest teacher at GIH was also responsible for the library, which in 1913 held approximately 6000 volumes, but "lacking the most modern literature on gymnastics" because the library had been dependent on sporadic funding for the first 70 years, and no funding at all for 30 years (1883-1913). Later the most interested teacher was made responsible for the library, and in 1934 a part time trained librarian was hired. From 1950 the library was the responsibility of retired teachers, with some training in librarianship.

Before 1945, in the old GIH building, the library collection was quite inaccessible for students, who perhaps were content with the obligatory textbooks, and the possibility for the library to buy modern literature was very limited due to lack of funding. In 1934 GIH was reorganized and students were

supposed to work more independently, but the staff reports that the library did not have the most modern literature in the collection. It was not until 1945 when GIH moved into the new building next to the Stockholm Olympic Stadium, and the library was located centrally on the first floor of the main building, that the importance of the library increased (Figure 5). In the 1960's the library was in much use both by staff and students, as well as by other libraries, national and international.

In 1980 the first librarian with a degree in Library and Information Science was hired at GIH. At this time the collection had grown to 40,000 volumes and 185 current journal titles, and the library grew even more in 2003 when a large donation came from the Swedish Sports Confederation moving to a nearby location. But still library funding was not sufficient, and the librarian expressed a need to "at least be able to buy the relevant literature published in Swedish". From 1980 the GIH library has received the file copies of all sports literature received by the copyright library, Stockholm University Library.

Starting in the 1980's the international activities of the GIH library has increased, focusing on cooperation with other sports libraries, and becoming members of IASI (International Association for Sports Information), Information Sources Commission, as well as NORSIB (Nordic Committee for Cooperation for Sports Libraries) founded in 1986.

During 2011-2012 the library was housed in a temporary location during the building of an extension to the main GIH building from 1945. In August 2012 the library was able to move into its new premises on the entrance floor of the main building (Figure 6).

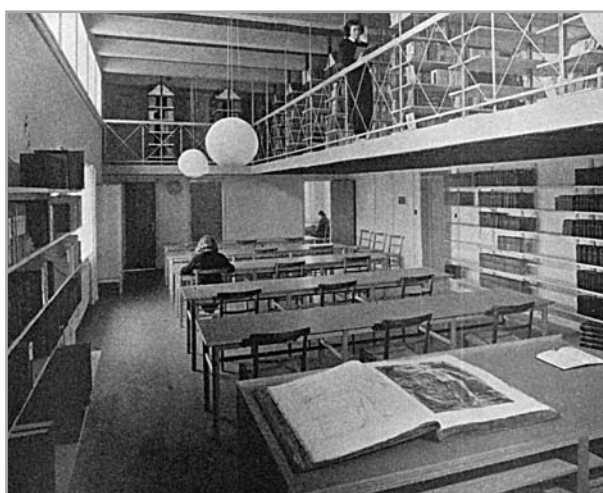


Fig. 5. The library in 1946



Fig. 6. The library in 2012

The main purpose of the library today is to support student learning and the work of teachers and researchers at GIH. The library is also open to the public, and is an important source of inter library loans, mainly in Sweden and the Nordic countries. In 2013 the library is staffed by 3.5 librarians, serving approximately 1000 students (650 FTE) and 140 faculty and staff.

The collections

The subject area of the GIH library is multidisciplinary in its character, containing both human biology, behavioural science as well as history. This reflects in the library's unique historical collection of literature from the 16th century onwards, covering topics such as anatomy, physiology, physiotherapy, military gymnastics, Swedish gymnastics, fencing and acrobatics. The history and evolution of Swedish gymnastics and sport is illuminated in the rich collection of both books and journals.

The library holds many rare and unique works on topics such as anatomy and physiology, for example *Anatomia. Ex. officina* by Thomas Bartholini from 1669, *Explicatio tabularum Anatomicum* by B S Albinus from 1744 and *Medicine et physique* by Bapstiste von Helmot from 1671.

The collection has a great deal of gymnastics literature, for example the first illustrated book about gymnastics; *De Arte Gymnastica* by Mercurialis from 1577. The Swedish gymnastic literature is also well represented in the collection by the founder P H Ling and his followers, both in Sweden and abroad. The material contains mostly lessons in gymnastics, with descriptions (*Figure 7*).



