

RECONCILING FEMININITY AND ATHLETICISM: THE ALL-AMERICAN
GIRLS PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL LEAGUE, 1943-1954

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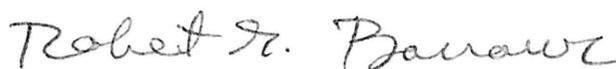
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INTRODUCTION

When Dorothy “Snookie” Harrell Doyle was a child in the 1930s she enjoyed playing baseball with the boys in her community. Only knowing one other girl who liked the game, Snookie played baseball with the boys at school until she was in the fifth grade. At this time her teacher decided that it was not a good idea for a young girl to play baseball with boys, and forbade her to do so. Snookie enjoyed the game too much to give it up and so she continued to play outside of school with the boys in her community. These older boys gave Snookie a hard time and tried to make her so upset that she would quit. Snookie kept playing though, and voiced her frustration to her aunt about not having a girls’ baseball league. Her aunt assured her, “...Someday, Snookie, they’re gonna have a league, a girls’ league, and then you’re gonna be able to play.”¹ Her aunt was right. In 1944 Snookie began the first of her nine seasons as a Rockford Peach in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, the first and only women’s professional baseball league. She played, but not completely on her own terms. Snookie, like the other players, would have to present herself in the image of a feminine, “all-American girl” in order to earn the right to play baseball like men. League management and players would struggle to balance the gender of the players with the masculinity of competitive sport.

For more than one hundred years, as women have fought for equality in society, they also gained more opportunities in sports. Female athletes challenged perceived gender roles that supported the dominance of men in both sports and society and faced public criticism for it. Few desired to make a grand contribution to

¹ Sue Johnson, *When Women Played Hardball* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1994), 42-43.

society. Rather, they simply wanted the opportunity to participate in a sport they enjoyed. They did not see themselves as trailblazers, but as women wanting the chance to be athletes. They earned both the respect and antipathy of the public while challenging gender roles and laying a foundation for the future.

The women of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League stood at the forefront of this struggle to be both women and athletes.² Philip K. Wrigley, president of the William Wrigley, Jr. chewing gum company and owner of the Chicago Cubs, developed the League in 1943. He wanted to address the threat of baseball's decline as an increasing number of male players left professional baseball to accept war related jobs or fight in World War II. Wrigley recruited players from all over the United States and Canada and initially established four teams in the Midwest. The AAGPBL featured skilled athletes who attracted crowds, praise, and criticism. While some of the public embraced the women, others ridiculed them.

Even though few women played baseball in the early 1940s, and competitive sports for women had always been controversial, there is a long tradition of women playing baseball in America. Founders of elite women's colleges in the nineteenth century believed that women should have the same opportunities as men, including a secondary education. They also believed in the importance of physical health and its relationship with mental health, and required women to participate in some form of physical education as part of their curriculum. Appropriate activities included swimming, skating, and gardening. While these colleges required students to

² Throughout its existence the League underwent many name changes. When first begun it was called the All-American Girls Softball League. Mid-season the name changed to the All-American Girls Ball League. Later it would be referred to as the All-American Girls Base Ball League, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League and finally the All-American Girls

participate in physical activities, they viewed competitive games as inappropriate for women. Students challenged this policy when they, like so many other Americans of the late nineteenth century, developed a great interest in baseball. Despite its competitive nature, many women's colleges allowed students to play baseball. They recognized the enthusiasm for exercise that baseball caused, and primarily viewed the game as a social activity rather than a serious competition. In 1866 students at Vassar College developed two women's baseball clubs, and in 1879 students at Smith College began playing intracollegiate baseball. This is noteworthy not only because women organized baseball clubs at such an early date, but also because they did so within just a few years of the first men's intercollegiate baseball game; in 1859 Amherst College and Williams College were the first post-secondary institutions to play.³

While most members of society viewed men's games as serious sports, they saw women's games as insignificant social events.⁴ White middle-class women with the luxury of leisure time were able to enjoy sports because their athletics seemed social rather than competitive. In the second half of the century women engaged in such activities as croquet, horseback riding, swimming, archery, golf, and tennis. By the 1890s bicycling had become a popular way for women to enjoy outdoor exercise, and further fueled women's growing passion for sports. Not everyone embraced

Baseball League. Throughout this study I will interchangeably use the word League and the acronym AAGPBL.

