Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend:
An Oral History of Women's Softball in America

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Abstract

*Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend: An Oral History of Women’s Softball in America* explains the development of women’s softball in the United States as it relates to women’s status in society as a whole. I conducted a series of interviews with some of the most influential women in the sport and in women’s sports in general. Through traditional historical research as well as the interviews, I illustrated how the status of women in softball reflected the status of women in society as a whole. I felt it was important for the stories of those who blazed the trail for their successors to be heard.
Acknowledgements

*Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend: An Oral History of Women's Softball* could not have come to life without the assistance, support, and inspiration of various people. I would first like to acknowledge Dr. Richard Aquila, my patient advisor, for his insight on creating this oral history. His guidance sparked my interest in the topic and his experience with oral histories proved to be an invaluable resource for my research.

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Thirdly, I would like to thank the Office of Academic Research and Sponsored Programs for graciously awarding me with an Undergraduate Research Grant for my work. Fifteen out-of-state interviews at an hour each did not make for a cheap phone bill. I think that AT&T thanks you also.

Finally, I would like to thank the following people for putting up with me throughout this process: my family for acting interested as I told story after story about these phenomenal women; my roommates for enduring my countless hours on the phone; and Stacey for supporting me when I felt overwhelmed. The support of my family and friends has enabled me to reach for the stars and for that I am forever grateful.

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Amy M. Doyle
Part I: Historical Overview

Jackie April 2, 1931, was just another day for many, but not for Virne Beatrice "Jackie" Mitchell. On that overcast Thursday in 1931, the 130-pound, seventeen-year old girl would make history. A pitcher for the Chattanooga Lookouts Class AA minor league team, Jackie was scheduled to face off against the most potent offense in baseball at the time, perhaps even of all time, the New York Yankees. The Lookouts, owned by Joe Engel, a former Washington Senators pitcher, had set up the exhibition game with the Yankees as they were returning home from their spring training for the year. According to Barbara Gregorich in her book, Women at Play: The Story of Women in Baseball, a crowd of 4,000 people came out to watch the newsworthy game. Giving up two hits and a run to the first two batters in the first inning, the starting pitcher Clyde Barfoot was pulled and Jackie was in relief. The third batter of the inning was no other than the Sultan of Swat, Babe Ruth. The first pitch was a ball. It did not take long, however, for Jackie to get the kinks out. Ruth swung and missed the next two pitches. The count was now 1 and 2; Ruth was in the hole. The next pitch...a swing and a miss...strike three. Mitchell knew her work was not finished. Next up, Lou Gehrig. Mitchell sat Gehrig down with three pitches, all of which he swung at and missed. Two down. The third batter Mitchell faced was second baseman, Tony Lazzeri. Fouling off the first pitch, Lazzeri chose a different strategy than his teammates. Watching the next four pitches go by, he found himself on first base. After the walk, Barfoot was put back on the mound and the Lookouts ended up losing 14-4.

Despite the loss, not only did Jackie Mitchell prove that women had the courage to stand up against the greats, but that they also had the ability to hold their own. Baseball
commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis evidently thought differently. Two days after the exhibition game, Landis voided Mitchell's professional contract with the Lookouts on the premise that "professional baseball was too strenuous a game to be played by women."  

Two theories have emerged from the events of Thursday April 2, 1931. The first theory claims that Mitchell did in actuality strike out the most dangerous offensive combination in history. The second revolves around the idea that since it was an exhibition game, Mitchell's triumph was staged for audiences. Essentially, this second theory stakes claim to the idea that Ruth and Gehrig struck out on purpose for publicity. No one involved confirmed or denied the story either way, so the world will never know what was going through the minds of Mitchell, Ruth, and Gehrig on that day in 1931.

While the motives may be unclear, the fact that a young woman was competing against one of the greatest teams in baseball was a step forward for women, because it acknowledged their participation in the athletic arena. This journey towards recognition and acceptance in the athletic arena is one that many women have embarked upon since the sport culture emerged in American society in the early 1900s. Throughout the twentieth century the status of women in sports has mirrored that of women in American society. The glass ceiling that women have been held under extends into the sports arena as well. Over the years, this glass ceiling has risen significantly due in part to the efforts of individuals who broke through the barriers set up for them by society.

The purpose of this thesis is two-fold. First, I will attempt to show how the status of women in softball reflected the status of women in society as a whole. We have all

heard the popular adage, "woman's place is in the home." This attitude often kept women
off the field and out of the arena. Women did not compete for fear of what they would
gain and how they would apply these attributes to the outside world, thus leaving the
domestic sphere behind. Yet, studies have proven that there is a direct connection
between the involvement of individuals in the athletic arena and the success in life after
athletics. According to Donna Lopiano, Executive Director of the Women's Sports
Foundation, "We know girls who play sports are 80 percent less likely to be involved in
unwanted pregnancies and 92 percent less likely to be involved in drugs-and three times
more likely to graduate from high school."²

Secondly, this thesis will investigate the careers of the early stars of women's
softball. The stories of these pioneer women athletes who laid the foundations for the
opportunities women have today have been lost in the shuffle. The information presented
in this thesis is based upon traditional historical research as well as interviews with
fifteen pioneers of softball. The efforts of these women have taken the sport to the level it
is today. The oral histories reveal the attitudes of people toward women in softball, as
well as the female athletes' personal experiences as trailblazers in the sport. They also
demonstrate how women athletes relate to American society as a whole.

As the push for women's rights was picking up momentum in the 1920's, the
game of softball had been in existence for more than 30 years. The game first appeared
in Chicago or Minnesota. In 1887, George Hancock (of Chicago) and a group of Harvard
and Yale alumni were awaiting the results of the Harvard – Yale football game. The
alumni grew bored, but the weather kept them inside the Farragut Boat Club. According

² Salter, David F. Crashing the Old Boys' Network: The Tragedies and Triumphs of Girls and Women in
to the story, Hancock developed the game of "Indoor Baseball" as it was called, by tying up a boxing glove and throwing it at one of his friends who picked up a broom handle or the like, and the rest as they say... is history. About five or so years later, the game popped up in Minnesota. Lt. Lewis Rober with Fire Company No. 11 wanted to find a way to keep his men active during their long shifts. It is not known if Rober caught wind of the fun they were having in Chicago, so both are usually credited with the development of one of the most widely participated games in our society today.\(^3\)

As the game began to gain popularity, leagues sprouted up across the nation. The early 1900s were a time of change in American society. Women were gaining new freedoms provided by the development of the bicycle and later, the car. The 1920s marked a time of changing attitudes towards women. For the first time women were breaking free from their Victorian style corsets and long dresses. They were cutting their hair, wearing dresses that exposed their knees and to top it all off, they were doing the Charleston. These new found freedoms did not come without limitations, however. According to historian Sarah Evans:

> Anxieties about marital success curbed some of the flappers’ new physical freedoms. If a young woman hoped to find a mate, she could not put all of her energies into other pursuits such as sports and careers. Female athletics had grown dramatically in the twenties, providing new heroines such as tennis star Helen Willis and Gertrude Ederle, who swam the English Channel in 1928 breaking previous records set by men. As the decade wore on, many expressed fears that competitive athletics could

make young women too masculine to be acceptable wives and, perhaps, even uninterested in marriage. ⁴

The Great Depression accelerated the belief that women belonged in the home. Women were encouraged to stay in the homes to save every available job for their men. “For women, the depression brought a sudden end to the aspirations of the 1920s.”⁵ But to an extent the softball field remained an outlet for the stresses the Great Depression inflicted upon women. Possibly because softball was one of the cheapest recreational activities. All you needed to play was a few people, a bat, or even a broom handle, and a ball and you were set.

