Sue's on First

Lessons learned from the oral histories of women baseball players

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

The girls who played in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League of the 1940s and 1950s are often credited as pioneers whose accomplishments continue to have far-reaching effects for women. The purpose of this project is to bring new relevance to women's baseball. The current era of professional baseball has been challenged by conservative fans as lacking the strategy, the respectability, and the significance of earlier periods. I propose that by applying an understanding of the history of the AAGPBL to Major League Baseball today, the spirit of the game can be revived. The issues highlighted in this paper as a springboard for considering men's and women's baseball include fan relations, player attitude, and team organization, which are discussed within a framework of historical literature, scholarly journals, scrapbooks, and personal interviews.
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Introduction: Baseball and Change

As a reflection of American culture, baseball is anything but static. Subject to the whims of a fickle and evolving society, the game's flexibility guarantees its staying power; as long as it caters to the fans and maintains the spirit of the game, baseball will survive.

With this built-in safety mechanism, it may be surprising that baseball is currently wrestling to balance the demands of business with the demands of entertainment, all while honoring the history of the game. These various pressures work together to provoke a wide spectrum of fan response to changes in the structure and operation of the game, from purists yielding to nostalgia and resisting all adjustments to modernists conceding to practicality and supporting informed modifications. Everyone wants the best for baseball, but often the short-term effects blur the long-term realities.

This struggle between tradition and change goes back to the very beginnings of professional baseball, with one of the earliest debates concerning the fly rule. Before 1865, a batter was out if the ball was caught on the fly or after one bounce. A difference of opinion arose because some players wanted to change the rule so that an out was recorded only if the ball was caught before it touched the ground.

By 1860, a mere fifteen years after the first club was organized and the first set of rules written, the baseball fraternity had produced two rival groups... Those who advocated the fly game also placed increased emphasis on skill, on a connection between manliness and the exercise of acquired baseball-playing skill, on practice, discipline, and match-game victories; in short, on the game itself. These reformers, or "modernizers," found opponents in those players and club members who did not separate the game from its matrix of social and club activities, who liked the game for its "exercise" and "fraternity" as much for its technical skill and match victories. These "traditionalists" predominated in the fraternity until the mid-1860s, when they were decisively defeated on the fly rule, which was in any event more a symptom than the substance of the change they were resisting.¹

These two camps of baseball theory still exist today, and the lack of consensus between tradition and innovation continues to fuel debates 150 years later. The gamut of recent modifications to the game are no less controversial.

Many of the “drastic institutional changes of the 1990s” have been accused of undermining rather than bolstering the appeal of baseball and alienating sincere fans. For example, the designated hitter rule, adopted by the American League in 1973, inflates scores and deflates strategy. The extended play-off system and the wildcard prolong the season and dilute the importance of late- and post-season games, resulting in watered-down competition and fan indifference. Soaring budgets of big market clubs lead to escalating salaries and put some teams out of contention. The advent of free agency and the resulting rotation of players between teams shows a lack of loyalty among players and a continuous upheaval of team identity.

Despite the temptation to mark these changes as the sole cause of baseball woes, it is important to recognize that “... the true tradition of baseball is change.” In fact, more subtle changes have been occurring continuously throughout the history of baseball, as discussed by Tim Wiles, director of research at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum Library.

Nobody’s hit over .400 for a single season since 1941 and a big, big reason for it, if you look at the history of baseball, is that gloves are almost twice as big today as they were in 1941. Nobody really complains about that, and yet it makes it very difficult to compare today’s hitters to the hitters pre-1941. You know, if you’re really looking, you can find other things in baseball history that have changed enough to make things into almost two separate eras. In 1920 they outlawed the spitball and all sorts of other... freak deliveries. They still happen, but they happen a lot less and that really changed the game when that happened. But you don’t hear people today going, “Yeah, I wish they had never outlawed the spitball in 1920.” We can’t tell what’s going to change in the future, but I think what we need to do with all of these changes is be aware of them so that we don’t look at Barry Bond’s or Mark McGuire’s 70- and 73-homerun seasons and say they were better than Babe Ruth. They were very, very good at what they did, as was Babe Ruth, as was Roger Maris, and all of those guys did it under different conditions. And I think if you’re aware of those conditional changes, then you can have a real good discussion and knowledge of baseball history. I do think that it’s naive to say that the only changes in history have happened in the last five years; they’re just changes of a different nature than earlier changes.

Wiles goes on to say that the recent changes will likely not be reversed, an assertion that suggests two options: either additional changes need to be instituted in order to revive the essence of baseball or the game of baseball is given time to adjust to and possibly benefit from these changes.

The first option, although proactive, may initiate a self-defeating cycle of continuously trying to one-up change. The second option, as supported by claims that "... baseball is, above all else, resilient," and is supported by recent examples of baseball balancing itself and developing new facets: pitchers have gotten stronger and are better able to counteract inflated offensive bouts, ballparks are again being built with the hometown character of baseball in mind, and shifting team abilities have created new rivalries that keep baseball fresh and interesting.

Yet the fact that I am writing this paper at all implies that I am not content to wait for baseball to come to its senses. At the same time, I am not prepared to offer extensive concrete policy and organizational changes that will restore baseball to its former glory. Instead, this paper will investigate the intangible qualities of baseball and suggest how the spirit of the game can be promoted within the game’s existing infrastructure.

And this issue will be discussed within the backdrop of a short era of baseball history: women’s professional baseball. The 1940s and 1950s fostered a unique social atmosphere, one in which girls had the opportunity to make sports a career. Every year, as girls’ baseball thrived during and after World War II, adjustments were made to maintain the game’s success. The evolution of the women’s game is a microcosm of men’s baseball history and its tradition of change. Although the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League ended in 1953, this paper asserts that women’s baseball still has relevance today.

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The value of the women’s game is in the intangibles: their love of the game, their willingness to learn, their focus to win, their team spirit, their absolute dedication, their unflagging loyalty, and their tremendous appreciation of the opportunity to play. Major League Baseball has a harder time displaying these qualities, because the scale of the league downplays such subtle features of the game. The trick, then, is to foster these subtleties that make the game great via the concrete aspects of the game: salaries, trades, playoff structure, farm systems, money use, and owner involvement.

As a fledgling league, the AAGPBL had the benefit of looking to men’s professional baseball as a guide, which at the time had been well-established in America for over 60 years, and improve upon the established game, because “...much can be learned from the long experience of professional baseball.” This humility and recognition that baseball’s success rests on its history was crucial to the development of the women’s professional league. I believe that it is time to turn the tables and see what the men could learn from the women.

