

**The Evolution and Marketing of Women in Baseball and the All American
Girls Professional Baseball League**

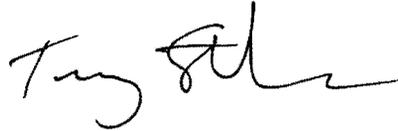
An Honors Thesis (HONORS 499)

By

Mia Trimboli

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Trey Strecker

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Trey Strecker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Trey" being the most prominent.

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

Date: May 2009

Expected Date of Graduation: May 2009

Abstract

The All American Girls Professional Baseball League was the only formal professional baseball league for women in the history of the United States. Formed shortly after America's entrance into World War II, the league was used to soften the blow that the war had on American morale and keep professional baseball alive while many major and minor league players were joining the military. From beginning to end, one of the most crucial parts of the league's success was the time, attention and money that were paid to marketing the league. This honors thesis will explore the evolution of women in baseball, focusing on the AAGPBL and the marketing and public relations efforts that were used.

Acknowledgments

- I would like to thank Dr. Trey Strecker for advising me throughout this project and providing me with a multitude of resources.
- I would also like to thank George Rugg, curator of Department of Special Collections for the University Libraries of Notre Dame, for granting me access to the Joyce Sports Research Collection.
- I would like to thank Lucy Sears and her mother, Janet “Pee Wee” Wiley Sears for providing me with invaluable information.
- I would also like to thank the Honors College and its entire faculty for their assistance throughout my project.
- I would like to thank author and AABPGL researcher Merrie Fidler for providing me with assistance and many useful sources.
- I would like to thank the South Bend Silver Hawks for housing the South Bend Baseball Hall of Fame and inspiring me to pursue the topic of the AAGPBL.
- I would also like to thank the Society for American Baseball Research, specifically the Oscar Charleston Chapter, for allowing me to present some of my research at their February 2009 meeting.

The Evolution and Marketing of Women in Baseball and the All American Girls Professional Baseball League

Baseball has always been known as America's game. It's a chance for the boys to go outside, showcase their skills, and turn into men. At least that's what most people think. In actuality, baseball has been shaped and influenced by women more than the average American could imagine. The success of these female athletes has been dependant, in large part, on the way that the public perceived the sports and the athletes. From the beginnings of baseball to World War II, all the way up to today, girls and women have had many opportunities to embrace the sport and leave their mark. They have done just that.

A History of Women's Baseball Before the AAGPBL

Women's baseball started long before the All American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL), some even believe that women have played the game since the beginning of baseball (Gregorich vii). Women were playing rounders, the earliest form of baseball, in England as early as 1803 (Ring 33).

The first documented women's baseball clubs in history were formed at Vassar College. The Laurels and the Abenakis teams were formed in the spring of 1866, just a year after the college was founded. Anne Glidden, a Vassar student, wrote a letter to

her brother telling him about the teams. "They have a floral society, boat clubs, and base-ball clubs. I belong to one of the latter, and enjoy it hugely I can assure you," she wrote (Shattuck). Although baseball was not sanctioned by the college, its popularity grew and the Résolutes were soon formed on campus, complete with uniforms (Gregorich 3). The Résolutes were a more sophisticated and serious women's baseball team at Vassar. Their schedule was expanded in 1869 to include men's town, semi-pro and minor league teams (VII). The college added the baseball throw to its annual "Field Days" competition in the early twentieth century (Ring 35). By the 1890s, women's colleges were facing off on the baseball diamond nearly every weekend (Gregorich 4).

Women's baseball spread to teams in the Midwest, too. Saint Mary's College, a women's college located in Notre Dame, Indiana, began to field women's baseball teams in 1905. A 1915 article in the student newspaper *Chimes* stated that "baseball is the latest and most popular form of athletics at St. Mary's." By 1919, local residents were attending games. One October afternoon boasted a women's baseball game where some say the cheering rivaled the football game taking place at Notre Dame at the same time (Zook).