World War II raised the glass ceiling that traditionally had held women back. Even if it was just for the duration, women were welcomed into the factory and onto the playing field. Just as Rosie the Riveter took her husband’s place in the factory, women athletes of the day took their husbands’ positions on the field with the All-American Girls Baseball League (AAGBL). The World War II years allowed women in softball and baseball to gain recognition as talented and competitive athletes in American society. Women who played ball were travelling around the country, and in some cases the world, playing in exhibition games from coast to coast. Softball and women’s baseball were very popular during these times because they were a great form of entertainment. The idea of escapism from the real world in the form of movies was also being exhibited in the attendance records of competitive women’s softball games as well as the popular All-


American Girls Baseball League. Outstanding semi-professional softball teams such as the Erv Lind Florists out of Portland, Oregon, the A-1 Queens and the PBSW Ramblers both out of Phoenix, Arizona were filling the stands game after game. Approximately 3000-4000 fans were packing in to watch women play highly competitive world-class softball.

As women's softball teams were becoming more popular on the West Coast, Philip K. Wrigley, of Wrigley's gum and owner of the Chicago Cubs, was having his own ideas about women in sports. In 1943 he formed the All-American Girls Baseball League in Chicago, Illinois. Popularized by Penny Marshall's movie *A League of Their Own*, the AAGBL was a huge success at the outset. One of my informants, Rockford Peaches player, Dorothy Harrell-Doyle, recalls that the League drew fans such as Jack Benny, Paulette Goddard, Charlie Chaplin, and George Raft. Sports historian Benjamin G. Rader reports that "in 1948 attendance reached a peak of nearly a million spectators, but competition from minor league baseball and television brought about the demise of the League in 1954."6

During their heyday, from coast to coast, these teams gave women athletes well-deserved celebrity status. Some of these pioneer players are still recognized today as they walk down the streets of their hometowns. Back in the 1940s, it was still considered unique for a woman to be participating in the sports arena or on the field. Their success and outstanding abilities thwarted much of the ridicule and discrimination that could have potentially arisen. In fact, many of the people these women encountered were very supportive of their actions. There is no better indication of support the women received

than the attendance records. For example, according to Mary Littlewood, former women's softball coach at Arizona State University, in 1948, the Phoenix A-1 Queens drew 279,000 fans in their 153 game season.\(^7\)

Despite the fact that many led a charmed existence, they were aware of the stereotypes and the negative feelings towards women in sports. People are always prepared to be critical of trailblazers. These particular trailblazers were transcending the boundaries of what was considered to be the norm. Some of the more obvious stereotypes included the idea that women who played sports were masculine and unladylike. Questions involving the players' sexual orientation often accompanied such stereotypes.

The owners of these leagues were aware of society's impression of women in athletics. For this reason, every opportunity to "feminize" the sport was seized. The most obvious attempts to do so rested mainly in the care of one's overall appearance on and off the field. For example, in the case of the Erv Lind Florists out of Oregon, Erv Lind stuck to a list of strict rules that included always having your shirt tucked in, never having your hands in your pockets in public, and always travelling to and from games in a dress. Managers such as Erv Lind encouraged, even demanded "lady-like" behavior off the field. Another example of this push to "feminize" the sport can be found in the All-American Girls Baseball League. As indicated in A League of Their Own, the players were in fact sent to charm school where they learned how to eat, drink, walk, and talk like girls.

The efforts to feminize the sport of softball also determined the uniforms the players wore. The short skirts worn in the AAGBL, while very attractive, accomplished nothing in terms of practical uses. For example, the uniforms did nothing to protect the legs of women sliding and diving into home. They may have looked good, but they were obviously made with alternative motives other than to provide the girls with uniforms in which to play. As spectating increased and the sport became a form of entertainment, the uniforms began to take the shape of costumes rather than uniforms. While most of the women in the league thought highly of the uniforms, a few that I interviewed thought that the owners of these teams may have been marketing the women as opposed to the softball. One particular advertisement announcing an upcoming game featuring the Phoenix Arizona Cantaloupe Queens and the New York Roverettes at Madison Square Garden, read: “Girls Softball! America’s Most Beautiful Athletes.”

During the 1940s, gender roles were so clearly defined that it was difficult to cross those lines and still maintain one’s social status. For this reason, the emphasis was put on the femininity of women in sport as opposed to the competition factor. Realizing this, advertisers focused not on the fact that women were playing in the dirt, but that they were women first and ball players second.

Gender roles were further clarified throughout the 1950s. Certain factors characteristic of society during the 1950s carried into the sports arena as well. The 1950s are often associated with consensus behavior. The coming of the Cold War and the transformation from a wartime economy to a peacetime economy affected the role of women in American society in many ways. As the men returned from their duties overseas, women were forced to give up their jobs and go back into the home. The new
found independence that characterized life during World War II was soon forgotten as women began to stick to more acceptable roles in the new suburbia. Society once again reverted back to the old style of thinking that a woman’s place was in the home.

The consensus behavior was associated with ideas of mindless conformity and the notion of apparent normalcy. According to historian William H. Chafe, “To get along, one had to go along. Individualism was forbidden...The group controlled everything, and anyone who violated its norms risked exile.”8 Consensus behavior and the push towards conformity can be linked in part to World War II. During the war, people joined together because the United States could not afford disunity. Just as Americans united against Germany during the war, they also had to unify against the threats of communism when the war was over. Anything outside of the norm was considered wrong, or even Un-American, and it was believed that it could potentially lead to communist ideals.

The issue of mindless conformity was reflected in all aspects of society including gender roles. Women were expected to prioritize caring for their husbands, children, and homes high above their own individual needs. “Women could secure fulfillment only by devoting themselves to homemaking...interior decorating, and making household work into a creative adventure. According to this analysis, any women dissatisfied with such a role were neurotic, victims of feminist propaganda, ‘masculinized.’”9

Given this mindset, it is no wonder that a woman’s position on the ball field was not as prominent as it was in the previous decade. That probably explains why attendance rates decreased in the 1950s. People did not want to watch a sport that “masculinized”

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innocent young women, whose place was in the home. Some suggest that a decrease in
talent in the 1950s was responsible for the drop in attendance. My interviews with
women who played in semi-professional softball leagues and in the AAGBL, seem to
support this theory. They overwhelmingly said that the reason why there were so many
fans in the 1940s, was because they were good, and people knew they were good.
Although, the marketing schemes in the 1940s were directed towards a particular
audience, the women claimed that people came out not to see the women, but to see
good, world-class softball and baseball. If they are correct, it would make sense that the
drop in attendance during the 1950s could be attributed to the drop in the number of
competitive players. So where did these players go? Some went on to school, others
started families, and yet others found new entertainment in the television and the car. But,
what came first? Did the drop in attendance cause talented women to hang up their
spikes? Or, did the women’s decision to retire cause the decline in attendance? Both
scenarios lead to the same conclusion: women’s softball was not as popular during the
1950s because gender roles were so clearly defined that overstepping them meant being
outside of the “norm.”

The first African-American softball player to be inducted into the Amateur
Softball Association Hall of Fame not only had to face gender discrimination during the
1950s, but she faced racial discrimination as well. The discrimination that Billie Harris
faced on account of her color reflected the racial attitudes that characterized this time
period in American history. Growing up in Tucson, Arizona, Harris was not allowed to
play softball in high school. Playing for a commercial team in her area, she was seen by
the PBSW Ramblers, one of the most successful softball teams out of Phoenix, Arizona.
The Ramblers and the Queens, both from Phoenix, were very well known throughout the softball community. Harris joined the team a few years later. One particular story reflects attitudes that typify the 1950s and the 1960s in American society. In the mid-fifties, the Ramblers' coach took the team out for steak dinners before a game. The team went in the restaurant and Harris followed a few minutes later because she had to fix her hair. While she was still outside, the waiter took the team's order. As Harris walked in, fifteen steaks were already on the grill. When the waiter saw that she was with the team, he approached the coach and told him that she could not eat with them because she was black. The coach told the waiter "Either Billie eats here, or we all leave." With fifteen steaks already cooking, the entire team walked out of the restaurant. In 1954, Harris could not go to Florida because of fear of potential racial tensions. According to Harris, her teammates would often get more angry than her about incidents such as these. She did not think that it was worth it to get angry, because she believed that there was no winning in such situations.