³ Gai Ingham Berlage, "Women, Baseball, and the American Dream" in Robert Elias, ed. *Baseball and the American Dream: Race, Class, Gender and the National Pastime* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 236; Gai Ingham Berlage, *Women in Baseball: The Forgotten History* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1994), xii, 9-11.

⁴ Berlage, "Women, Baseball, and the American Dream," 239; Joan Paul, "Heroines: Paving the Way" in Greta L. Cohen, ed. *Women in Sport: Issues and Controversies* (Newbury Park, California: SAGE Publications, 1993), 27.

women's bicycling; critics determined the sport harmful for women. They warned that it resulted in uterine displacement, spinal shock, pelvic damage, and hardened abdominal muscles.⁵ Conservatively minded men and women only deemed certain types of physical activity appropriate for women, and closely monitored their participation in sports in order to prevent them from acting too masculine. Not only would this loosen the sexual morals of women, they argued, but also compromise their reproductive health. Liberal attitudes in the 1920s allowed women to gain more acceptance in society as social and political activists and athletes.

Women's increasing participation in sports intensified the preexisting fears that strong, active women were destroying masculine privilege and superiority.⁶ In the nineteenth century gender boundaries determined which activities were appropriate for women and men. These boundaries helped to define and protect both femininity and masculinity. In the twentieth century women increasingly challenged these boundaries, believing that their gender should not restrict their role in society as it had in the past. They participated in more social functions and organizations, and earned the right to vote. Similarly, as women entered the male territory of competitive sports, they sent a message that old gender boundaries were failing, and that women were challenging men's dominance not only in sports, but also in society as a whole. "With unaccustomed boldness, female athletes invaded what had previously been men's exclusive space," one historian noted, "claiming 'masculine' strength, speed, and power as a right of womanhood."⁷

⁵ Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 16.

⁶ Cahn, 32.

⁷ Cahn, 51.

By the 1920s critics had a tougher time than ever controlling women's sports, for the conservative Victorian era had given way to the more liberal flapper era. At this time sports, especially community and industrial sports such as baseball, basketball, and bowling, were becoming more popular with men as well as women. As women gained more experience they became better athletes and competitors in tennis, golf, swimming, skating, and track and field. Female athletes had become so prominent that the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) sponsored national competitions in women's sports throughout the 1920s, having already organized a national swim meet in 1916. Female tennis players, swimmers, and golfers became national celebrities and encouraged other women across the nation to emulate them.⁸ Few talented athletes gained national renown, despite the fact that during the 1920s distinctions between men's and women's sports blurred as their performance records in track and field and swimming became more similar. As women's athletic abilities increased they took greater interest in sports that society had traditionally defined as only appropriate for men. In the coming decades women became more involved in competitive sports like basketball, softball, ice hockey, and lacrosse.⁹

As a result, in the 1920s a major debate among physical educators and critics of female athleticism grew around women's participation in competitive sports. Among those against competition were conservative female physical educators. They argued that it would make women vulnerable to sexual and economic abuse and prove exhausting for the fragile athletes.¹⁰ Many believed that women lacked

⁸ Cahn, 44-45.

⁹ Helen Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport, and Sexuality* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986), 70.

¹⁰ Cahn, 60-63.

modesty and self-control. Certain situations, such as large cheering crowds, would corrupt women. However, not everyone opposed competition in female athletics. Those who embraced the modern woman saw athletic competition as an exciting way to exemplify the new womanhood of the 1920s. Despite how they felt about women and competitive sports, both sides agreed that women should not sacrifice their femininity for athleticism by appearing or acting mannish.

Babe Didrikson Zaharias best exemplifies this struggle. The multi-sport athlete of the early- and mid-twentieth century faced much ridicule in her early career due to her androgynous appearance. Many people wondered if she were really a man disguised as a woman. After all she was extremely athletically talented, excelling in basketball, swimming, baseball, and track and field. Zaharias oftentimes made comments that prompted these questions, such as telling a reporter that she was not nervous about competing in the Olympics, for she was just running against girls. In statements such as this the athlete seemingly placed herself in a category separate from women, raising questions of her actual gender.¹¹ Zaharias recognized that the public commented on her androgyny and doubted that she was a woman, but did not allow it to affect her in the early days of her career. This changed in the early 1930s, at which time she made a conscious effort to appear more feminine. She felt that the survival of her career required her to do so.¹² Not only did she shed her working-class image in favor of an image more in line with the middle class, she also left behind her days of basketball and track and field for golf, a sport dominated by the

¹¹ Susan E. Cayleff, *Babe: The Life and Legend of Babe Didrikson Zaharias* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 90.