Once baseball became common among women's colleges, it didn't take long for girls to begin to play for pay. Although not much is known about the circumstances, the first recorded "professional" women's baseball game was held in Springfield, Illinois, in 1875. The Blondes defeated the Brunettes by a score of 42-38 in six innings (Gregorich 4). The women were considered professionals solely because they were paid for their

efforts. Their baseball skills were nearly non-existent, and many baseball fans feared that they threatened the purity of the game, as well as their personal moral standing (Ardell 104). The Blondes and the Brunettes took to the field once again on September 22, 1883, at the Manhattan Athletic Club Grounds. More than 1,500 fans attended each of the two games that the girls played in three days for a mere 25 cent admission (102). The Brunettes were much more skilled than the Blondes, resulting in frequent shutout games. The teams took to the road, travelling through Boston, Philadelphia and other large cities before funding ran out in Chicago (103).

Soon after the first professional baseball teams for women were created, women's baseball began to cross the color line. A Colored American League for Girls was proposed to start in Springfield, Ohio in 1908, with other Ohio and Indiana cities on board the project (Sullivan 42). A team was started in Louisville, but many players were unskilled at the game and much of practice was spent teaching them about baseball (43).

Women were also playing on the same team as men. Margaret Gisolo was the star player of her Blanford, Indiana American Legion team. She took the team to the state championship in 1928 (Sullivan 133). Their victory was appealed because of Gisolo, but the decision was made to award them the victory. Before the next season started a rule was added banning women from all American Legion teams (134).

The 1890s saw the creation of Bloomer Girls teams and an abundance of women playing hardball (Gregorich 4). Deriving their name from the bloomers that the ladies

would wear while on the field, teams such as the Chicago All-Star Athletic Girls, American Athletic Girls and All-Star Rangers began to pop up more frequently following World War I (VII). There was no league for these teams, but these girls challenged everyone from each other to town, semi-professional and minor league men's teams ("Science").

The Philadelphia Bobbies began an impressive barnstorming tour of the Northwest beginning on September 23, 1925 (Ardell 106). After completing their tour on American soil, the girls, their coaches, and their chaperones boarded a plane and touched down in Japan on October 19, 1925. They were able to play men's teams consisting of students, writers and actors while travelling to Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe before funding ran out and the team was forced to return home (107).

Bloomer Girls teams soon lost their luster and gave way to softball in the mid 1930s (Gregorich 41). The final Bloomer Girls game was played in 1934 (Science). Many thought that this would be the end of women in baseball, but it was only just the beginning.

World War II and the All American Girls Softball League

Professional baseball was affected by World War II as much as any other profession. The minor leagues were almost completely wiped out due to the draft, and nearly half of baseball's big leaguers were leaving to fight for their country as well. Club

owners were warned by Major League Baseball in the fall of 1942 that the 1943 season was in jeopardy of being cancelled due to loss of personnel (Johnson xix). Fearful of the disappearance of baseball, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent a letter to Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, the commissioner of baseball, to voice his support and the country's need for baseball during the war. His letter stated:

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 they ought to have a chance for recreation and for taking their minds off work....Even if the actual quality of the teams is lowered by the greater use of older players, this will not dampen the popularity of the sport. (Macy 6)

The minor leagues were hit the hardest, and by the 1943 season over 3,000 minor league players had either joined the service or taken other war-related jobs. Only 9 of the 26 minor leagues had teams with enough men to play a game (Macy 5).

Phillip K. Wrigley, chewing gum magnate and owner of the Chicago Cubs, was known as an enthusiastic patriot and was one of the first businessmen to support the war. He donated his aluminum for gum wrappers to be used in production before war was even declared. Just days after the declaration of war he dismantled his Times Square sign and donated the materials to the war effort while cutting down on electricity usage (Browne 9-10). Wrigley also sponsored radio broadcasts encouraging all

citizens to do what they could to help the armed forces and war efforts (10). The first lights for Wrigley Field were actually ordered on December 1, 1941 and were being prepped for installation on December 7. As soon as Wrigley got word of the attack on Pearl Harbor, he promised the lights would be donated to the war effort. The government received all of the lighting materials on December 8 (48).