These racial tensions that permeated the 1950s bled into the 1960s as well. The 1960s signify the first major shift in ideologies that have led to the opportunities that women have today. The assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963 shocked the nation. It was almost as if this event shattered the collective consciousness of 1950s consensus behavior, causing people to no longer subscribe to the idealism that the 1950s pretended to offer. The 1960s can be characterized by sweeping changes in terms of gender, race, and society as a whole. Contrary to the 1950s, people began to question the norm. Women such as Betty Friedan began discussing "a problem that has no name…the
comfortable concentration camp." The woman’s rights movement became an outgrowth of the civil rights movement. Both movements were fighting for equality and used some of the same tactics to combat the problems of discrimination.

The pivotal year of 1963 set the stage for the remainder of the turbulent decade. Four significant events occurred in this year that changed the course of history. Aside from JFK’s assassination, Betty Friedan’s, The Feminine Mystique was published. The March on Washington took place focusing the nation’s attention on the civil rights movement. Finally, perhaps lesser known, “the Division for Girls and Women’s Sports (DGWS) changed its attitudes about women’s athletics, stating in its annual publication that competitive opportunities beyond the intramural program are desirable and should be provided for highly skilled women.” This action paved the way for the passage of Title IX that would come nine years later.

In many ways, the civil rights movement, the new women’s rights movement, and Vietnam defined the 1960s. As the war was raging in South East Asia, one of the most successful softball dynasties of all time was continuing its reign at the top. Between 1958 and 1978, the Brakettes won the national title 15 times. In 1965, the Brakettes represented the United States in the first International Softball Federation’s world championships. At this time, it was customary that the team that won the national title would represent the United States in international competition. This has since changed. Today we have an actual U.S.A. team that represents our nation on the international field.

As the women’s rights movement began to gain recognition, the world of women’s

athletics opened up. In addition to DGWS statement in 1963, in 1966, the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (CIAW) was formed. The CIAW was the predecessor to the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) that would eventually consolidate with the NCAA giving us the organization that we have today. When the CIAW became the AIAW in 1971, the organization was run by women for women. Women were the administrators, the coaches, and the athletes. One year later, in 1972, the most significant piece of legislation in terms of advancing the status of women in sports was passed. Title IX gave women a fighting chance to increase the status of women's athletics. According to Title IX of the Educational Act of 1972 "no person shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance." While it has taken many years to be implemented, and still is not consistently followed today, Title IX marks the beginning of the end of discrimination against women in athletics. From this point on, women now had something in the law to refer to.

The struggle to raise the glass ceiling in women’s athletics is a struggle that began in the early part of this century and continues through today. There is no question that Title IX made the biggest impact on women’s athletics. Prior to Title IX women had to make their own uniforms or use the hand-me downs from years before. Title IX provided women with new uniforms, new facilities, better practice times, and more equality overall.

13 Littlewood, Mary. The Path to the Gold: An Historical Look at Women’s Fastpitch in the United States.
It was at this point that the status of women in athletics started on the path that led to what we have today. It is important to remember, though that Title IX would not have been passed had it not been for the women who were playing their hearts out on the field everyday prior to 1972. These are the women who deserve the credit for the opportunities that women athletes have today. They played for the love of the game, for the thrill of the competition, and expected nothing in return. It was this expectation of gaining nothing in return that enabled them to capture the world. Their conquests give women the freedom to play with heart and not have to worry about the ramifications. Part Two of this thesis will spotlight the careers of several of these pioneering women athletes.

PART II: Oral History of Women’s Softball

As part of the research process for this thesis, I conducted a series of hour long interviews with fifteen women whose contributions to the sport of softball and in general to the status of women in sports are unmatched by today’s standards. These pioneers of women’s sports blazed the trail that many women in athletics take for granted today. All of the opportunities that women athletes have today are the results of the blood, sweat, and tears left on the field by women such as the ones you are about to meet. I first met the majority of these phenomenal women (from a distance) in 1997 when I had the opportunity to play in my second ASA Women’s Major National Championship in Phoenix, Arizona. The tournament directors in Phoenix invited those who were considered to be Legends, most of whom are members of the Hall of Fame, to come to Phoenix for the tournament as well as to participate in a Legends game to kick off the week. It was there that I was first introduced to the idea that the sport of softball had roots planted far earlier than the days of the more recent 1996 Olympics. Playing around the country and around the world these women laid the foundation for what we have today.

Of the fifteen interviews that I completed, I chose to feature excerpts from five of those that adequately represented the development of women’s softball from the Post World War II Era to the passage of Title IX in 1972. Due to time restraints, regrettably, I could not feature excerpts from all fifteen interviews, even though any of the fifteen would have served the purpose. In the five that I chose to include here, I chose excerpts that best related to the issue at hand, i.e. how the status of women in softball changed from the 1940s to the 1970s. They are included in the following pages.
Transcribed Interviews:

1. Dorothy Harrell Doyle—7 November 1999

*Dorothy “Snookie” Harrell Doyle played in the All-American Girls Baseball League from 1944-1950 and again in 1952. Snookie’s defensive abilities at shortstop helped the Rockford Peaches become series champions in 1945, 1948, 1949, and 1950 in a league that lasted from 1943 through 1954. One of the most successful players in the AAGBL, the outstanding shortstop was selected on the all-star team representing Rockford in 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, and again in 1952 as a utility player.*

*AD: What years did you play?*

DHD: I played 1944-50, and 1952. I had gotten married in 1949 and I decided not to go back to Rockford; many of our players were quitting and I really was tired of all the travelling. I had the opportunity to play in Arizona and it was for more money and then it was closer to home too. I thought that way my husband might be able to come over more often [he lived in California]. But I played there a year then I was back in Rockford the following year [1952]...[When I came back] the league had gone down a bit because we didn’t have the ball players in the league as we had had before. Many had quit and they had gotten older and as I was starting to get older too although I did play until 1960 in softball.

*AD: What were people’s responses to you being a woman and playing sports?*
DHD: We had a good and bad responses, but we had a very outstanding league in the California, Los Angeles area where I first began my career. [The league was run by Marty Fiedler who had one field by Columbia movie studios and another by the CBS Broadcasting Station in LA] ...People were very enthusiastic about our playing. Those who were very enthusiastic would come almost every single night. We didn’t play every night, but there were enough teams that there was a game every night. Several movie stars came out to our games such as George Raft, Paulette Goddard with Charlie Chaplin, and Jack Benny and his wife. We had many movie stars who were very enthusiastic and they were amazed at our abilities. But there would be some people who could be very sarcastic. I never will forget one time because it kind of upset me. A man said to me, well Snookie how old are you going to be when you are 17. And I said well by you when I'm 17, I’ll be 19 and I was 15 at the time. I guess that he couldn’t believe that I could play ball as well as I did because of my youth.

AD: In your opinion, was the movie A League of Their Own pretty accurate to the way things were in the AAGBL?