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5 AAGPBL Mimeograph (17 February 1943). BHOF collection.
Motivation for Studying Women’s Baseball as an Avenue for Change

Baseball is played at its best when it embraces spirit and precision, grace and commitment. These androgynous qualities of the game defy the commonly-held conception that baseball is naturally, properly, and exclusively a male-dominated sport. Baseball is a venue in which women, too, have excelled, albeit with unexpected and previously unrecognized talent and ability. It is a game that alternates between individual and team play; it fosters independence while encouraging mutual support, two manifestations of women’s character that resurfaced most recently during the feminist movement of the 1960s.

The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was one of the many institutions that helped redefine the role of the American woman. At such a significant turning point in America’s past, the overall importance of these women is rarely debated. The importance of these women within the context of baseball, however, is muted at best. Women baseball players are relegated a special place in our history and our hearts: they are revered as path-blazing pioneers, as precedent-setting exceptions. At the same time, however, the honor and admiration credited to them is done so mostly within the context of women’s history, and the value of their accomplishments is rarely extrapolated to include baseball as a whole. It is time this limited recognition be rectified. Tim Wiles understands that the history of women baseball players has been sidelined.

Like the Negro Leagues, women’s baseball was put aside in a separate part of baseball history. We can’t change the fact that it happened, but we can learn from it. To ignore that part of baseball history would be a big mistake; it reveals what our attitudes toward women were in the 1940’s and 50’s. It throws light on how we got to where we are today.

It also shows us that, despite all of the progress that has been achieved over the last 50 years, we still have a long way to go.
The first thing one might notice when researching women's baseball is that early writers of the sport were amazed by the girls' ability. Their skill, coupled with their femininity, created an atmosphere of wonderment. Newspaper and magazine articles from the early years of the league are rarely short on praise, but they lack a sense of sincerity. Men, the predominant authors of newspaper and magazine articles covering the league at the time, credited the women with exceptional talent, but sometimes within a circus-atmosphere of intrigue and spectacle. Headlines such as *Darlings of the Diamond* and *Belles of the Ball Game* show that the girls' feminine traits often trumped their baseball skill. Content was distracting and irrelevant at best.

The South Bend Blue Sox were in a slump. The reason was obvious. As they say in Brooklyn, "them baserunners was stealin' the pants off a the catcher." Only they don't say things like that in South Bend because the Blue Sox play in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. Bonnie Baker, the catcher, doesn't even wear pants. She wears regulation spiked shoes, knee length stockings, an abbreviated dress cut ballet fashion, a pert blue cap, and a—well, on Walker Cooper of the Giants you would call it a chest protector.

Chet Grant, the former Notre Dame backfield coach who manages the Blue Sox, went into a huddle with Bonnie. They decided the trouble was not in Bonnie's arm—she really rifled the ball down to second. Maybe the opposition was stealing the pitch-out sign?

Bonnie squatted behind the plate and Chet trotted to the first base coaching line. Bonnie wagged two fingers under her glove. Detective Grant promptly solved the Mystery of the Stolen Bases.

"Elementary, my dear Bonnie," Chet explained. "You'll have to tone down your nail polish."

Bonnie examined her manicure. The smart mahogany shade glistened in the sunlight. Bonnie wanted to know what was wrong with her taste in nail polish. She reminded Mr. Grant that, after all, she made a pretty good living as a model and a style consultant during the Winter months. What was baseball coming to when the managers started to second guess Helena Rubinstein's color charts?

This article was written during an era that was just beginning to acknowledge women's potential to contribute to baseball and society at large, so to judge it outside the context of these times would be inappropriate. Instead, it is offered as a benchmark to compare later coverage of the league.

Jane Moffet, who played in the AAGPBL from 1949 to 1952, experienced the changing attitude of men during her tenure in the league: "The time that we were playing, we were well-respected by the men. Once they got to see the game and they found out that it was really

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6 William Cullen Fay, *Bonnie's the Belle of the Ball Game*. Barbara Liebrich scrapbook, BHOF collection.
competitive and people knew what they were doing, then they began to accept us.” Sportswriters soon recognized that the girls could play, and coverage of the games began to mirror that of Major League Baseball.

The peppery Peoria, Ill., Redwings, playing flawless defensive ball behind the cagey pitching of AnnaBelle Lee, a trim little southpaw, whipped the Fort Wayne, Ind., Daisies 16-6 before a shivering crowd at Shaw Stadium last night to take a 4-3 edge over their All-American Girls Baseball League rivals in their spring tour of southern cities.

It was the only one-sided game that has been played in the entire series between the two speedy, splendidly drilled teams, but the crowd liked the hefty hitting, fast base running and flashes of scintillating defensive play.7

Literature and scholarship on the league today is likewise more objective and less sexist, but it still struggles to convince readers that women’s baseball was legitimate, in large part because the majority, if not all, of the recent, post-league literature about women’s baseball has been written by women. This gender bias implies that women’s baseball is not of interest or value to men, that only women can appreciate the women’s game.

In fact, when asked what men playing baseball professionally today could learn from the women of the AAGPBL, overwhelmingly the women I interviewed scoffed at the suggestion. Beans Risinger asserted that the men “wouldn’t want to learn.” Helen Hannah Campbell labeled the men as “hard-headed and self-impressed.” Misconceptions on both sides need to be corrected.

The intent of this paper is to celebrate the women who have been a part of baseball history because of their right and natural expression of baseball aptitude. Rather than limiting the stories of the AAGPBL to a twelve year era of female standouts, this paper attempts to resurrect these stories and show their continued relevance to baseball today. There is something to be learned from the women of the AAGPBL, something that could potentially revitalize a

7 Gene Thompson. *Flashy Fielding and Heavy Hitting Mark Well-Played Game*. Vivian Kellogg scrapbook, BHOF collection.
game whose integrity and value is currently being questioned. This paper aims to highlight the most revolutionary of the women’s contributions as potential reinforcements of the positive aspects of Major League Baseball.
A Brief History of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League

The escalating involvement of America in World War II brought baseball under scrutiny. As players enlisted in the armed services and rationing made travel difficult, baseball’s value to the country came into question. The Office of War Information warned baseball club owners that the 1943 season might be cancelled.

Philip K. Wrigley, chewing gum magnate and owner of the Chicago Cubs, was aware of this threat to the continuation of baseball. As a safeguard, he came up with an innovative and unprecedented solution: a professional girls’ softball league. The social climate of the time supported women filling the niches left behind by men, and Wrigley probably figured “If Rosie the Riveter could keep wartime factories going, maybe Rosie the Right Fielder could do the same for baseball parks.”