Wrigley was also a long-time supporter of bringing women to the ball field. From the day he inherited the club, every Friday was "Ladies' Day" at Wrigley Field. Wrigley felt that women at the stadium would help to civilize the men there, making the entire event more enjoyable for everyone. This event became so popular that one Friday afternoon game in 1930 drew over 30,000 women to the 38,000-seat stadium (Brown 19).

Wrigley remained determined to find a way to entertain baseball fans while his players were off at war (Gregorich 84). He put Ken Sells, Cubs assistant general manager at the time, on the job. Sells was assigned to lead a task force to organize a women's league (Ardell 114). "I really don't see why people think I acted strangely," said Wrigley. "If the orthodox doesn't work, why shouldn't we try the unorthodox?" (Browne 8). Wrigley used the popularity of softball leagues in the Midwest to model his new league.

George W. Hancock created softball on Thanksgiving Day in 1887 at Chicago's Farragut Boat Club (Browne 14). Originally played by men, women soon joined in, and the popularity of softball grew throughout the Midwest and Canada (15). Baseball was gaining popularity as well by the 1920s and into the 1930s, but by the end of the

Thirties, softball crowds were growing larger than baseball crowds in many cities (18). It was reported in 1942 that over 12 million Americans played softball (Macy 7) One four-team softball league in the Chicago area drew over 250,000 fans in 1942 (Brown 19). *Time* magazine reported in 1943 that there were over 40,000 women's semi-professional softball teams in the United States (Macy 7). Rudy Sanders, owner of the Chicago softball league, paid his players \$25 a week, owned the teams and all of their equipment, took gate receipts for profit, and paid an advertising firm a flat fee per year (20).

Aware of the negative images of earlier women's baseball and softball teams, Wrigley began the All American Girls Softball League (115). Four Midwestern cities were chosen: Racine and Kenosha, Wisconsin; Rockford, Illinois, and South Bend, Indiana (Belles Comets, Peaches and Blue Sox, respectively). Each of these were mid-sized war production cities, located close to Chicago, and each had a popular history of softball (Fidler, Origins 36). The chosen cities were home to factories of large, aviation manufacturers and heavy equipment suppliers who employed thousands of workers (Browne 22). Selection of the cities was key, something that Wrigley considered very carefully. Keeping in mind the requests of President Roosevelt in his "Green Light" letter to Landis, Wrigley attempted to create his new league in the most patriotic sense. "This way, we'll be doing a sincere, patriotic job, not merely selecting the eight biggest cities where we know we can make money." (23).

Wrigley and his chief advertising agent Arthur E. Meyerhoff approached the leaders of each city with the proposition of buying a franchise for \$22,500. They claimed the investment would show patriotism and provide wholesome family entertainment during wartime, and each city agreed (Johnson xix). Wrigley preferred that there be multiple backers in each city in an attempt to avoid any sort of monopoly over a team and ensure that each backer only be required to pay a modest sum (Brown 23). He created a non-profit corporation and matched each city's contribution. Wrigley's plan was for the league to own the teams while the cities were responsible for getting fans to the stadiums (Johnson xx). Wrigley's original intent of the league was not to make money; it was started as non-profit, and any money made was used to fund local projects in each of the league cities (Browne 24).

During the war, Wrigley felt that trustees would be more effective than individual team owners who often became interested only in personal profit (Fidler, Origins 34). “[Using trustees was] the only way to start during the war for the support of both the government and public psychology” (35). Wrigley sought out influential men that he felt shared his vision for the AAGSBL, enlisting Branch Rickey, general manager for the Brooklyn Dodgers, and Paul V. Harper, attorney for the Chicago Cubs, to assist him (42). Rickey held no active position in the league, but just his endorsement carried weight because of his other innovations of and contributions to the baseball world (Browne 21.) A board of directors was formed with members from each of the four cities and the All American Girls Professional Softball League began (Johnson xx).

Let the Games Begin!