DHD: It depends on who you talk to. I read one remark....by Doris Sands [a player in the AABGL]....who said that about 30% of the picture was accurate; most of us say around 70%. [For example] the World Series game was really played in 1946, well they played it as being in 1943, the first year [of the league]. They used the smaller ball in throwing overhand, but that didn’t start until later on. In 1943-1945, it was underhand pitching with baseball rules. [Another example] is that the two sisters were supposed to be off the farm in Oregon which I think technically that, being that it was the son of one
of our players [who worked on the film] I believe that the movie was talking about were actually from Canada. One was a third baseman and the mother of the one that helped on the movie, Candell was his name, and Wilson were recognized in the introduction of the movie. His mother was the left fielder. She was a very good ball player; never chosen on the All-star team, I don’t know why. I think one year they didn’t pick an all-star team. Neither one of them were catchers.

**AD:** What were some of the common stereotypes of women in sports when you played? Were there any that you noticed? Were women made fun of for playing sport amongst peers and in school? Or was it more accepted?

**DHD:** No, it wasn’t accepted on our era. They would consider us instead of being athletically inclined, or being athletic….as being very “manish.” Any of us playing in the league, after we finished playing we never discussed it with anyone but ourselves because they considered it very “manish” or tomboys, and that’s what they called us when we were younger. It was not easy for us.

**AD:** What kind of changes did you notice? Like you said there were a lot of women quitting in the early 1950s. Do you think that was because of the end of World War II?

**DHD:** Well, I really got tired of the travelling as others did and they wanted to do other things….We had a manager that was so gung-ho that he thought that we should always eat and drink baseball. You know, we wanted to do more in our lives that just do that. We had to tell him everything we were going to do; like after a game we had to get permission. We weren’t allowed to meet with the opposition. At times we would sneak
out to meet our friends. They insisted on femininity. We always had to wear lipstick, although we weren’t required to wear stockings all of the time. But you enjoyed playing ball, and I probably would have played for nothing. It is something that you want to get on with your life and do other things too.

**AD: Do you think that if you would have played today that you would have made a career out of it because there is more of an opportunity for women to make a career out of athletics?**

DHD: I think that it’s great now. You see it’s not something you need to be ashamed of. It was almost as if we should have been ashamed of being athletically inclined, so this is why we didn’t discuss it. I think that in this day and age it isn’t looked upon the same as it was thirty or forty years ago.

**AD: Can you recall any specific instances where you were made to feel ashamed?**

DHD: Some comments that are made and accusations that are made. Accusations like you being one of the girls or something like that. When it was first suggested of me, I was just about 15 or 16, and I didn’t even know what it was all about. My mother too; she had to be told to protect me and so forth. My mother made sure that if she wasn’t there that my manager or the coach would pick me up and bring me home. It was always that I had a guardian.
AD: Do you think that throughout the eight years that you played for the Peaches that
the sport gained popularity or lost popularity? Or were you consistent in terms of
drawing in the fans?

DHD: Well, in '47 like I said we weren’t as good, but ‘48,’49, and ’50, we were the
champions again….they started using rookies because they weren’t developing the girls.
When they first started the league there were outstanding players from all over the United
States. We had many in California who never went back and didn’t want to go back.
The money that was offered wasn’t worth it to them, but some of us that were not tied
down at home wanted to go back and play again. The team was better….more evened
up. [Thus drawing more fans]

AD: How do you think things have changed in terms of today compared to when you
played?

DHD: Many more girls are interested in playing softball in the little leagues. They start
at seven and eight years old. Some of us go out to their games and they are thrilled to
death to meet us and see us. We sign autographs at least three hours straight
sometimes….In my day, we had to play with the boys, those of us that were highly
skilled. Now some of the little girls are so good now. It makes you think if all of us
would have had the opportunities they are having now, we would have even been better
than we were.

AD: How does the first year that you played compare to the last year that you played?

Now the first year would have been in 1944 and the last year would have been 1952?
DHD: Right. Well in '52 when I went back and I frankly didn't think that our league was that great....I could see an improvement in the league in '45, but I really felt that our better team was in '49 and '50. Then in '52 when I went back I could see a big change in the league in it not being as good.

AD: What about in terms of attitudes? Did that change at all during those years?

DHD: I was in my own little world at times. I could see that in '52 the fans were different. Maybe they didn't appreciate the ball playing as well later on because we weren't as good. They were accustomed to our team winning, and we weren't as good; although the people in Rockford were very nice.

I think that people changed after the war was over. I think television came into the picture and there were other interests then. We also started having our own automobiles.

AD: You had mentioned that you think today that more girls are interested in softball and that there have been a lot of changes. My last question for you: when do you think those changes took place? And why do you think those changes took place?

DHD: Well, we had Title IX I think. At first I thought it was just in California, but it was very slow. It is still not where it should be as far as athletic scholarships go for the girls compared to the men. I think that there has to be more fairness in that particular area. The young lady could never look up to perhaps getting the scholarship. These are things that I hope will improve even more.
2. Billie Harris—11 November 1999

Billie Harris was the first African-American to be inducted into the National Softball Hall of Fame in 1982. A modest woman by nature, her accomplishments speak for her. Officially beginning her pitching career in 1950 with the Phoenix Ramblers, she participated in 15 Amateur Softball Association Women's Major National Championships. In 1979 Harris was inducted into the Arizona Softball Hall of Fame.

Billie's experiences as a black woman athlete from 1950 to 1975, when she hung up the spikes, are particularly valuable to my research because she had two major obstacles to surpass; not only the fact that she was a woman, but a black woman.

AD: What kind of problems did you have to face as a black woman in softball at a time when it was hard enough to be a woman in sports? Can you remember any specific examples?

BH: I would go to a restaurant or something and wouldn't get served, but I would just keep going back and eventually when they would serve me I decided that there wasn't any need to go now.

AD: I heard a story that your coach was very supportive when the team went into a restaurant and was told that you couldn't be served because you are black. Could you elaborate on that?

BH: Yes. We went to a place here in Arizona and sat down because the coach was going to buy us steaks before the game. I was the last one to get out of the car because I had to
comb my hair. I have a different grade of hair than anybody else, so I wanted to look
decent because we were going into a restaurant. I was the last one to come in and [before
I went in] I just told them to order my steak the same as they did. I walked in and the
waiter came back and said that they couldn’t serve me. The coach just said “Well Bill,
just wait right there.” He said to the waiter “Do you have the steaks on?” He said, “Oh
yes sir.” Then coach said, “Team, let’s go.” The waiter replied “What do you mean let’s
go? You had me put on fifteen, twenty steaks.” And coach then said, “Well if you can’t
serve her then you can’t serve us.”

AD: As you said when you were in high school you didn’t have an inclination to fight
that kind of stuff, [Harris was not allowed to play sports in her integrated high school
in the late 40s because she was black. She said that she didn’t fight it, because she did
not know anything about it.] how did that make you feel when you were discriminated
against? Were you angry, or did you just see others as being ignorant?
BH: I was raised in Texas and I knew that this was the way things were, but you still
don’t expect it to happen. You don’t think that it is going to happen, but if it does and you
have been told by your mother that these things happen so you just kind of roll with the
punches. That’s about what happened. I knew those things were out there and I knew
that’s how it was.

AD: I guess I just don’t understand prejudice. How people can be so prejudiced against
other people is something that I’ll never understand.
BH: You know, we all have our prejudices. I have mine against my own; I have mine against white people, but it is the type of prejudice that [makes it different]... Many times people get upset with people when they are just out with a different race of people. That to me is the part that I don't understand. Why are some called names because you are with a black person? Some of my friends have been called "nigger lovers" because of the fact that you go out somewhere with them and you see other people who think that shouldn’t be. That is going to happen until the end of time.

AD: In terms of when people would come up to you and your teammates, how did you respond first of all, and then how did they respond to that kind of stuff?