Due to a lack of support from many of the other owners of Major League Baseball clubs, who believed that their towns could not support both a men’s and women’s game, Wrigley turned to smaller venues for his softball league, including Racine and Kenosha, Wisconsin; Rockford, Illinois; and South Bend, Indiana.

Smaller towns turned out to be the perfect sponsors of the girls’ game, since “Patriotism rather than profit was the official reason that Wrigley gave for establishing the All-American Girls Softball League.” These areas were central to the war effort, and offering recreation and entertainment to workers was deemed vital to maintaining the country’s morale.

Franklin D. Roosevelt also recognized the role that baseball could play in the war effort. In his Green Light Letter to Commissioner Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, Roosevelt encouraged him to not suspend the 1943 baseball season.

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I honestly feel that it would be best for the country to keep baseball going. There will be fewer people unemployed and everybody will work longer hours and harder than ever before. And that means that they ought to have a chance for recreation and for taking their minds off their work even more than before.

Although the 1943 baseball season ended up not being cancelled, Wrigley was still doubtful of baseball’s ability to successfully entertain during the war years, due to the lowered quality of play that was developing as more and more players joined the armed services. He therefore went forward with the All-American Girls Softball League as a new form of recreation to “tide baseball over.”

To accommodate the women’s ability and familiarity with softball, as well as to make the game faster and more entertaining, the style of baseball played by the women in the AAGSL was a hybrid game of baseball and softball. The lengths of the basepaths and the distance from the mound to the plate were shorter than baseball field dimensions and the ball was larger than a regulation baseball. In the middle of the first year of operation, the name of the league was changed to the All-American Girls Baseball League to designate it from traditional softball, and throughout the history of the league the game began to approach baseball more and more.

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Fan Interaction and the Baseball Community

"You’re not having any trouble getting these girls to talk, are you?" Dolly White remarked to me while chomping on a celery stick. As a player in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (the name chosen by the former players as the league’s official designation) and current president of the AAGPBL Association, Dolly knows how much the women who played baseball in the 1940s and 1950s love to share stories with their fans.

The AAGPBL has a special following of fans. From young girls sitting in the bleachers during World War II to young girls sitting in the movie theaters 40 years later, the women’s league continues to captivate audiences long after the final pitch was thrown. This enduring support is a by-product of several unique situations surrounding the women’s league, including the novelty of the sport and the need of the girls to prove themselves, the special relationship the girls fostered with their fans and the wartime community, and the girls’ unending appreciation for the opportunity to play baseball.

Garnering fan support is a challenge for all professional sports, but it came even harder to the girls who played baseball in an era that rarely recognized women’s ability outside of conventional roles. The girls had to earn the respect and admiration of their spectators, especially men. Susan Johnson, an avid follower of the AAGPBL who grew up cheering for the Rockford Peaches, explains that “in the early years, fans were initially drawn to the park for the unusual spectacle, but they returned and developed a loyalty to the team, not because of the coiffures, but because of the class and the clout.”11 When the girls won over the skeptics, they got devoted fans in return.

Helen Hannah Campbell’s father was one such skeptic. Helen Hannah Campbell, a chaperone for the Muskegon Lassies from 1947 to 1951, tells of the first time she encouraged her father, a player in the Pacific Coast League, to see girls play baseball:

My father, when I first went back there and I told him about the league, he shook his head because his was a staunch old-timer as far as baseball players were concerned and he said, “Girls, they can’t play ball.” The girls out here in the winter time, those of them that lived in close proximity to Los Angeles, would get together as regularly as they could, if they were working in the bank during the week, you know, or whatever they happened to be doing. They’d try to get together over the weekends and have a pick-up team or they would play a little high school team or something in the area. I said to my dad, “Why don’t you go with me to these workouts, they’re going to be in Brookside Park at Pasadena?” He said, “What do I want to go and watch a bunch of girls play for?” And I said, “Just to see what I’m involved with back east.” . . . So I got him to go with me one day over there, over the weekend, and I said, “Now, you’ve gotta be easy on these girls because they know that you are a manager and that you will probably be pretty picky about what you’re going to call.” And it turned out that he was the only man that showed up out there, none of the other managers that used to come [showed] that day. So they said to me, “Helen, would your dad umpire for us, do you think?” and I said, “Well, I don’t know. I can go and ask him.” So I went and asked him and he said, “Well, I didn’t know we were going to stay for the whole game,” and I said, “They’ll only play three or four innings but they have to have someone to make command decisions for them.” So he said, “Yeah, I’ll umpire for them.” . . . So he called balls and strikes and we came home and I said, “What do you think?” and he said, “Well, I learned something today. I didn’t think I would ever live long enough to see a girl throw a curve ball.”

This initial skepticism was not uncommon. Some people, described as “horse-and-buggy cynics”12 would argue vehemently against the validity of the women’s game even years after its establishment, “preferring to keep the little women in the kitchen or playing a red-hot game of croquet out on the back lawn.”13 After seeing an AAGPBL game, however, even doubters had to admit that girls could play, and play well.

The loop is ten years old now, and plays before approximately a million people every year throughout the Midwest. The Blue Sox gals shoot for their third straight pennant this summer in a circuit that includes Muskegon, Kalamazoo, and Grand Rapids, Mich., Fort Wayne, Ind., and Rockford, Ill. Each club plays a season of 110 games.

Yet, somehow, girls’ baseball is still not accepted by too many as the “real thing.” Anyone affiliated with the AAGBBL is quick to point out, though, that they play BASEBALL—not softball! And there are fans—even men among ‘em—who are completely sold on the gals’ game.14

13Ibid.
The women are still winning over fans, long after their playing days have ended, largely due to the release in 1992 of the movie, *A League of Their Own*: "Millions more people have seen the movie about the League than ever saw the League itself, and the real All-Americans have a new generation of fans."\(^{15}\) The former players of the AAGPBL continue to respond to this wide spectrum of fans with unlimited poise and grace, attending card shows, minor league and exhibition games, and other public events that foster the continued fame of the league and initiate a resurgent fan base.

This enduring sincerity and care developed out of the unique relationship the players of the AAGPBL had with their fans. As young girls, often away from home for the first time, they lived in private homes during the playing season. Campbell remembered the care that the host families showed the players.

Most of the girls lived in pairs in these different community homes around the ballparks and the people that they lived with became surrogate mothers and fathers and would take care of them just like they would if they were their own children, and that was a nice feeling for those youngsters to be staying in homes like that . . . I know one of the little girls that I had on my club, she and her roommate would get to the place where they were housed and there would be notes on their pillows saying, "We know it's late at night but there are sandwiches in the refrigerator if you girls would like them."