Phillip K. Wrigley started the All American Girls Softball League in 1943 with \$250,000 dollars, and a significant portion of this capital was set aside for advertising and publicity (Fidler, Development 76). Wrigley took care of everything for the league cities. He found men to scout the girls and hold tryouts. Throughout the years of the league, girls ranged in age from 15 to 20 years old (Brown 5). In addition to scouts, Wrigley found coaches, umpires, and chaperones (Johnson xx). He enlisted his wife along with poster artist Otis Shepherd and Chicago women's softball player Ann Harnett to design the uniforms (Fidler, Development 85). Although many of the girls complained about the fit and style of the uniform, the league maintained that they designed them that way for a reason. "We do not want our uniforms to stress sex," said league secretary Marie Keenan, "but they should be feminine, with emphasis on the clean American sports girl" (Browne 40).

Players were the property of the league, not the teams and signed a one-year contract with the league instead of a specific club (Brown 23). Only the most skilled and most feminine players were considered for roster spots (Johnson xx). This was highlighted in many of the league's original documents.

Every effort was made to select girls of *ability*, real or potential, and to develop that ability to its fullest power. But no less emphasis is placed on femininity, for the reason that is it more dramatic to see a

feminine-type girl throw, run and bat than to see a man or boy or a masculine-type girl do the same things. *The more feminine the appearance of the performer, the more dramatic her performance.*" (emphasis in the original) (xx).

Publicity for the league soon started and efforts were focused on Chicago and the areas surrounding the league cities (Fidler, Development 77). Wrigley understood the value of national popularity as well, so no publicity opportunity was turned down (78). According to Merrie Fidler, Wrigley and league publicists regarded feature stories in national media as an appropriate way to attract not only new fans, but potential players to the league as well (78). Once the league was established and the teams were chosen, publicity took center stage, and certain aspects of the league were chosen to be emphasized to the public. These included recreation for war workers, community welfare, and family entertainment.

By the end of the 1944 season the league officially became the All American Girls Professional Baseball League, and Wrigley sold his share of the league, including all rights, to Meyerhoff (Fidler, Origins 51). Wrigley never saw the girls play baseball. He said that he might be disappointed because he couldn't help but compare the girls to men (Browne 45). Meyerhoff introduced the Management Corporation, and this system became the new way to administer all league affairs (Fidler, Origins 51).

The AAGPBL in the Public Eye

In the midst of World War II, it only seemed natural that one of the core publicity themes was the recreation for war workers. President Roosevelt stressed using baseball to keep morale up on the home front in his “Green Light” letter. Each of the cities in the league was chosen because of its industrial plants, and many of these corporations provided funding to bring the franchise to the area (Fidler, Development 80). Nights were used throughout the season to encourage the attendance of workers from the industrial plants and their families (80). Some games were held at 11 p.m. to cater to second-shift workers; others were advertised as free to industrial workers and service personnel. Exhibition games were often held near military bases and veterans hospitals (81). The league was not shy about using local media to disperse their idea of patriotism to fans, as seen in this excerpt from the *Kenosha Evening News* of June 1, 1943:

Come out and have the time of your life! See what a fast, exciting game these professional champions play. They’re the top players of the country, keenly competing – upholding the best traditions of big league play – boosting morale and providing the finest recreation on our home front! Forget your cares and worries! –You’ll go back to the job feeling better than ever.

The league’s effort to serve the country was showcased most effectively in two games held at Wrigley Field in 1943. An All-Star game held on July 1 as part of a Women’s Army Air Corps recruiting rally attracted over 7,000 fans and featured an

exhibition softball game between two Women's Army Air Corps teams (Fidler, Development 81). Lights were brought in to illuminate the field, since the games went into the night. Another similar exhibition was held as a "thank you" game for Red Cross members and donors on July 18, 1944. This doubleheader started at 7:30 p.m. and attracted somewhere between 16,000 and 20,000 fans. These were the first games ever played under lights at Wrigley Field, a fact that the Cubs organization currently disregards in their history (82).