BH: Well of course there were words passed, but then you just say “let’s not create a problem, and just leave it alone.” And most of the time you weren’t followed. I have a tendency to get angry, but most of the time I tried not to because I know how those things are. My friends would get more angry than I would. It was just as well to walk away from it than to try to solve it with a fight or anything like that, because in my opinion you couldn’t win anyway.

AD: What types of changes took place between the time you began playing and the time you retired?

BH: I kept to myself those first few years. [In the later years] I was either being accepted more or they were getting used to me more after getting to know me. I think it was getting used to me and knowing that I wasn’t going to rub off on them.
AD: Would you attribute that change to the changes that were going on in society at the time?

BH: That’s it. That’s a good possibility because there were changes. I thought they were good changes because the restaurant that I used to go to [in 1958] was a little Mexican restaurant. Everyday I would go to get a Mexican dinner and I’d go inside; we even got to calling each other by our first names. I always had to get up to go around to the window to get my food. They’d say “now Billie, you know we can’t serve you, don’t do that.” And I’d just say, “Well I just thought that today might be the day.” And when it wasn’t I’d say “Well, order me a couple of tacos and a burrito and I’ll leave.” Finally one day it got where I could go in and eat.

AD: What did people outside of the sport think of women who did play sports? Such as people that you hung around with and people who didn’t play.

BH: They loved it because they would see me play. I never had any problems that way. I was so into softball that I never even read the clippings about games that I won. I never paid any mind to the newspapers or anything like that. Other teams that we played against all liked me, so it was fun. If there was somebody in the stands heckling, both teams would probably go up and clear them out.

AD: In the 1940s, especially when you first started playing, in terms of the uniforms that were worn at the time, do you think that uniforms indicated people’s attitudes about the sport? Do you think that people were coming out to watch the women as opposed to coming out to watch the sport?
BH: The girls that played ball back then played as well men. I think that they came out to watch the women play. I think they also came out to watch the women raise a little hell. The Queens and the Ramblers were rivals and always at each other’s throats when they played each other. The Queens was a professional team and the Ramblers was an amateur team. But it was always fun to play each other. The coaches were rivals too. They were at each other’s throats all the time; playfully, but it made it look good. It was always a good game when they Queens and the Ramblers played.

AD: Did you guys get a lot of fans at those games?

BH: We had a lot of fans because we had a small ballpark and it always filled it up. We didn’t have any more than 1400-1500 people, but that’s a lot when it comes to the size park we had to play in.

AD: What types of major changes did you see? How would you compare the first year that you played to the last year that you played? Were there a lot of changes that occurred during that time?

BH: In what ways?

AD: In terms of the acceptance of women in sports and also in terms of you as a black woman in sports.

BH: From the time I started to the time I quit, by that time, we had all sorts of women in sports. It was just like opening and closing a door; there was nothing to it then. But see there weren’t too many black women that played the game when I played. In the later
years there were three or four that played up in southern and northern California on teams, but I was probably the only black that played on the Ramblers team, except maybe one year when one other girl tried out. But that was about it. I didn’t see too much different after the first couple of years as things went on. Other people may have. I just wasn’t into paying that much attention. I can’t say what went on because I didn’t see it and didn’t know it.

AD: You mentioned that you began to see all sorts of women in sports, when do you think that began to take place?

BH: Probably in the late’60s. I think more and more women, it’s like tennis was getting popular. I can remember when golf tournaments were only $25.00 for women. It was a lot of money back in those days to have a $25.00 tournament. They kept on and kept on until their purses just got bigger and bigger. Now we have women who make a million dollars a year, where men make a million dollars playing one skins game.
3. Margaret Dobson, PhD—7 November 1999

Margaret Dobson played third base for the Lind Pomroy team, which became the Erv Lind Florists in 1948, from 1946-1959 in Portland. Inducted into the National Softball Hall of Fame in 1964, she was selected as an ASA All-American three times and participated in nine ASA Women's Major national championships. After retiring from softball in 1959, Dobson went back to school to pursue her career in higher education. In 1976, Dobson was named the first woman Vice-President for Academic Affairs of Provost in the state system of higher education in Oregon. She retired as second in command of the university, as the Executive Vice President Emeritus at Portland State University.

AD: Did you experience discrimination as a woman in softball?

MD: Oh, of course. That happened to me when I got older and went on to high school and college. I think one of my best memories in softball was back in the early 50s. I think that the ASA was trying to make softball more palatable and attractive for women so they created the Miss Softball trophy. That was highly coveted by people to win that trophy and I had won just about everything in 1952 from most outstanding player for the ASA and other things. So the team was kidding me about never winning the Miss Softball trophy. So I let my hair grow long that year and at the world tournament in Phoenix in fact, I was presented with the Miss Softball trophy by Barry Goldwater, who at that time was the governor. I guess because that was one thing that I had never won and my teammates didn’t think that I could do that. I won it.
AD: You say that you grew your hair long. Was that one of the things that was considered in choosing the winner of the trophy?

MD: Evidently. Our sponsor was very sensitive about our appearances off the diamond when we were representing the team. We would always travel with dresses or skirts on because Erv wanted us to look feminine.

AD: Do you remember any specifics in terms of people outside of the softball world? Were they accepting of it or not accepting? What types of blatant discrimination did you face?

MD: Well, I guess I have to tell you about one experience that I had to demonstrate this. I was playing for Erv Lind and I enrolled in a college. It was called Vantort, which is now Portland State University, where in fact I retired from. In 1951, they heard that I was in school there and we were very well known. I was called from my English class to the president’s office where the baseball coach and the athletic director were present. They asked if I would play the opening inning of the men’s baseball season and pretend that I was really out for the team. At that time, all of the [softball] teams in the West Coast went semi-pro in what was called the National Softball Congress. It was created by Larry Walker out of Phoenix....so I told them [the baseball coach and the athletic director] that I was on the contract and that they would have to get a release for me to do that from Mr. Lind. He said fine as long as it was just going to be an inning or two at the opening game. I made Time, Newsweek, and even international publications, I have one article from Paris, France where they built it up that a woman was invading a man’s sport and playing baseball....I ended up playing enough innings to get a varsity letter. So I am a “letter
woman” in baseball. So I am the first woman in the United States to have lettered in baseball in college. When I transferred to the University of Oregon, I would be walking in downtown Portland and people would walk up to me and kind of give me funny looks. Of course the guys thought that I was a real jock. I didn’t even get a date at the University of Oregon, the guys were afraid of me. I think that I felt that form of discrimination because I was a headliner and we didn’t dare tell the press that it was a publicity stunt. They finally ran an article where I said that baseball was for men and that I preferred softball, in that effect so that I could get out of it.

**AD: Did you notice any major changes between the 40s and the 50s?**

MD: I think that it was about the same in those eras. Towards the latter 50s I think it started changing. I think there was a depletion of talent in softball; they weren’t drawing the crowds as much in the latter part of the 50s. Maybe it’s because they lost a lot of the super-stars, I don’t know. But there was a depletion of interest in the game. I didn’t play in 58 because I was working on my master’s degree and teaching full time at Portland State University and had to go on for my PhD and I just really didn’t have time. But Erv talked me into playing again in 59 at regionals. And I noticed quite a difference in terms of the crowds just from 57 to 59.

**AD: What effect do you believe Title IX had on women’s athletics?**

MD: I know Edith Green [author of Title IX and Senator in Oregon] real well and did champion with her and her writing of Title IX which was misinterpreted in every legal
ramification. I don’t think that she meant it to be as far reaching as they interpreted the
law.

AD: That is one thing that I have noticed. Title IX included a whole slue of things yet
when it’s mentioned it is always in terms of the gender equity in sports and not as in
wide based education.

MD: Exactly, and she would tell you that. I think that she wanted to give women more
opportunities in the realm of women’s sports as well as in scholarships and opportunities
in education.