Nor was it uncommon for a fan in the stands to offer to take the girls out for dinner after the game or for local civic groups to sponsor events in honor of the team. There was an intimacy and a sense of trust between the players and the fans. Audrey Haine Daniels, who played in the AAGPBL from 1944 to 1948 and again in 1951, remembered being close to one couple in particular.

All the fans were just great to us. They would invite us out for dinner and that. When I played for Rockford in 1951, there was an older couple that was very good to us. By that time I was married and had a little 18-month-old, and they would often baby-sit for me while I was out practicing, because my husband was working. Really and truly the fans were just super to all of us. I remember getting a fan letter from

one of the little girls, she was about seven or eight, you know, it was just so sweet, hoping that some day she’d be part of the league or at least be a batgirl.

Above all there was a feeling of mutual appreciation: the fans enjoyed the games as a recreational experience far removed from factory work, and the girls recognized that if it wasn’t for the support of their fans, they wouldn’t have the opportunity to play.

Professional ballplayers today could use a reminder that the fans are integral to the game. Dolly White targeted player indifference to their fans as a key issue that needed to be addressed in Major League Baseball.

Our fans were very important to us. And we were treated more like family. I think professional players today ignore their fans. We still have fans today that come to our reunions and everything. I don’t think the players today spend any time with their fans. I think a player that I will use as an example of being more like what I think professional players should be like, and that’s Cal Ripken, Jr. I’ve seen him stand after batting practice and all and sign autographs for kids for a long time, while most of the other ballplayers are going to go to the clubhouse and sit down and do whatever. But he spent the time with the fans. And that’s what we did and that’s what we do now. We just are glad somebody wants our autograph, so we’re glad to give it to them. I think they would do well to remember the fans in the stands are what made it able for them to get all that money.

Tim Wiles has worked with the former players on several occasional and has experienced their generosity firsthand. He understands the context of the women’s appreciation for their fans.

The women who played in the All-American League loved the game, and as women they were taking advantage of an opportunity that hasn’t existed prior to this time. They were very, very grateful to play. I think that there are a lot of professional and college players today including Major League Baseball players who aren’t aware of how much of a wonderful opportunity it is to play a sport for a living. So I think that the main thing I would say that Major League Baseball players can learn from the women’s league is, when I go out to an event where a women’s league player is appearing, say at a minor league game, [or] at a school, that woman universally has a smile on her face, is happy to be there, and stays there until every autograph has been signed and every kid or adult is happy and has had a chance to talk with her.

Developing a fan base is not only the responsibility of the players, however. Ticket prices and stadium atmosphere, factors controlled by owners and the front office, also contribute to attracting fans. White reasoned, “Today the price of going to a ballgame is so high. For a man to take his family . . . if he had to take his wife and two children to the ballgame, he’s
spending $100. And not many people can afford to do that many times.” This price inflation shows a marked departure from the “sixty-five-cent and twenty-five-cent juvenile admission” that were the norm when the league began in 1943.

The fundamental issue, therefore, is that all fans—rich and poor, young and old alike—have the ability to support their team from the stands. Charging outrageous prices is not the way for franchise owners to show appreciation for the fans that keep them in business, particularly when, as Wiles explained, high ticket prices mean that the character of the fan base is changed.

The large salaries mean that the price for fans to go to the game has sky-rocketed as well. Fans who are not employed in corporate America are not as welcome [in the ballpark] anymore. This leads to less knowledgeable fans that are going to the ballpark because it is the place to be seen. Ball clubs are shortsighted to encourage expensive seats because the novelty of new stadiums will wear off in a few years. High ticket prices also price kids and minorities out of the market. The interest in developing fans is missing.

An additional way to show fan appreciation is inherent in the ballparks themselves: atmosphere. The situation looked dire in the late 1980s and early 1990s as new, large, and impersonal stadiums began replacing the hometown parks that had welcomed fans for years; baseball was in desperate need of a downsizing. Wiles admits that such a refocus has been underway, as overgrown stadiums are replaced by entirely modern stadiums that balance atmosphere with convenience. Bob Costas explains how Camden Yards, “an old style park with modern-day conveniences” fulfills this need to renovate yet maintain fan appeal.

There was something alluring about this park, not because it presented some nostalgic homage to the past, but because it marked a return to the scale and feeling of intimacy in the game that had long been a big part of its appeal.

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18 Ibid.
The trend in stadiums is a good example of baseball righting itself by recognizing the fans as an integral part of the game and therefore making their comfort a priority.

A final way that Major League Baseball could enhance its fan network is through community involvement. The nature of the AAGPBL as a morale booster and a facility for bringing the community together during the trying times of World War II created a special relationship between the players and the community members. Aside from providing recreation for factory workers and others contributing to the war effort, the players had a role beyond the field as ambassadors of goodwill.

As a "non-profit, community enterprise [where] . . . All proceeds from the operation, if any, are devoted to worthy youth enterprises and recreation in the city" each AAGPBL team was an active, charitable contributor to its surrounding neighborhood. Community efforts went so far in the later years of the league to support the beginnings of a farm system for the AAGPBL, in which "junior girls' leagues will emulate the Belles by playing the same brand of baseball which was first devised by the All-American Girls Baseball League," and demonstrating the value of continuing baseball in the area.

Community involvement aimed "... to further the interests of young and old," thereby addressing the needs and attending to the interests of all fans. The AAGPBL made baseball a form of family entertainment and enrichment. And as is often the case, this community outreach was warmly received and reciprocated. Local establishments, including "Civic Clubs, Fraternal Organizations, Service Clubs and other organizations," eagerly contributed to the efforts of the AAGPBL by sponsoring additional events preceding the ballgame to make the evening a complete outing.

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19 Racine Belles 1947 Year Book, BHOF collection.
20 Racine Belles 1949 Year Book, BHOF collection.
21 Fort Wayne Daisies 1949 Official Program and Score Card, BHOF collection.
Without the fans, there would be no baseball. The current baseball situation suggests, however, that the fans are not important, that ensuring their enjoyment is not the foremost influence in front office decisions. Taking small steps, beginning with encouraging the players to pay attention to their fans, would lead to big changes and a return to the time when the stands were filled with educated fans who were emotionally and intellectually invested in the game. Community involvement would further this cause; as fans have the opportunity to see baseball players contributing to their local community, they are better able to discard misconceptions concerning player image and attitude.
Player Spirit and the Resulting Quality of Play

Unlike men playing today, the character of the girls who played in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was rarely questioned. Underlying this assumption of integrity was that because the girls were so appreciative of the opportunity to play baseball, they were not about to put their position at risk. Helen Hannah Campbell, as a chaperone of the league, was responsible for ensuring that the girls maintained a decorum on and off the field.