¹² Cayleff, 115, note 6.

upper classes. She also presented herself in a more ladylike manner, wearing dresses and later marrying. The press and public embraced Zaharias' new image and, although she still faced some criticism, they did not as often compare her with men in skill and appearance.¹³ Her experience proved that impressive athletic skill was not enough to succeed; femininity was key to the public's acceptance of an athletic woman.

Although not supported by everyone, both men's and women's baseball was popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This popularity existed on two levels. First, both genders enjoyed playing the game. Women enjoyed playing so much that they fought conservative public resistance in order to participate in the game, and won. Second, men and women enjoyed watching teams play one another. Recognizing the potential of women and baseball, male promoters organized women's teams. Promoters believed that women would enjoy the opportunity to play, but more importantly the public would take interest in the spectacle. Women received money for their play and were therefore professionals, and fans paid admission to watch the games.

In 1867 the Dolly Vardens, a team of African-Americans, became the first women's professional baseball team. Like teams that would follow, the general public viewed their games more as theatrical spectacles than athletic competitions.¹⁴ Although it is unclear when promoters organized the first white women's team, Frank Myers, S.B. Brock, and Thomas Halligan organized the first female barnstorming teams, the Blondes and the Brunettes, also referred to as the Reds and Blues, in 1875.

¹³ Cayleff, 115-133.

¹⁴ Berlage, *Women in Baseball*, 28-29.

They first played in Springfield, Illinois, and traveled to other cities such as Philadelphia, New York, and New Orleans. Although they received money, they were not considered professional baseball players but rather performers. The promoters' intentions were to create a spectacle of the women's limited athletic skills and make a profit, rather than give skilled women the opportunity to play baseball. The public received the teams with mixed emotions, and the Blondes and Brunettes disappeared by the 1890s.¹⁵

The most well known early women's teams did not begin playing until the 1890s. Receiving their name from the Bloomer pants that served as part of their uniform, Bloomer Girls teams, consisting mostly of women but also men, played competitive baseball from the 1890s to 1930s.¹⁶ Not belonging to a league, these independent teams barnstormed the eastern United States playing against men's community, semi-professional, and minor league teams. Occasionally Bloomer teams played against one another, but this was uncommon. The majority of the players were women, although at times up to four men would also play. Men would play the positions of catcher, shortstop, third baseman, or center field. Unlike the Dolly Vardens and the Blondes and the Brunettes, teams such as the Boston Bloomer Girls, the Star Bloomer Girls, and the Western Bloomer Girls featured talented women who entertained fans for decades with their home runs and base stealing.

¹⁵ Barbara Gregorich, *Women at Play: The Story of Women in Baseball* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1993), 4; Berlage, *Women in Baseball*, 29-31.

¹⁶ Some sources claim that Bloomer teams took their name from the suffragette and feminist Adelaide Jenks Bloomer. See Berlage, *Women in Baseball*, 34; *The Cultural Encyclopedia of Baseball*, s.v. "women in baseball."

These teams confirmed that women were capable of playing baseball. Many Bloomer Girls proved to be very successful baseball players. In 1898 Lizzie Arlington became the first woman to sign a contract with a minor league team, the Philadelphia Reserves.¹⁷ In 1931 Virne Beatrice “Jackie” Mitchell became the second woman to do so when she signed to play for the Chattanooga Lookouts. Having already forgotten about Arlington’s accomplishment, local papers incorrectly heralded Mitchell as the first woman to secure a minor league contract. The news of Arlington’s achievement in 1898 remained at a local level, but the nation heard of Mitchell’s via the radio. Newscasters were eager to spread word of a young woman’s success to a nation battling the hardships of the Great Depression.¹⁸ Maud Nelson not only played as a Bloomer Girl but also went on to manage and own teams such as the Western Bloomer Girls, the All-Star Athletic Girls, and the All Star Ranger Girls.¹⁹ Bloomer Girls not only gave women the opportunity to participate in a popular competitive sport, but they also gave national recognition to women’s professional sports. Unlike teams before them, they showed the public that women were capable of playing serious baseball. The public’s interest in the Bloomers proved that women’s baseball could succeed as a spectator sport. Bloomer teams therefore undoubtedly helped female athletes gain more acceptance and respect from the public.