AD: What were the uniforms like when you played?

MD: From 46-51, we wore long baseball type uniforms. Then Charlotte Armstrong,
who was a pitcher for the Queens in Phoenix, designed a skirt with tights underneath. We
then all shifted to play in shorts and skirts and that was in 52.

AD: What do you think that indicates?

MD: They were trying to feminize the sport and attract crowds.

AD: When you say “they” who might you be referring to?

MD: I think all of the coaches and sponsors were trying to make it as feminine as
possible.
AD: What effect do you think Title IX had on women’s sports and softball in particular?

MD: Oh there’s no question that it opened the doors for opportunities and continues to do so.

AD: You mentioned that participating in sports made you more successful could you elaborate on that?

MD: Oh there is no doubt that it did. When you are in the limelight you are more on guard; you gain confidence. Every world tournament that I went to we would have to go to breakfasts and speak. Here in Portland we had two world tournaments and just being on that team, we would be in the public’s eye. It gave me a great deal of confidence.

AD: Do you that women were kept away from sports for so long because of the fact that society did not want us to gain the attributes that would enable us to succeed in the outside world?

MD: Oh yes. There is no question about the whole image of femininity. I think that men feel threatened by women who show athletic prowess.
4. Sharon Backus—6 November 1999

One of the most successful collegiate coaches of our day, Sharon Backus has experienced success in all aspects of the game of softball. She first began playing the game in 1954 at the age of eight. By the time she was fourteen, she was playing for softball powerhouse Whittier Gold Sox, who won the ASA (Amateur Softball Association) Women’s Major National Championship the first year she played, in 1961. In 1964, she moved to Orange Lionettes, National Champions in 1965, where she played until 1967. After taking a two-year hiatus from the sport, she went on to play for one of the most powerful dynasties in the history of the sport, the Raybestos Brakettes where she remained until 1975. From 1969 to 1975, the Brakettes won the ASA Women’s Major national championship every year from 1971 to 1975, and continued to the trend until 1978. Earning numerous ASA All-American accolades, Backus concluded her playing career by playing two seasons with the professional softball team, the Connecticut Falcons. In 1975 she took the head coaching position at UCLA, perhaps the most successful Division I collegiate team to date. In her career at UCLA she has coached the Bruins to 14 out of 15 berths to the Women’s College World Series, and has taken the cake seven out of those 14 seasons. Compiling a career coaching record of 847 wins and 167 losses it is no wonder why Sharon Backus is one of the best coaches of our day. Three of her players, Lisa Fernandez, Sheila Cornell-Doudy, and Dot Richardson went on to represent the United States and win the Gold Medal in the 1996 Olympics. Her successes lead to her selection to the NFCA (National Fastpitch Coaches Association) Hall of Fame, the ASA Hall of Fame, and the Women’s Sports Foundation Hall of Fame.
AD: In terms of when you coached and when you played, what were people's responses to you when you said, “Oh I play softball, I have played for some world championship teams?”

SB: Well, it depended regionally where you are. When we played for Whittier [Whittier Gold Sox from Whittier, California], we had a good following in the young days [1961-1964], but they were family, you know parents and friends of the family. Pretty much they didn’t just get John Doe off the street to come in because they loved the game of softball. But it was followed by, like I said, friends and relatives and that type of thing.

When we got to the Lionettes [Orange Lionetes from Orange, CA, 1964-1967] we were in a small community so we were the biggest thing in town. There were no major league or pro teams, this type of thing and there was a large population of older people. It was a retirement type of community and boy I’m telling you, we had about 1200-1500 people a night and on real big dates, close to 3,000. That was back in the early 60s.

AD: How did that change? Did it seem to get progressively more popular?

SB: Game visibility, I think when college sports really hit the scene in the 1970s, with scholarships and opportunities for women and television. A few select games were broadcast here and there bringing about a lot of visibility and options. Before girls weren’t going to make a career out of athletics. But now, not only do they play, but they are administrators. And they are finding the value in these types of experiences.

AD: As you mentioned you lived a charmed experience, did you face any blatant discrimination as a woman?
SB: Not that I was aware of. I guess that is maybe my personality. I accepted whatever was told this is what we do, this is what we have. I made do, and that was fine. Maybe it was the way I was raised, but I was okay with it.

AD: Historically, in the 1950s with the McCarthy era and this consensus thinking of everyone has to be the same, you can’t be different or you’re considered to be wrong. How did that relate to your experience as a woman in softball or in sports?

SB: Well, if it was there I wasn’t aware of it because I always had the support of my family, with in restraints of course, but to express myself in a positive way regardless.

AD: Was that the same in the 1960s?

SB: I really can’t at this point relate a time period. The only social stigma I think that I felt was when I got into my junior and senior year of high school [1964-1965]. I was so unique within the social structure of the kids that I hung around with, I didn’t want to be separated out; I didn’t want to be different. I wanted to be one of the group. It got to the point where I put the brakes on. And it wasn’t until I went on to college that I realized the drive. In school I was that way, but outside of school when I played on the Lionettes and the Gold Sox and so on, I was able to be that free spirit. So I wasn’t totally stifled. On weekends and during the summer I could be myself and literally go for it. Which was different than in high school. That is a major change now. Kids don’t have those stigmas, it is very prestigious to be on a championship team.

AD: When do you think that change occurred?
SB: I think it started in the late 70s.

AD: *When Title IX was being implemented do you think?*

SB: Yes, I think so. I think the legislation was there, but you know you can legislate all kinds of things, and it doesn’t happen until your peers, your parents, and the philosophies of leaders change.

AD: *Did you notice any major uniform differences?*

SB: Not really, no. When we started, we wore very practical uniforms that we made for movement and were very attractive. The materials at that time, we didn’t have the nylon polyesters and stuff like they do today... but we had some satin and I can remember it used to be so hot playing in the summer in Connecticut. We had these red satin uniforms and they weighed fifty pounds it felt like, but we looked good.

AD: *Do you think that the status of the sport and women in the sport has increased since the time you played?*

SB: Oh I know it has. As you say, it is being more accepted. It is no longer a carnival atmosphere. They are being validated by the kinds of things that they do on the field. And parents realize that not only do the boys have the opportunity, but the girls do too, and both parents are very proud of that. Whereas before it was very, very unique that a woman or a girl was able to [play sports].
AD: In terms of coaching [at UCLA] did you see any major changes from 1975-1996? Just in terms of talent?

SB: No, because basically a game is a game. You are going to have the super athlete that comes down once every ten years, such as the Lisa Fernandezs, and right on down the line, the Dot Richardsons, the Sheila Cornells [members of '96 USA Gold Medal Olympic Team who were coached by Backus at UCLA]. So that’s going to always be there and people being able to execute the fundamentals, that’s there. Basically the game stayed the same.

AD: The glass ceiling is being raised, but how far it will be raised and if it will ever disappear will remain to be seen.

SB: Well, it will never disappear because I have always firmly believed, unfortunately if you step back and look at the world, it is a white male society that pulls the strings. Look at the struggles with the minorities.
5. Donna Lopiano—16 November 1999

Donna Lopiano played for the world renowned Raybestos Brakettes from 1963 to 1973. During her ten years playing with the ASA, Lopiano garnered All-American honors nine times. Lopiano was inducted into the National Softball Hall of Fame in 1983 and is also a member of the National Sports Hall of Fame. One of the most influential people in the world of women's sports, in 1992, Lopiano was named Executive Director of the Women's Sports Foundation. The Women's Sports Foundation was founded by Billie Jean King in 1974 to further the status of women in sport. WSF focuses on four main ways of increasing the status of women in sports: education, opportunity, advocacy, and recognition. Lopiano's contributions to the world of women's sports are immeasurable. She is one of the top advocates for women at the national and international level. Her passion for furthering the status of women in sports is virtually unmatched.