Most of them were willing to follow regulations, there’s always a wild-hair or two on a club like that, but they didn’t get out of line to the point that it was embarrassing. We had to tone a couple of them down from time to time, but if they wanted to go out after a game and have a hamburger and a beer, I’d usually go with them, because I had a car and I could transport them and see they got home all right. Not very many of them were wild, they were so eager to be able to do what they were supposed to do on the field the next day, that they didn’t want to jeopardize that future. They were anxious to stay in shape and to take their exercise and to eat properly and to get enough sleep and to behave themselves. They weren’t real rowdy; they were very conservative most of the time.

By no means, however, were the girls pushovers. Because they were so dedicated, they put their all into every game.

Even veteran baseball fans who have viewed the young women performers in the maiden year of the All-American Girls’ Softball League... admit that they’ve brought to ball games reminiscences of the old fiery spirit of competition that blazed when the Giants, Yankees, Tigers, Pirates, Orioles, and other historic battlers were in their belligerent prime.22

Often surprising their fans with their aggressive and emotional efforts on the field, the girls were far from delicate and docile, despite such suggestive team names as the Daisies and the Lassies. Instead, the girls continuously balanced their feminine image with their baseball prowess.

Meeting the expectations of dual roles was not uncommon for the girls, as can been seen from the following excerpt from a newspaper article about Audrey Wagner, who played for the Kenosha Comets from 1943 to 1949.

22 Herb Graffis. Belles of the Ball Game. Barbara Liebrich 1949 Tour scrapbook, BHOF collection
From babysitting to 1948 batting champion, and from premedical student in an Illinois college to All-American Girls Baseball League “Player of the Year”—that is the paradox which is 21-year-old Audrey Wagner of Bensenville, star outfielder of the Kenosha comets.

A sturdily-built brunette with sober brown eyes and a shy but friendly manner, Audrey admits with an unexpected blush that next to batting out home-runs her “specialty” is baking coconut cream pies.  

With such apparently divergent interests, it is little wonder that fans didn’t anticipate the ladies getting rough on the field. Parents did worry, however, that baseball and the spirited play would have ill-effects on their daughters’ demeanor, as the following story showed.

Mr. Cook, an avid baseball fan who had once played a little semipro ball himself, was all for the idea, but wanted his brown-eyed south-paw daughter to get her high school diploma before she took up the game as a profession. He and Mrs. Cox were a bit uncertain too, about the manners that might pervade a group of high spirited girls who would have the gumption to invade the domain of the male and in many cases steal the spotlight from the stronger (?) sex by their own brand of rough and tumble, hard-hitting antics on the diamond.  

The game certainly lived up to the Cook’s expectations. As pioneers of women’s baseball, the girls were anything but timid and acquiescing on the field and they cared about the game so much that emotions often ran high. Although not an everyday occurrence, the girls’ reactions to questionable calls by umpires offers a glimpse of their passion for baseball.

The baseball game between the Kalamazoo Lassies and the Muskegon Belles was moving along very ladylike. It was the third inning of a 0-0 game, the sun was shining brightly, and the stands were well filled.

The batter, a Muskegon girl, hit a slow roller to the infield. The Kalamazoo shortstop moved in, fielded it nicely and threw to first base. The first basemen caught the ball, put her left foot on the base, and the batter coming towards her was clearly out...

Then there was a collision. The first basemen dropped the ball, the umpire called the runner safe, and it wasn’t ladylike anymore...

“Don’t get the idea this is a sissy game,” admonishes Mitch Skupien, an ex-semi-pro who now manages the Lassies. “These kids are real ball players...”  

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A magazine cover at the time even chose to highlight a player-umpire quarrel. The caption reiterated the contrasting images espoused by the girls: "It’s a strike call about which Pat obviously wasn’t pleased, and we’ll bet she isn’t inviting the umpire to a taffy pull." A newspaper photograph attributed one confrontation to the spirited play of the girls.

Bronx Buzz—Sometimes the girls in the All-American Pro Ball league forget about their femininity if they think the umpire has fouled them up. In one of the games last week here against Racine, Dottie Naum, Comet catcher, explodes with a verbal attack on Umpire Dubis, debating his call of a strike when she figured it a ball. Millie Deegan, pitcher from Brooklyn, strides in to shower Dubis with her best "Bronx barrage," while Irene Hickson, Racine catcher, stares smugly at Naum’s screaming. The fans come out to Simmons field to see this excitement, typical of all games.

Fans appreciated that the players were so engaged in their games that they sometimes forgot to behave in a way that befitted a lady.

A major factor behind the spirit of the game, however, was the social climate in which and for which the games took place. Philip K. Wrigley, owner of the Chicago Cubs, was concerned that Major League Baseball may be suspended in 1943 due to World War II. Players were being drafted and materials were being sequestered for war use. As an innovative solution to keep the game going, Wrigley decided to begin a girls’ softball league.

We believe it is generally recognized and accepted that under war conditions any nation requires for its population more recreational and entertainment facilities than it does in times of peace, just as it requires greater production facilities, and more and harder work. Furthermore, just as these production facilities and work have to be changed to fit a wartime basis, so do recreational and entertainment facilities have to be changed. In short, neither recreation, entertainment, nor business can or should be conducted as usual during the war...

World War One showed to the world for the first time on a large scale what women could and did do, and World War Two is going to carry this even further. American women have taken a very definite place and have carried a very definite share of the load in the country’s progress, and in the fields of science, business and sports they are now also working in ever increasing numbers in the field of mass production, and adding to what they have always done for our Armed Forces in the nursing service, through the newly formed women’s branches of the Army, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines.

Americans, more than any other people, depend upon organized, competitive sports for their recreation need. By cheering their favorite players and teams, mingling with other fans and enjoying the excitement and color of various sports events they find an outlet for their pent-up energy and escape from their problems and troubles. Americans thrive on outdoor games and the crowds that attend them, and in war times this kind of entertainment becomes an actual necessity.

The foregoing facts have prompted the formation of the All-American Girls Softball League to furnish to a hard-working population additional healthful outdoor entertainment, without interfering in any way with the American war effort. By making use of existing facilities and readily available personnel, the League can be established on a basis that will reflect credit to the game of softball, and to the girls and women who participate in it. 28

This explanation for the formation of the league shows the strong sense of duty embraced by its originators, which was reflected in the girls who played the game. Many of the girls had family members and other loved ones overseas and were therefore emotionally invested in the war. They visited army hospitals and wrote letters to servicemen. They supported recruitment efforts and played exhibition games.