Fig. 7. Gymnastics books from around 1900

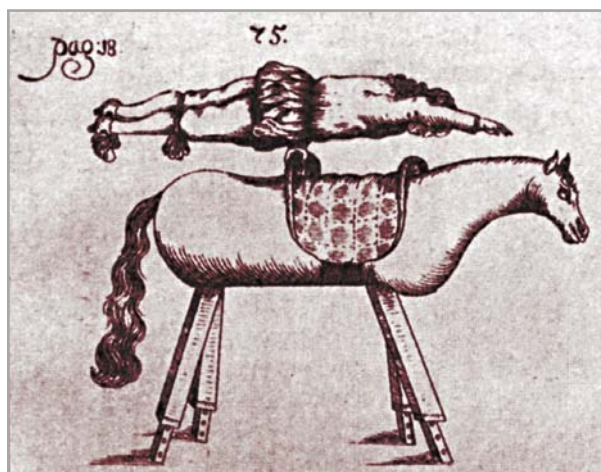


Fig. 8. From the book *Beschreibung des Voltiger* by Pascha, 1666

The European gymnastics literature is also represented, mostly from Germany, for example Johann Georg Pascha's *Kurtze iedoch grundliche Beschreibung des Voltiger*, from 1666, a handbook about equestrian vaulting with many amusing illustrations (*Figure 8*).

The library also owns the first book on acrobatics, Tuccaro's *Trois Dialogues de l'Exercice de Sauter, et Voltiger en l'Air* from 1599, illustrated with excellent woodcuts.

There are many famous books on the subject of fencing, for example one of the most important Flemish baroque book, Thibault's *Academie de l'Epee* from 1628, a beautiful magnificently illustrated book on swordsmanship. The first and oldest Swedish book on the same topic is *Palaestra Svecana* by Porath from 1693 (*Figure 9*). It is mainly based on Salvatore Fabris' famous book about fencing, first published in Copenhagen 1606.

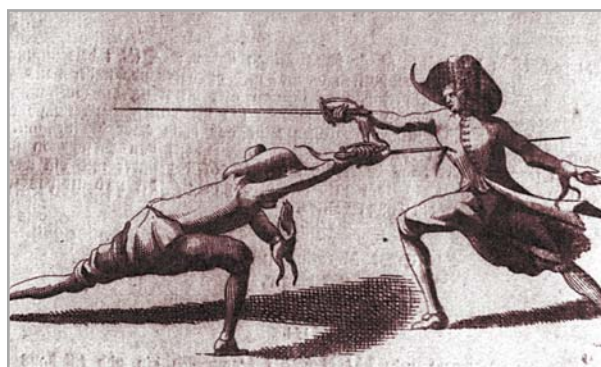


Fig. 9. From the first Swedish book on fencing, *Palaestra Svecana* by Porath, 1693

The library today holds approximately 59,000 volumes, increasing by approx. 1000 every year. Today the library acquires books in mainly Swedish and English, but also Norwegian, Danish and German books are added to the collection. The journal collection has changed from printed to electronic journals, but maintains a good collection of sport magazines in the library.

User education

The library staff has had a pedagogical role since 1988, when, for the first time, a librarian conducted user education for students within a degree project-course. At this time, the staff consisted of only one librarian and one library assistant. The small size of the university-college has made it easy for the library staff to cooperate with teachers. For example there were only about 30 lecturers/teachers and 350 students at the time. All staff of GIH shares the same faculty lounge, which results in a cordial atmosphere between staff of different occupation, not least between teachers and librarians.

As a result of this good cooperative environment the librarians of GIH have taught students how to find information resources in their degree project-courses of the final year since 1995.

Back then, user education mostly consisted of showing literature on research methods, and of course, the computerized local catalog and the few reference databases that were available. But, as the chief librarian

states in the library's annual report of 1995: "It can be observed that the students have increased computer skills and better ability to find literature that they need". In 2001, the pedagogical role of the library expanded. The staff now had increased to four persons (3.5 FTE), which made it easier for the librarians to specialize on different roles in the library. In this years' annual report, the concept of information literacy is mentioned for the first time. Thanks to collaboration with some of the faculty staff, the librarians have become involved in most research methodology courses that include academic papers. Hence, by 2003, the library's user education was scheduled in all degree programmes, on 2-3 occasions during the students' education. Different aspects of information literacy were by then also listed in the course curriculum.

From this time on the academic quality-requirements of student papers have increased, for example the need of peer-reviewed references. This has further enhanced the library's role of guiding both students and faculty in scientific databases. The multidisciplinary nature of sports sciences results in a need of different subject databases. One of the most frequently used databases is SportDiscus.

A new challenge facing the library is the newly initiated doctoral course, in which the library is responsible for instructing in search strategies and publication strategies (bibliometrics, citations etc).

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