AD: What were people's responses to you at a time when women were not as involved in athletics as they are today?

DL: Obviously when I was growing up, any girl who played sports was called a tomboy, and it was a derisive term. Fortunately my family supported playing and didn’t see anything wrong with it and I didn’t think anything was wrong with it either. Usually insecure people ridicule you and secure people accept you and that’s all there was to it.

AD: One of the theories that I am looking at is showing how the fact that historically women have been suppressed in a way and not allowed in athletics because people
realized the positive effects of sports and that they ultimately lead to success later in life. Do you have any comments on that?

DL: Oh there is no question that sport is how our culture has taught boys for many years how to pursue excellence, how to put teams together, it’s a laboratory for getting something done. Everything I learned in sport I still use today. There is no question that those experiences help you later in life.

AD: What changes did you notice during the time you played?

DL: [There were] probably no changes during the time that I was playing. I stopped playing in 1972, a couple of years before Title IX really kicked in. After I stopped playing Title IX really only affected college and high school sports, which is why I make that statement. Although pro-sports were going on in the mid-70s, there wasn’t enough of a cultural change to change in any way what the attitude of women in sports was in that period. The biggest changes came in the late 70s....I was fortunate that I played on a softball team that had a tremendous following, Raybestos Brakettes, which was in a very small town. We averaged 3000-5000 people a day; we just were atypical. We were the best followed team in the United States and the best sponsored team in the United States, so I had an experience that was probably very different than a lot of other athletes of my time.

AD: What effect do you think Title IX had on softball?

DL: Obviously, the best players moved from open amateur sport, as the only place to play, to being on college athletic scholarships and also playing an open amateur sport and
professional sport. Today there is a women’s pro league, there are athletic scholarships available at the college level, and there are plenty of summer participation opportunities. There is no comparison to what it was like in the 1960s, where very few women had the chance to play at a very high level and you had to be near a town where a corporate league sponsored team that probably got its origins as an industrial league.

AD: When was the Women’s Sports Foundation founded? How did you get involved?

DL: In 1974 by Billie Jean King. I was a former trustee and was asked to be the Executive Director when a previous trustee left. As a trustee I was a member of the Board of Directors, the group with the judiciary responsibilities for the non-profits.
Appendix 1: Initial Letter

I sent initial letter to fifty players that I chose from “Legends” roster

Amy Doyle
Address
City, State, Zip

Interviewee
Address
City, State Zip

Dear Ms. --------,

Hello. My name is Amy Doyle. I'm a student at Ball State University, in Muncie, Indiana. I am writing to you to ask your help for a school project that I'm writing about women's softball. As a pioneer in the sport, you have played an important role in shaping the world of softball into what it is today. The time has come for stories such as yours to be told.

As a member of the Honors College at Ball State University in Muncie, IN, one of my graduation requirements is the completion of a Senior Honors Thesis. It is my intent to complete an oral history entitled "A Social History of Women's Softball," and I am looking for people like you who might be willing to share your memories and experiences.

Two of my main passions in life are the game of softball and the study of history. These two arenas have been integral in shaping me into the person I am today. My passion for American History intertwined with my passion for softball and equality in and off the field has brought me here today, writing to you, asking you to tell your story, one that has been waiting to be told for far too long.

My thesis, "A Social History of Women's Softball," will consist of a compilation of interviews of women who have centered much of their lives around the game of softball. Essentially, I am attempting to show how the status of women has changed in the years ranging from the Post-World War II era, to the passage of Title IX, to the present day. I plan to do this by illustrating how women's involvement in the game of softball has changed during this same time. It is my intention that the completed product will be an oral history of women's softball; in other words it will be a complete history of women's softball from the mouths of those who actually played the game.

My success on the playing field and in the classroom has enabled me to write my thesis from a scholar's as well as an athlete's perspective. I am an honor's student at Ball State, majoring in Social Studies education and History. On the field, I have twice earned First-Team All-Conference accolades as a member of the Division I, Mid-American Conference as well as being selected twice as a GTE Academic All-American (a first in Ball State University's history) in 1998 and 1999. I was also selected as Ball State's
NCAA Woman of the Year in 1999. Finally, in December of 1998, I was drafted by the Tampa Bay Firestix to play in the newly formed Women's Professional Fastpitch League (another Ball State first).

I believe that a glass ceiling has existed in the United States that has allowed many great women athletes slip through the cracks and be forgotten. It is my belief that without the contributions to the sport from women such as yourself, the game of softball would have never gained the respect that is gradually gaining today. Every young girl loving the game today has women such as you to thank. For this reason, I feel that it is important that these stories finally be told.

If you are interested in being involved please send the enclosed postcard back to me with your response as soon as possible. Please include your full name, email address if you have one, phone number, and the best time of day to call. Secondly, if you have any questions for me, please do not hesitate to contact me at the above address, at 765-284-2083, or feel free to email me at takaflynlp@aol.com. The best time to reach me by phone is any day after 4pm, with the exception of Wednesdays, which I am only available from 4-6:30. Finally, if you know of anyone else that would be a helpful source, please write their name and how I can reach them on the postcard as well. Thanks a lot, I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Amy M. Doyle

Encl//postcard

POSTCARD:

DIAMONDS ARE A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND!

☐ I am interested in participating.

Name_____________Email_____________
Address_____________Phone #: ( )________
Best Time to Contact: __________________________

☐ Sorry, I am not interested.
Appendix 2: Follow-Up Letter:

I sent this letter to those who responded to the initial letter.

Amy Doyle  
Address  
City, State  Zip

Interviewee  
Address  
City, State  Zip

Dear Ms. --------,

Hello again! I recently received your response expressing an interest in helping me with my thesis. I have received a great response from women such as yourself who are just as interested, which makes me very excited to begin the actual interview process.

As I said in my initial letter, I am attempting to show how the status of women has changed in general from the Pre-World War II Era to the present. I intend to show how these changes have taken place through a study of the involvement of women in softball. I have broken this time period down into a few main areas. These include: 1929-1941 (Great Depression Era); 1945-1950 (Post-World War II Era); The 1950s (Consensus thinking—anything different was wrong); 1963-1972 (Passage of Title IX—prohibited gender discrimination in publicly funded institutions); 1972-Present (U.S. gold in softball).

As I mentioned before, I have had a number of responses, ranging from the 1930s all the way up to today. One interesting little-known tid-bit that I discovered in my research and thought you might find interesting is the story of Virne Beatrice "Jackie" Mitchell. Sixteen-year-old Jackie was the first women in baseball to ever sign a minor league contract that she signed in 1931 with the Double-A Chattanooga Lookouts. In April of 1931, the Lookouts played the NewYork Yankees in an exhibition game. As the starting pitcher, Jackie did more than hold her own against the big names of Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, and Tony Lazzerri (the best second baseman in baseball at the time). Astoundingly, or not so depending on your point of view, she sat all three men down in that order. One...Two...Three...the 130-pound teenager struck them out. Within a few days of this feat, Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the commissioner of baseball, tore up her contract with the Lookouts claiming that "baseball was too strenuous to be played by women" (adapted from Nike is a Goddess: The History of Women in Sports edited by Lissa Smith).

At any rate, that is just a side-note that I thought you might enjoy. I hope this letter gives you somewhat of an idea of what I am attempting to do. I have enclosed a list of the questions that I would like to focus on. A few logistical things, I expect the interview to
last no more than an hour, that should give us enough time to chat. Secondly, I would like to tape-record our interview. If this is a problem, please let me know. Upon the completion of the interview I plan to send you a form giving me permission to tape record the interview and also to use your interview in my thesis in the event that it be published—cross your fingers! I will be in contact with you within the next week or so to arrange a time for the interview. Thanks again for your help and I look forward talking with you soon.