Interested spectators at the double header last night at Marsh Field, when the Muskegon Lassies and Kenosha Comets played in and out baseball, were 19 patients from Percy Jones Hospital, Battle Creek, and all expressed enthusiasm for the entertainment features of the game as they entered the Lassies bus for the return trip to their hospital quarters. 29

Fort Wayne Daisies chaperon Helen Rauner Harrington remembered a pre-game visit by her team and the Grand Rapids Chicks to the amputees ward at Percy Jones General Hospital.

"This is when I found just what those girls were made of," said Harrington. "They went through talking to the guys, asking where they were from and making other small talk, never letting them know any pity. The guys ate it up. At that time we were the same age as those fellows, and many of us had family or friends in the service."

"Visiting army camps and hospitals was a natural extension of the personal commitment many players felt to the troops." 30

The war effort lent a purpose to the game, and it produced a national focus rather than a desire for individual gain.

28 AAGPBL Mimeograph (17 February 1943), BHOF collection.
Despite Wrigley’s anticipation of a shut-down of men’s baseball, Major League Baseball continued during the war, in large part due to parallel arguments emphasizing baseball’s contribution to the war effort. Will Harridge, president of the American League from 1931 to 1958, supported the continuation of men’s baseball in 1942, and justified his feelings by calling on the game’s value in times of war: “Baseball may be approaching the finest opportunity for service to our country that the game has ever had, providing a recreational outlet for millions of fans who will be working harder than ever help achieve out common cause of victory.”

Furthermore, baseball was seen as an embodiment of the values being fought for in the war: “... the game portrayed itself as the essence of democracy—doing it in would be tantamount to subverting the ideals that made the nation great, the principles for which our boys were fighting.” As Bob Quinn, president of the Boston Braves from 1936 to 1945, said: “It is the more democratic of games, for the governor’s son may play alongside the son of humble parents and the only favoritism that either gets is what he earns by merit and playing.” Had Quinn only included women in his sentiments, he would have expressed the true essence of the equality of humans and the ability of all to have an equal opportunity to play, if not to go so far as to play alongside each other.

The situation the war created on the home front demanded spirit and purpose to endure. The women dealt with gasoline rationing, taking overnight bus trips to rival cities. Even men playing baseball at the time dealt with trying transportation situations. Phil Weintraub knew that the men were tough, and his attitude is very similar to the feelings espoused by many of the women players.

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32 Ibid, 35.
33 Ibid.
You loved the game so much you didn’t mind these things. I never objected to any of those things. It was a thrill just to be playing the game and be a part of it. You know the old saying, ‘In those days we’d have played for nothing and most of us did.’ Now you see all these guys with their injuries and sore arms and everything. Every time I pick up the paper somebody else is going out of the lineup. When we got hurt in those days, they said ‘stick it in the dirt.’ You were afraid to say you were hurt. You had an entirely different breed.  

The women were uncomplaining and tough, too. A newspaper article about Dorothy (Mickey) Maguire showed why she was nicknamed Iron Woman . . . nothing would keep her out of the game.

Her job is back of the plate . . . And in addition to her catching duties, Mickey is willing to add any sort of chore that will boom the game she loves to play. . . . Many fans criticized Mickey this year, although she has been playing and throwing better than at any time since she broke into the AAGL in 1943. They did not realize that Mickey was playing with a torn ligament, a bruised sacroiliac, a split finger, and a “strawberry” several inches long on one leg from sliding on a base stealing charge. Mickey is popular, however, with the majority of fans, who like her “fighting spirit.”

And it wasn’t just physical obstacles that Mickey surmounted.

Women in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League didn’t come much more competitive than Mickey Maguire. The gutsy catcher from Lagrange, Ohio, played her heart out in every game. When Maguire joined the league in 1943, her husband, Corporal Thomas J. Maguire, Jr., was stationed overseas. On June 9, 1944, Maguire took her place behind the plate as usual for her team, the Milwaukee Chicks. Although the Chicks lost to the Kenosha Comets 11-4, the next day’s newspapers didn’t dwell on the lopsided score. Instead, they reported that the game had featured “the most dramatic exhibition of courage shown in the girls loop in its short, one-season history.” Just moments before the first pitch, Maguire received word that her husband had been killed in the fighting in Italy. After making a quiet request that the crowd not be told, she put on her gear, took the field, and played ball.

No one would have blamed Mickey Maguire if she had asked for time off after learning of her husband’s death. The fact that she paid tribute to him by digging in her heels and catching a good game says a lot about her determination and strength.

Campbell recognized the girls’ determination and is disappointed by the lack of commitment in baseball today. She is especially offended by players who demand from others more than they are willing to give themselves.

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35 *Ordinary Injuries Do Not Stop 'Iron Woman' Maguire*. Donna Cook scrapbook, BHOF collection.
The attitude has changed during the last 60 years and the attitude of the kind of money that they can get and the things that they demand. You know, the girls were never in the position to do it on this great of scale, but by the same token the principle of the thing is there. And now, if somebody comes up with a hangnail in the third inning, why, he's taken out of the game and rushed to the hospital. Big deal. Those kids would play with broken fingers sometimes if they had to.

These anecdotes do not suggest that players in the Major Leagues should completely disregard their personal interests for the good of the team. Rather, they illustrate the magnificent dedication exhibited by the women, and show that team play overrode their individual needs; this attitude is crucial and should be foremost in the game of baseball.

Ultimately, a middle ground needs to be found that allows for valiant, self-sacrificing team play and reasonable attention to injuries, as Wiles explained:

The women's league players, like men players of the '40s and '50s, were a lot more likely to play through injuries. And I'm not sure that that's a good thing actually. Today's players get a lot of great medical care and maybe their injuries get fixed, whereas a player in the '40s and '50s, male or female, might just learn a different way, might adapt. If you had an arm, elbow, shoulder injury, you might start throwing different pitches or throwing with a different delivery. That's just one of those things where the eras have changed and you're not going to see it that way that it was anymore. But sometimes you get a major league baseball player who's, you know... there's one guy that I've been seeing on TV over the last week, he's not going to make opening day because of a personal problem. And they're not saying what it is. I don't know what that problem is either, but when I look at that and I think of both the men who played in the '40s and '50s and the women who played in the '40s and '50s, they were like, "I got a job to do. I'm going to go out and do it." I think a little bit of that is missing with today's players. I'd like to see it somewhere in the middle between the players of the '40s and '50s and the players of today, to where there was a little more sense of responsibility to the job, but also that they'd take their injuries seriously.