League owners tried to find other ways to reach each team's supporters. The players and the teams were property of the league, which created stability. Despite central ownership, it was important that the teams gave back to the communities where they were located in order to gain fans and support. League management emphasized community welfare throughout the lifetime of the league and in each city. Team sponsors provided money for the teams as well as the community, so it was important that the teams were used to bring fans and publicity to the city through the AAGPBL (Fidler, Development 97). From the beginning of the league, many cities would have a welcoming ceremony for the teams, complete with speeches from the mayor and other local leaders (Browne 99).

The most evident way that teams connected with the community was through the community's youth. Many league cities held "scholarship series" against other league teams. The winning city then had the privilege of choosing a female resident of

the city who planned on attending a four-year state college and pursuing physical education. This recipient received a \$1,000 scholarship funded by the teams (99).

The South Bend Blue Sox started a girls' Bobbie Sox League in 1946. The teams played mostly local games, but there is record of one Bobbie Sox game featuring girls from South Bend versus girls from Fort Wayne. The game was played as a five-inning exhibition prior to a regular South Bend versus Fort Wayne league game in 1952 (99).

The unity brought on by war put a great emphasis on family throughout the United States and the cities where the various league teams were located. Capitalizing on this was key to league popularity throughout the years, and the AAGPBL was actively promoted in this light (Fidler, Development 101). The most well-documented attempt at bolstering family values was done by the Milwaukee Chicks through their symphony concert series. When the Chicks joined the league in 1944, they attempted multiple concerts with the local symphony throughout the season in an attempt to attract new fans (104). Symphony music was soon changed to light opera, then to pop and semi-classics, but the concerts didn't have much of an effect on attendance and the partnership was dropped at the end of the season (104-105).

Femininity and the All-American Girl

Community support and recognition were huge focuses of the AAGPBL, but there was one facet of marketing that the league put the most emphasis on. The most

prominent and widely used theme throughout the years of the AAGPBL was the idea of femininity. Players were chosen based on their ball-playing skills, but once they made the team, their image was property of the league. Although they were playing baseball, girls were required to wear their hair long, wear makeup on the field, and don the short skirts and tight-fitting tops that were the league uniform (“Women Who Played”).

Once a girl was chosen for a team, she was given a copy of the *Guide for All American Girls*. This included rules on dress, appearance, activities, relationships and attitude (O’Reilly and Cahn 58). Spring training included Helen Rubenstein’s charm school and salon, where players were taught how to eat, walk, dress and act (Fidler Development 89). Each player was also issued a blank loose-leaf notebook called “Notes of a Star to Be” to record their thoughts and experiences. Promoters thought that showing the girls coming from small town farmers to big city ball players would attract enormous amounts of publicity (Browne 43). Charm school was discontinued after a few seasons, but a “beauty kit” distributed to girls was still issued for many years (44). Included in these beauty kits were various creams and lotions, makeup, deodorant, astringent and hair remover (“Reel Life”).

Disregarding any of the rules could severely damage a player’s reputation in the league and possibly lead to fines or even dismissal. Penalties in their contracts included \$10 for back-chatting umpires and \$50 for appearing “unkempt” in public (Browne 38). Blue Sox player Josephine “Jojo” D’Angelo showed up to spring training in 1944 with a new haircut. “I have a ticket for you to go back to Chicago. We’re terminating you,” her

manager told her. “Your hair is too short, and those are the rules, and you knew it when you came in” (Ardell 117).

The league hired chaperones to ensure that players were acting appropriately at all times. According to Fiedler, chaperones were hired to serve as a “moral buffer for the league and [reassure] protective parents” (Fidler, Development 88). Outings, as well as relationships outside of the club, had to be cleared by the chaperones. Chaperones spent the entire season with their team, traveling from city to city and attending every event with the team (89).

In order to maintain femininity, homosexuality was frowned upon throughout the league. There was no specific rule against lesbianism, but everyone in the league was aware that it was unwelcome. Players had to be careful to admit lesbianism (Johnson 114). If chaperones or coaches suspected a budding relationship, they would try their hardest to separate the girls whenever possible. Some players were even traded in an effort to break up relationships (115). One manager released two girls after learning that they were lesbians, claiming they would “contaminate” the rest of the team (Browne 61).

