

PUBLIC SCHOOL ATHLETIC LEAGUE
"FIELD DAY" MEDALS
by Paul Lajoie

This collection identifies medals that were presented as awards to New York City elementary and high school students by the Public Schools Athletic League from 1906 and 1930.

Through a contract with Joseph Pulitzer's *Sunday World* newspaper, gold, silver, golden bronze, and bronze medals were given to winners of schoolboy athletic events. Additionally, Field Judges for the events wore identical medals.

The events and their winners were summarized regularly in the *Sunday World*, the *Evening World*, and *The New York Times*. In the 25 year span approximately 65,000 medals were awarded. The 1917 "yearbook" identified 1,980 each of the silver and bronze medals for that year, with 38,850 awarded up to that date.

Gold medals, such as the 1914 and 1918 "solid gold" are known to have been awarded to winners of city championships in team sports such as basketball (for certain) and baseball (possibly). There is evidence that some City Championship medals had distinctive Championship bars from which the drupe and medal were suspended (1920 and 1922). For regular field day events, first place awards were sterling silver, and second place awards were bronze. Third place winners sometimes received a ribbon, evidenced by a 1921 award.

The brass medals given to Field Judges, identical to the competitive awards, were suspended from a red/white/blue ribbon instead of the usual red/white/red ribbon seen on the competitive awards.

The design of the medals changed each year, resulting in many diverse styles. Though roughly the same size, about 1½ inches in diameter, the shapes range from basic round (1912 and 1921) to indescribable (1909).

The formation of the Public School Athletic League, under the direction of General George C. Wingate, was first reported in November 1903. The demise of the Pulitzer Newspaper Empire in 1931 effectively ended their sponsorship of the medal awards, thus defining the beginning and the end of the set of *Sunday World* "field day" medals.

Additional corroboration proving the beginning and ending dates of the awards is available through the annual yearbook that was published for the Public Schools Athletic League, and the *Official Handbook*, Public Schools Athletic League, published for the Spalding's Athletic Library.

FIELD DAYS DEFINED

The 1916 "yearbook" of the Public Schools Athletic League explained just what constituted a "field day". Since it became a "day off" from school and provided a chance to play sports, it had the perfect formula for success!

"Through the passing of a By-Law several years ago by the Board of Education, every school is permitted to annually take from its regular school year one full day to devote to what is known as "Field Day". These are held upon one of the large athletic fields of the Board of Education or Park Department and are participated in by each school as a body. In each of the field days the principal acts as referee and the teachers assist him. Prior to the school games, which constitute the athletic events, some special patriotic exercises such as "Salute to the Flag" are held. Many schools also hold folk dances and special races for the girls.

Public Schools Athletic League of the City of New York,

Official YearBook of the, Year 1916, New York, New York.

About Ribbons – Most of the reported survivors of these medals that have ribbons show excessive wear. The pieces from 1909 to 1914 inclusive have a fob type loop which is often mistaken by the uninitiated for a watch fob. The ribbon on these medals was threaded directly through this fob without the need for any secondary metal loop.

The 1906, 1919, and 1920 dates have a hole directly in the medal through which a small metal ring was attached. A second ring at the bottom of the draped ribbon would secure the drupe to the medal. In similar fashion, all other medals exhibit an integral loop for the attachment of the ribbons to the medals. The ribbons themselves, that attach to the medals that were awarded to the athletes, are of a red/white/red color. The ribbons for the brass Field Judges Medals were of a red/white/blue color, and affixed to the medals in the same manner, but also had, in addition, a small yellow bar containing the words "FIELD JUDGE". The evidence suggests that medals awarded for city or team championships were attached to red/white/blue ribbons. 1920 and 1922 championship medals are examples of this.