When you're on the field, the game and your team comes first. Because of this interest in contributing to the team, the girls of the AAGPBL played hard all the time. Many of the former players, in fact, are unimpressed with the work ethic, skill level, and stamina of Major League players.

To begin with, pitching today isn't like it used to be. Campbell's father didn't want to handle a pitcher unless he pitched the whole game, reasoning, "We're going to go play a game for nine innings, you're the pitcher, you stay out there on the mound the whole nine innings
regardless of whether it’s a no-hit game or you get your ears knocked down.” The women displayed this commitment to finish things out, as evidenced by a 17-inning game Beans Risinger once pitched. The newspaper account of the duel lauds her efforts.

When asked her opinion of MLB pitching today, Beans remarked indifferently, “Oh yeah, I guess it’s all right.”

In spite of personal stresses and strains, playing for the team was of utmost importance to the women, unlike today’s athletes, who need an attitude adjustment according to Jane Moffet.

And there wasn’t any such thing as someone being favored. Today I said to one coach, “If this player’s not doing what she should be doing, get her out of there, bench her.” She said, “She’ll quit.” I said, “Let her quit.” And that seems to be the attitude today of some athletes, that ‘I’m going to do what I want to do, and they don’t always look at, hey, you’re also affecting four others on the squad. It’s I, I, I, me, me, me, which is unfortunate.’

If players’ attitudes are not altruistic and progressive, there is no need to pander to them. Campbell, like many of the women players interviewed, mentioned the exorbitant salaries as one source of the self-serving nature of some ballplayers: “They cater to the players a lot more. And money seems to be no object at all. If a fella says, ‘I want $200,000 to play,’ why that’s what they give him.”

Which brings us to the most controversial topic in baseball today: salaries and the business of baseball.

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37 *The Grand Rapids Herald* (1 July 1949).
League Business and Organization

Baseball has been highly criticized for letting the demands of business take priority over the spirit of the game. Changes such as extending the play-off system and building larger stadiums follow in the footsteps of other professional, profit-guided sports such as basketball and football. The organization of the All-American Girls Baseball League, however, did not mirror Major League Baseball. It therefore has a lot to offer as far as innovative business ideas. This section highlights concrete ideas that could be implemented by Major League Baseball.

Of fundamental importance to the organization of the AAGPBL was that it was centrally controlled upon its inception. The athletes were therefore employed by the league rather than by individual clubs.

As the formation of the All-American Girl Softball League is prompted primarily by war conditions and to be in keeping with the war effort, the organization will be formed as a non-profit corporation to be controlled by a Board of Trustees, rather than by a Board of Directors and Officers; the Trustees to live up to everything that that name implies. The players will be signed by this non-profit corporation for all of the teams in the league. These personal service contracts, with an option to renew from year to year at a definite predetermined and agreed upon salary . . . if not exercised by the league leaves the player a completely free agent . . . 38

Wrigley, as initiator and main financial investor of the league, arranged for scouting, advertising, equipment, and personnel for each franchise.39 This centralization was crucial to successfully beginning the AAGPBL, because it allowed team owners to effectively cooperate and all work toward the improvement of the league.

The first responsibility of the league was to locate talented players. Softball was very popular in America in the mid-1900s, which made finding skilled athletes a relatively straightforward task, although girls with athletic experience in other sports were also considered.

38 AAGPBL Mimeograph (17 February 1943), BHOF collection.
The majority of players in the league are versatile athletes with winning histories in basketball, track, tennis, skating, golf, hockey, and bowling. Johnny Hamilton, transferred from scouting for the Cubs to hunting talent for the All-American League, maintains that at the rate the girls have been developing smarter baseball under expert tutelage this season, it won't be long before their successors come into the league with the baseball instinct that American boys seem to be born with.40

Despite the chauvinistic undertones of the above quotation, the existing talent of female athletes could not be denied, and the selection process reflected that of other credible sports.

The aim of the All-American Girls Softball League will be to follow the recognized professional sports principle of getting the very best obtainable players throughout the country and to stage the game in the best possible manner. The member clubs will be given an opportunity to select players for their teams in accordance with ability to make the League's playing truly competitive and interesting. In this way the teams will be adjusted from year to year, preventing the League from becoming lopsided.41

There was a range of ability, from girls who grew up playing pitch-and-catch with their brothers to amateur softball players. The hybrid game developed for the AAGPBL, which drew from both softball and baseball, was a good equalizer, as all of the girls had to adjust to new rules. Because the AAGPBL was centrally controlled, the owners were able to work together to enforce team parity using an allocation system, thereby enhancing competition within the league.

So effective is the unique allocation system employed by the All-American Girls Baseball League that as of Monday, June 28, the ten club circuit was enjoying one of the closest possible races in an unusual ten club setup. Peoria's Redwings have done the unusual by passing up both Grand Rapids and Rockford in the standings, but the amazing thing about the effectiveness of the allocation system is the spread of only 12 games between the top and bottom teams in the league.42

In order to aid in this allocation system, every player attended spring training at the same location.43

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40 Herb Graffis. *Belles of the Ball Game.* Barbara Liebrich scrapbook, BHOF collection.
41 Ibid.
The importance of this allocation system and owner cooperation to maintain balance and competition in the league is proven by the state of the league upon the demise of central control, which resulted in some teams becoming “perennial powerhouses, others chronic also-rans.”

During the league’s successful years, another crucial factor to the business and administration of the game was the manager, who was “qualified and experienced . . . with years of major and minor league baseball experience and know-how,” including Bill Allington, Max Carey, Dave Bancroft, and Jimmy Foxx. Male managers had to learn to respect the girls’ playing ability as well as learn new approaches to coaching.

You’ve got troubles? Listen, have you ever tried to manage a girls’ baseball team? . . .

The All-American League is the Little Big Horn of the managerial profession. Twenty-eight managers—17 of them former major-league stars—have resigned or quit since the league was organized six years ago. Obviously, there is not much future in managing a female ball club, but that's no indictment of the sport. It's testimonial.

“You’ve got to see those girls play to believe it,” admits a deposed manager. “They slide, steal bases, throw overhand and pitch curves—and the fans love it. That's why so many of us get fired—every city wants a winner, or else!”

The girls usually returned this respect. Helen Hannah Campbell explained the relationship between the manager and the girls.

Most of them got along fine with the manager. They realized the fact that most of those men had been playing professional ball themselves and they knew and understood baseball and the ethics and the tactics and the procedures, so they gave him the benefit of the doubt. Every now and then you’d find one that got a little too smart for her britches and thought that she knew more than the manager and they might have words and often she would be traded then, but most of them realized that in order to keep their jobs they should do the best they could everyday and come out with a winning attitude and try to play the best they could and to win for the manager regardless of some of the requests that he made from them. It might have seemed absurd to them, but he evidently had a reason for it, and sometimes he proved themselves. But as a whole, we didn't have too many squabbles at all in the league. We had a real nice glowing rapport with the managers.