Players followed an unwritten rule that discreet relationships would be tolerated as long as the older, more experienced women did not approach the younger rookies. It’s hard to say how many women in the AAGPBL were lesbians. Some players estimate that as many as eighty percent of the girls on their team were lesbians, while others

claim that none were (Johnson 115). The answer surely lies somewhere in between the two extremes, but the truth will probably never be known.

It's apparent that the AAGPBL's early promotional efforts struck a chord with fans. Attendance records found in Harold T. Dailey's files show that league attendance of 176,613 in 1943 increased almost 50 percent to 259,658 in 1944 (Dailey). In 1945 attendance rose once again to 450,000 fans, according to the Kenosha Comets 1946 Year Book (Sullivan 204).

Expansion of the AAGPBL

When Meyerhoff took over the league, he expanded publicity throughout all media outlets. From 1943 until 1952, 34 articles about the AAGPBL were featured in 13 periodicals ranging from trade publications to sports magazines and news weeklies (Fidler, Development 141). Newsreel, movies, radio, and television were all popular at this time as well. The league distributed short movies highlighting teams and players to be shown before the feature presentations at many movie theaters (Brown 87).

War travel restrictions were lifted in 1946, allowing teams to travel more freely. Spring training was moved from Chicago, first to Mississippi in 1946, then Cuba in 1947 and finally Florida in 1948 (Fidler, Development 145). The league travelled to Havana in 1947, the same year that Branch Rickey's Brooklyn Dodgers and Jackie Robinson trained there. During their time in Cuba, more fans attended the AAGPBL games than the

Dodgers' games. Some exhibitions even featured the AAGPBL versus Cuban all-girls teams (150).

Exhibition tours were used to attract new fans and players. Many of these games were sponsored by local charities in each town (Fidler, Development 147). Summer barnstorming tours were used to find new talent, and post-season tours were implemented to spread the word about the league and increase overall profit (162). A budget of over \$7,000 was added to pay for scouts before the 1945 season (Brown 88).

Meyerhoff attempted to start a Canadian league in 1945. Once this fell through, he tried a winter league in Florida, then promoted the creation of leagues in New York, Alabama and several Latin American countries (Brown 88). After the league's trip to Cuba, Meyerhoff proposed an International League of Girls Baseball in 1948 (Fidler, Development 165).

The AAGPBL reached its peak in 1948. The league claimed attendance of over one million in 1948, but actual figures show it was closer to 910,000 (Brown 172). Financial problems and decline became obvious starting in 1949. Collective spring training was cut for financial reasons, but caused the league to lose promotional press due to the scattered locations of training facilities (173). At the end of the season, only two teams recorded a profit and one other broke even (181).

Once the downfall of the league was evident, the press began to blame some of the league's troubles on the players (Brown 183). The Grand Rapids newspaper said that the players and the game had become boring and had problems attracting fans (184).

The league chose to re-emphasize the principal of femininity, something league management felt had been neglected (184).

In 1950, Meyerhoff sold the clubs to the cities for \$8,000 dollars. (Browne 186).

Decentralization of the AAGPBL

After cities bought the teams, the central league publicity budget was cut almost in half, from \$7,365 to under \$4,000 (Fidler, Development 195). Local management was untrained in publicity, causing many teams to suffer during the split from central management. The practice of planning special promotion nights began (Dailey). Television was gaining popularity throughout America and the league needed to find ways to attract fans (Fidler, Development 197). Spring training had television coverage in 1951, and league sweetheart Bonnie Baker appeared on the show "What's My Line" in 1952 (Dailey).

The mid-season All-Star game was introduced in 1952. On July 7, the leading South Bend Blue Sox faced an all-star squad of players from the rest of the league as voted on by newspaper and radio representatives (Fidler, Development 201). These games were popular with fans and netted the league over \$1,250 each year (Dailey). Nineteen fifty-two also marked the first time an AAGPBL team played a men's team, when the Peoria Redwings faced the Old Timers in 1952 (Fidler, Development 202).