Please take a look below at a list of potential questions so that you know what to expect. Thanks again!

Sincerely,

Amy Doyle

Things to consider:

1. Background information such as who you played for, when you played, and for how long.
2. How did you get involved in softball? Who taught you how to play—brother, father, mother, friend?
3. What are you best and worst memory of playing softball?
4. What were people’s responses to you playing a sport? Accepting? Ridiculing?
5. What were the common stereotypes of women in sport when you played?
6. What did you gain from playing softball? Did that experience help you later in life?
7. What changes, if any, can you recall between the years in which you played? When did you notice the biggest changes?
8. What were the uniforms like? Do you think there is a connection between the uniforms and peoples’ attitudes about the sport?
9. How popular was the sport when you played? Did you have a good audience? Do you remember times when there were more fans than others?
10. How have the rules changed since you played? Does this say anything about the sport in general? For example, at a time, women were only allowed to play half-court basketball. Can you remember any major changes of this sort?
11. What effect do you believe Title IX (1972) had on women’s softball?
12. How would you describe the status of women’s softball today? How does it compare to when you played?
13. When do you think the status of women in softball began to change?
14. How does your experience fit into the major time frames that I mentioned in my letter? How do you think that reflects the attitudes at that particular time?
15. How do you see women’s softball in the future? More or less popular?
16. In my experience indoor women’s sports have been and continue to be more popular than women’s outdoor sports such as softball and field hockey—with the exception of soccer of course! Do you agree or disagree? If you agree, why do you think that is?
In 1939, the Arizona Cantaloupe Queens, made up of all-stars from the state, played in New York’s Madison Square Garden.

Courtesy of Alita Mecey
Appendix 3-A

September 20, 1999

Dr. Amy,

I felt like a celebrity in receiving and reading your nice letter regarding women's softball. I'm sure you are familiar with a recent book written by Mary L. Littlewood, "The Path to the Gold", an historical look at women's fastpitch in the United States. She lives in Phoenix and was formerly head women's softball coach at Arizona State for 19 years. It is a real nice book.

I felt honored to even have my picture in with an early team I played with at the beginning of my softball playing, known as the PBSW Ramblers. I was only about 13 yrs. of age at that time and later traveled with them to the Chicago World's Championship at Wrigley Field and on to the Madison Square Garden where we played. The next year, 1939, I traveled with the Arizona Cantaloupe Queens team which was made up of all-stars from the State. We also played at Madison Square Garden. I never considered myself as one of the "greats" because I was just a substitute pitcher then after one year of school at Arizona State University, I transferred to Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. My softball playing days more or less ended at that time. But some of my fellow players became Hall of Famers, such as Margie Law, Amy Peralts both of whom I went to high school with and others I started out with. In those days, softball, tennis and swimming were the main activities in the area.

I regret I don't have any more information to share with you but I appreciate your kind letter and admire all of your outstanding achievements. Good Luck!

Sincerely,

Margaret Mills

Letter from Margaret Mills, pictured with the Cantaloupe Queens. Explains some her softball experiences as a young player.
The Cantaloupe Queens in 1999. The line-up is the same as in the advertisement 1939, except Rose Mofford, the Ex-Governor of Arizona, is not pictured in current photograph.
The Rockford Peaches in 1945, two years after the All-American Girls Baseball League was established. The Peaches were crowned AAGBL champions in 1945, 1948, 1949, and 1950. The AAGBL disbanded in 1954.
DOROTHY HARRELL
shortstop

BATTING RECORD

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One of the original Rockford Peaches, “Snookie” was an outstanding shortstop as well as a huge threat at the plate. An All-Star team member for 4 years, she led her team in RBI’s and RBIs. During the 1951 season she played semi-pro ball, returning to the AAGPBL for one last season. She also played under the last name of Doyle.

AAGBL baseball card featuring “Snookie” Doyle.
The picture was taken in 1945.

DOROTHY “SNOOKIE” HARRELL DOYLE
Shortstop - Rockford Peaches

Dorothy “Snookie” Harrell Doyle played for the Rockford Peaches from 1944-1950 and again in 1952. She was selected as a member of the All-Star Team in 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, and again in 1952.

Courtesy of Dorothy “Snookie” Harrell Doyle
Enjoy America's Newest Sports Thrill!

TONIGHT 8:00 SEE THE OPENING GAME
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at HORLICK FIELD

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ADMISSION $0.74
CHILDREN $0.25
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ALL AMERICAN GIRLS PROFESSIONAL BALL LEAGUE

SAVE THIS SCHEDULE OF HOME GAMES IN RACINE

MAY 23, 24, 25, 26 — ROCKFORD
MAY 30 — KENOSHA
JUNE 5, 6, 7, 8 — SOUTH BEND
JUNE 9, 10, 11 — GRAND RAPIDS
JUNE 17, 18, 19 — KENOSHA
JUNE 24, 25, 26 — FORT WAYNE
JULY 4, 5, 6 — KENOSHA
JULY 7, 8, 9 — SOUTH BEND
JULY 14, 15, 16 — GRAND RAPIDS
JULY 25, 26, 27, 28 — FORT WAYNE
JULY 29, 31, AUG. 1 — ROCKFORD
AUGUST 10, 11, 12 — GRAND RAPIDS
AUGUST 13, 14 — FORT WAYNE
AUGUST 15, 16, 17 — SOUTH BEND
AUGUST 26, 27 — KENOSHA
AUGUST 29, 30, 31 — ROCKFORD

BACK THE BELLES!

August 11, 1999

Amy M. Doyle
3114 W. Devon
Muncie, IN 47304

Dear Ms. Doyle:

Congratulations! The Undergraduate Student Grant Committee approved your proposal! Your award is in the amount of $200.00 and is to be used toward supplies associated with your project. Once you have accepted the award, we will set up an account for your use in the History Department for your grant--this process normally takes 2-3 weeks. You will then be notified of the account number and expenditure guidelines.

A condition of the award is that in the event any intellectual property is developed from the project (such as patentable inventions or copyrightable works) it is necessary for these to be disclosed to the University Patent & Copyright Committee through the Office of Academic Research & Sponsored Programs.

Your acceptance of this award will be acknowledged by signing and returning the enclosed copy of this letter to the Office of Academic Research & Sponsored Programs at your earliest convenience. A final report on the project is required, and must be submitted to the Office of Academic Research & Sponsored Programs on or before May 7, 1999. Final report format information is enclosed.

On behalf of the Undergraduate Grant Committee, I extend our best wishes for continued success in your research and creative endeavors.

Sincerely,

Linda D. Keys, Ph.D.
Associate Director, and
ex officio member, Undergraduate Grant Committee

LDK/mmb

pc: John Barber
    Richard Aquila

Enclosure: Final Report Format

Acceptance of Award:

Amy M. Doyle 8/14/99

Please return to Monica Bauer in the Office of Academic Research & Sponsored Programs
Bibliography

A. Books


B. Oral History Interviews:

1. Those Quoted in Thesis:

Backus, Sharon. Telephone interview. By Amy M. Doyle. 6 Nov. 1999

Dobson, Margaret. Telephone interview. ---. 7 Nov. 1999.

Harrell Doyle, Dorothy. Telephone interview. ---. 7 Nov. 1999.

Harris, Billie. Telephone interview. ---. 11 Nov. 1999.


2. Additional Oral Interviews:


Fitzwater, Carolyn. Telephone interview. ---. 18 Nov. 1999.

Kalliam, Diane. Telephone interview. ---. 9 Nov. 1999.

Lang, Margie. Telephone interview. ---. 7 Nov. 1999.


Sears, Ruth. Telephone interview. ---. 8 Nov. 1999.