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Campbell filled a unique position in the AAGPBL: the team chaperone, who was responsible for the “conditioning, first aid, uniforms and equipment, living and travel arrangements, general health, welfare and deportment” of the players. League regulations were extremely strict for the girls, many of whom were away from home for the first time. The presence of a chaperone was a comforting fact for many parents and players.

The chaperone, in addition to being the mediator between the male manager and the players, helped the girls transition to their new roles as professional baseball players. Whether the AAGPBL or the MLB, fans want upstanding heroes, too, not just rowdy sports figures with no sense of appropriate behavior. The image of players is crucial, as shown by the hostile reaction from fans in regards to the recent steroid accusations. Some players need guidance to appropriately handle their new stardom. Veteran players are natural mentors, and it is the responsibility of each team manager to ensure his team comes together and that every player is supported and gets the guidance he needs, including handling his money.

Opponents to the disparities in payroll (and therefore, many would argue, talent) would find the allocation system refreshing and balancing. Audrey Haine Daniels shares the lament of many baseball fans on this issue as she discusses what men could learn from women players.

They could learn a lot, because the game was everything to us, and it wasn’t the money, and that’s what it is in today’s game: the money. And it’s a shame because owners with lots of money today can buy the best players and players move from one team to another unlike in years when we played, the men . . . you could always tell what team a player was on because he had been on that team for years. Not today. You never know from one year to the next who’s playing where.

Another unique aspect of the league’s early days was that it was a non-profit organization. In addition to perhaps alleviating the stigma that baseball is big business that operates primarily to line owner pocketbooks, the nature of the non-profit organization meant

that each team made strong community ties and likewise were often well-supported by its hometown. In fact, the teams were entirely dependent on the support of their fans, a situation which made fan satisfaction a priority rather than making money, as shown in the following article:

The Kenosha Enterprises, Inc., civic organization for the support of recreational, cultural and educational endeavors in the city, urged the support of the membership and all Kenoshans today for the opener of the All-American Girls' Baseball '48 pennant race when the Comets meet the Racine Belles here Sunday afternoon at the Lake Front Stadium, and in the dedication game at Simmons Field on May 19, when they meet the Chicago Colleens.

In making the appeal to the local citizenry, the board of directors of the Enterprises are following the purposes for which the organization was founded. The Comets are one of many projects that has the support of the group.

The Enterprise membership is giving its whole hearted support with limited financial backing to the Comets with hope that this activity will have a much larger endorsement by the citizens of the community.

When a sports business recognizes that its fans are crucial to its continuation, only good can result.

Furthermore, because the AAGPBL was a non-profit establishment, the girls' salaries were not a sore issue with the fans. Players made from $45 to $85 dollars a week, which was about twice the average salary at the time. Many players were making more than their fathers made working in factories. Nevertheless, the women are quick to point out that money was not the focus of their game. Jane Moffet was critical of the driving force behind baseball today.

I think the amount of money that ballplayers are making is absolutely ludicrous. Today, money is the name of the game, baseball has become a business. It's no longer, gee you go out and you have a good time and you enjoy each other's companionship and you enjoy dealing with the public. Today it's a business and the owners are out to make money and they don't care how good you are. I think you're going to destroy the sport with what Rodriguez and what Jeter makes. Don't misunderstand me, I respect them as ballplayers, but I think back, my gosh, what DiMaggio made and Babe Ruth got, and they made baseball. These people make more in two innings than they made in a year.

Although many fans would advocate implementing payroll caps and controlling inflationary salaries, such anti-capitalistic ideas may not be necessary. As touched on in the...

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48 Backing of Fans Necessary to Hold Franchise. Audrey Wagner scrapbook, BHOF collection.
previous section, player attitude is so significant to the game of baseball, that it downplays the
need to limit salaries. If there was a sense that players were giving their all, fans could probably
live with the money made by ballplayers.

Fans have grown alienated from the players in recent years, but not, I think, for the reasons many
players suspect. It's not the money so much as the mindset.
I think the modern fan understands that the game generates billions in revenue, and that players as a
group are entitled to a lion’s share of that revenue. Certainly, most fans prefer that the money go in Derek
Jeter’s pocket rather than George Steinbrenner’s.
What fans are asking, in return for the interest and support that make these players millionaires, is for
them to give an honest effort, conduct themselves civilly, and be team players.49

The problem is that the quality of play displayed by many athletes does not justify getting large
paychecks. Dottie Schroeder and the other former players of the AAGPBL are acutely aware of
the skill level of players today and are often the first to argue that the size of the paycheck is not
justified by the extent of the talent.

Two or three years ago Sports Illustrated had a picture of every player in the major leagues and how much
money they made . . . When I saw what some of those guys were making, and some of them as dumb as dirt
when you watch them play . . . it's amazing.50

The league folded a few years after World War II in part because of the return of men to
the game, the advent of television, the lifting of gasoline rationing that gave families more
freedom for recreational traveling, and also because the successful organization of the league
was changed. In 1950, the league was decentralized, hindering franchise owners from working
together, showing that the business of the game is tantamount to its success. Regardless of the
spirit of the game, the talent of the players, and the fan support, the underlying success of any
operation stems from its organization.

In the On-Deck Circle

So where does baseball go from here? With the game being clobbered by serious and casual fans alike, is it time to send in a pinch hitter and let baseball sit out the rest of the season? On the contrary, baseball is at a turning point, and the most important thing it can do is move forward. The actions it takes in the future will determine whether it will ever return to the scale and atmosphere of earlier times.

The unexplored nature of women’s baseball opens up several avenues for baseball analysis, of which the impact of the fans on the game, the social atmosphere and player attitude, and the league structure and entrepreneurial endeavors are just a few of the prominent issues currently under debate. Continuing to consider Major League Baseball with the added perspective of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League may lead to innovative approaches to restoring and maintaining the spirit of the game.

The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, although it came 60 years after the establishment Major League Baseball and approached the style of men’s game toward the end of its existence, still has something to offer. Adopting the mentality of the girls and the atmosphere and climate of their games would revolutionize the aesthetics of baseball today. The fundamentals of the game are still intact; there isn’t a need to establish new rules. Rather, it is a matter of encouraging changes from within, starting with the players’ outlook, to restore what is best about baseball: its total adherence to American life, values, and spirit.
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