Attendance fell to only 270,000 in 1954, the final year of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League ("Reel").

Highlights from the Field

When play began in 1943, the league was very well received. This was due in part to the early promotional efforts and in part to the talent on the field. After impressive attendance numbers, the Racine Belles won the first league title beating the Kenosha Comets in three straight games (Browne 49).

The Milwaukee Chicks and the Minneapolis Millerettes were added to the league in 1944. Wrigley learned before the season started that his original idea of a central pool of players at spring training each year would pose a problem. Many of the league cities had become attached to certain players, making it imperative to return these players to their previous teams (Browne 51). This also marked the first time that scouts were sent westward and players from as far as California were recruited for the league (52). Despite the challenges of being new to the league, Milwaukee took home the league victory over Kenosha before the Chicks were relocated to Grand Rapids and stayed there until the end of the league (60).

The Fort Wayne Daisies entered the league in 1945 to take the place of the disbanded Millerettes (Browne 86). By the third season, players on all of the league teams were highly skilled. It was hard for new players to break into the league, and most rode the bench for at least a season before seeing much real playing time (87). Mid-way through the 1945 season, the girls got word of the end of the war. The teams joined in the celebration, but league managers soon realized that their publicity themes would need to be revamped. Instead of the league being recreation during wartime, it was now important to show that the players were

role models. Community welfare and family entertainment were moved to the forefront (103). The Rockford Peaches won the league title this year and the face of the league was changed with the end of the war (107).

At the beginning of the 1946 season the ball shrank to eleven inches and sidearm pitching was introduced, bringing pitching closer to the size and delivery of a regulation baseball (Browne 109). The Muskegon Lassies and the Peoria Redwings were also added to the league at this time, bringing the total number of teams to eight (113). Nineteen forty-six wrapped up with a seventeen inning semi-final game in which the Racine Belles topped the South Bend Blue Sox 3 to 2 (124). The Belles then went on to defeat the Rockford Peaches in 14 innings to claim the victory in the finals (125).

The 1947 season started with rookies and veterans alike being transported down to Havana, Cuba for spring training. By this time, many of America's soldiers had returned from overseas. The major leagues were filling back up with star players and fans in the Midwest were able to travel to Chicago for Major League games due to the end of gas rationing (Browne 133). The full overhand pitch was added this season, but it wasn't yet mandatory, and the distance of the mound was moved back (135). The Racine Belles took home the championship once again to round out the 1947 season (136).

Nineteen forty-eight proved to be a very successful year for both men and women in baseball. Joe DiMaggio was signed by the New York Yankees and the All American Girls Professional Baseball League was poised to start its biggest season yet. The spring started in Opa-Locka, Florida, where the league held spring training, but the Midwest was ready for its

girls to come back to town (Browne 137). The Springfield Sallies and the Chicago Colleens were added to the league, making it necessary for more players to be fielded to round out the new teams' rosters (138). Many of the league cities were experiencing a post-war boom, and many of the league teams were enjoying new ball parks (145). The season started off slowly due to inclement weather and cold temperatures (151). By June, the weather started to cooperate and fans began to show up in full force. The league leaders changed often throughout the season, making many games quite exciting and sparking new rivalries (166). The Rockford Peaches finally took the title in five games against the Fort Wayne Daisies (170).

Heading into 1949, optimism throughout the league was high. The truth was that some teams were doing better than others and the decline of the league was beginning (Browne 171). Many notable players ended their run at the end of the 1948 season. Some players left because of injuries, others because of marriage and family, and still more because of financial strains during the off-season (175). The league was back down to eight teams after the dismal seasons for the Colleens and the Lassies. The ball was made smaller again and distances on the field were increased (176). The newly formed Chicago League was attempting to imitate the AAGPBL. They posed a threat to the league with their player raids, offering more money and playing time (180).