Despite their success, Bloomer teams, like other baseball teams, became less prominent during the Great Depression and eventually ceased to exist. In the 1930s

¹⁷ Gregorich, 13.

¹⁸ Gregorich, 66.

¹⁹ Some of the male players on Bloomer teams went on to further success in men’s baseball. Boston Red Sox pitcher “Smokey” Joe Wood and St. Louis Cardinal Rogers Hornsby were former Bloomers who later played Major League Baseball and were inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. See Berlage, “Women, Baseball, and the American Dream,” 240-241; Berlage, *Women in Baseball*, 34.

baseball attendance for both major and minor league teams decreased as unemployment rose. National organizations such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Catholic Youth Organization, and the National Recreation Association supported women's softball rather than baseball.²⁰ Softball required fewer resources, such as money, space, and talent, than did baseball. Times were so bad that in 1932 the New York Bloomer Girls had to advertise for opponents.²¹ By the end of the decade, few opportunities for women existed in baseball and Americans associated women with softball instead.

Softball gained national support when the 1933 Chicago World's Fair featured an amateur softball tournament with male and female players. Leo Fischer, sportswriter for the *Chicago American* newspaper, and M.J. Pauley, Chicagoland sporting goods salesman, had attended a softball game and determined the World's Fair an ideal means by which to spread the popularity of the sport beyond the Midwest.²² William Randolph Hearst, owner of the *Chicago American*, promoted the tournament. Over 350,000 people witnessed the game during the three-day tournament.²³ The sport appealed to many. Spectators found the softball games entertaining. The low level of athletic skill required to play the game, in comparison with baseball, meant that more men and women would be able to participate in the game. The distances between the pitcher and home plate and between the bases were shorter than those in baseball. The large, heavy, slow moving ball was easy to hit

²⁰ Gregorich, 41.

²¹ Gregorich, 49.

²² Paul Dickson, *The Worth Book of Softball: A Celebration of America's True National Pastime* (New York: Facts on File, 1994), 60-61.

²³ Dickson, 64.

with a light bat. And with only seven innings of play, players did not have to worry as much about fatigue.²⁴

In the fall of 1933 Fischer and Pauley organized the Amateur Softball Association of America. The association's primary interest was to promote organized softball for both men and women. The combination of the World's Fair tournament (which standardized game rules), publicity from William Randolph Hearst, and the Amateur Softball Association of America allowed for the national recognition and popularity of softball.²⁵ During the dismal years of the Great Depression Americans turned to softball as an inexpensive and easy way to pass time and take their thoughts away from their troubles. The game was especially popular in the Midwest and on the West Coast. Softball was most popular among the white working class of both rural and urban areas. Men and women enjoyed the game as spectators as well as players.²⁶ Churches, Parent-Teacher Associations, and Lion's Clubs supported the construction of softball fields, and so did President Franklin D. Roosevelt.²⁷ Between 1935 and 1940 the Works Progress Administration built over 3,000 athletic fields in order to increase recreation opportunities for Americans, and they were ideal for playing softball.²⁸

By the late 1930s and early 1940s industrial and community softball teams became associated with the working class and the social life of blue-collar workers. After games players would meet together at bars or taverns. This association gave softball a negative, masculine reputation in the eyes of the middle and upper classes.

²⁴ Lois Browne, *Girls of Summer: In Their Own League* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1992), 17.

²⁵ Dickson, 68.

²⁶ Cahn, 142.

²⁷ Dickson, 72.