The Muskeegon Lassies were unable to make their way through the 1950 season and were forced to move to Kalamozoo, Michigan. This shift was highlighted by former Blue Sox star Bonnie Baker assigned as the manager for the Lassies. Soon after this, women were banned from managing teams unless an emergency arose (Browne 182). Racine left the league at the

end of the 1950 season, and Kenosha and Peoria left the next year (183). Attendance continued to fall as the years wore on. Newspaper coverage was down, attendance was declining steadily, and league costs were beginning to exceed its profits (187).

The Belles moved to Battle Creek in 1951, but the new team had an even harder time than the others stabilizing and lasted only two seasons (Browne 188). This year had a high-point though, with South Bend Blue Sox pitcher Jean Faut throwing the first of her two perfect games on July 21 versus the Rockford Peaches. Faut led South Bend to the title that year. Faut's next perfect game came in 1953 versus the Kalamazoo Lassies on September 3 ("Jean Faut"). Total debt for the league exceeded \$80,000 at the end of the 1953 season (188). Some franchises were still able to draw fans, but others suffered from depressing numbers (190). The Kalamazoo Lassies won the final league title in a surprising upset over the Fort Wayne Daisies (193).

Women and Baseball After the AAGPBL

A unique era of baseball ended with the final out of the AAGPBL in 1954. Many people simply forgot about the league, while others were unsure of its importance.

Movie director Penny Mashall wanted to showcase a time when women played like men and that many Americans are unaware of. The movie *A League of Their Own* packed theaters in 1992 because of its big name stars like Tom Hanks, Geena Davis, Madonna and Rosie O'Donnell. Viewers left with a new piece of American history.

The movie follows two sisters, Dottie Hinson and Kit Keller, as they are recruited and play a season in the All American Girls Professional Baseball League ("Reel"). Although none of the characters in the movie were actual people, it's hard not to notice their resemblance to many prominent league figures. Many former AAGPBL players served as consultants for the movie as well. The girls in the movie don accurate AAGPBL uniforms and play the game as the girls did at the height of the league. The film ends with a players' reunion and a ceremony at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York (IMDb). In reality, the players of the AAGPBL were not inducted into Hall of Fame. Instead, a "Women in Baseball" exhibit was erected in November 1988 to honor the league ("Reel"). After the ceremony, curator Ted Spencer told a reporter the exhibit was "the rightest thing we ever did." (Johnson 257).

Many surviving AAGPL players have voiced their praise for the movie (Gregorich 260). After *A League of Their Own* was released, talk of another women's professional league began. The idea never saw fruition due to the large start-up costs of such an endeavor (167).

There have been individual women's baseball teams created recently in the United States. The Colorado Silver Bullets played their first game on May 8, 1994, Mothers' Day. The Silver Bullets are the only women's team to ever be recognized by the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues (Christie). The process was started years before when Bob Hope, vice president of promotions for the Atlanta Braves, tried to start a minor league franchise in the Class A Florida State League, the Sun Sox. His tryout attracted only 40 women, and only one of these women possessed real baseball talent. Once Hope got the backing from Coors Brewing

Company, he announced the formation of the Silver Bullets in 1993. The team's base was in the independent Northern League and more than 1,000 women attended the tryouts (Ardell 121).

South Bend attempted another try at women's professional baseball in 1996 when a few Saint Mary's College women formed the South Bend Belles in the Ladies Professional Baseball League. The name was soon changed to the South Bend Blue Sox, and the team moved to the Great Lakes Women's Baseball League in 1997. South Bend was the last professional women's baseball team to be associated with either league and contributed players to the first ever National Women's Baseball team selected by USA Baseball, Inc, the team that selects the Olympic baseball team, in 2004 (Zook).

From the 1800s all the way through the new millennium, women have played baseball. Some of them played for pay while others played for pleasure, but they've always played. Although their history in baseball is highly unknown, with the exception of the scenes from *A League of Their Own*, the impact that these women had on the sport is undeniable. From the first game under lights at Wrigley Field, to keeping baseball alive during World War II, to the first and only professional player to ever pitch two perfect games, these women have done things that would have been nearly impossible without the support and smart marketing behind the few years of purely professional baseball that women could call their own. These, along with the other years of women in baseball, are a forgotten, but integral part of this history and evolution of sport.

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