These members of society oftentimes criticized talented female players for appearing and acting too manly. Softball and its players came to be associated with rough play, drinking, and lesbianism.²⁹

Despite this criticism, softball maintained its popularity with players, fans, and the national media. In the 1940s softball competed with baseball both as a game and a spectator sport. In 1936 the Amateur Softball Association reported that one million Americans played the game in organized leagues.³⁰ By 1942 an estimated 200,000 men's and women's softball teams existed throughout the country.³¹ The next year a separate survey reported that twelve million Americans played softball. In 1943 *Time* magazine reported that 40,000 semi-professional women's softball teams existed in the United States.³² Although in 1939 the Amateur Softball Association reported that more women played that sport than any other, organized men's softball was, in the eyes of many, in competition with baseball for fans. Commissioner of Baseball Kenesaw Mountain Landis dispelled the fears. He argued that rather than serve as competition, the two sports actually helped each other by attracting crowds. If fans were interested enough to go to one sporting event, they would likely be interested enough to go to another.³³ Therefore, softball was not a threat to baseball.

²⁸Dickson, 72.

²⁹Cahn, 145-146.

³⁰Dickson, 70.

³¹Robert M. Yoder, "Miss Casey at the Bat," *Saturday Evening Post* (August 22, 1942), 48.

³²"Ladies of the Little Diamond," *Time* (June 14, 1943), 73.

³³Dickson, 75-77.

Women's sports underwent a significant transformation during the 1940s, as did the general perception of women, due to World War II. The total war effort brought about changes in American society, and women were among those most affected. By September 1943 ten million men had gone to war.³⁴ With so many men serving in the military, women and minorities took on extra responsibilities at home. Women who had previously not worked outside the home now did so. Census records show that in December 1942 fourteen million women worked outside the home.³⁵ Before overtime their workweek averaged forty-eight hours in six days. Women served as both breadwinner and caretaker of the family, pulling double duty for the survival of their families and country and assuming jobs that men traditionally held. They worked as secretaries but also as engineers, heavy machinery operators, and airplane builders. Women also took jobs in sports. They became jockeys, umpires, caddies, and horse trainers.³⁶ American women were not only willing to temporarily break traditional gender boundaries, their country expected them to. This, however, did not challenge gender norms, for the government advocated only temporary changes necessary for the war effort. Women's roles in society may have temporarily changed, but women still maintained their femininity.³⁷

In the nation's time of need women stepped up to the plate, both figuratively and literally. Men left their jobs to fight the enemy, and they also left the ballpark.

³⁴ Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 116.

³⁵ Weatherford, 120.

³⁶ Paul Gardner, "Now Lady Umpires!" *This Week* (July 17, 1943); Richard R. Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On? The American Home Front, 1942-1945* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), 152.

³⁷ See Melissa Dabakis "Gendered Labor: Norman Rockwell's *Rosie the Riveter* and the Discourses of Wartime Womanhood" in Barbara Melosh, ed., *Gender and American History Since 1890* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

Approximately one half of Major League Baseball players served in the military. The league continued by using older men and men too young for the draft to replace the players.³⁸ Although play continued, the substitute players were not as talented as those they replaced. A simple solution for the lack of talent among the players would have been to bring up players from the minor league. This would have worked had there been anyone left in the minor league. By 1943 over 3,000 players were either serving in the military or holding a war-related job. Out of twenty-six teams, only nine had enough players to play a game.³⁹ This lack of male baseball players, in combination with the temporary changes in women's roles, created the ideal conditions for a women's baseball league.

Although women's professional baseball flourished in the 1940s and early 1950s, opportunities for girls in baseball faded when the AAGPBL ended. The establishment of Little League Baseball in the 1950s resulted in fewer boys and girls playing informal sandlot baseball. Little League Baseball did not allow girls to play, and with more boys playing for Little League rather than neighborhood teams, girls had fewer opportunities to play baseball in their communities.⁴⁰ Girls did not have many opportunities in sports, let alone in baseball, at school. Most athletic programs were for boys. With the end of the AAGPBL and the development of Little League Baseball, girls had few opportunities to play baseball.

³⁸ Diana Star Helmer, *Belles of the Ballpark* (Brookfield, Connecticut: Mellbrook Press, 1993), 10; Sue Macy, *A Whole New Ballgame: The Story of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1993), 4.

³⁹ Macy, 5.

⁴⁰ Little League Baseball prohibited girls from playing until the 1970s. Title IX of the Educational Act of 1972 stated that no educational institution receiving federal funding could prevent a person from participating in any educational program or activity based upon gender. And in 1974 the Supreme Court ruled that barring girls from participating in Little League games was a form of sexual discrimination.

The public all too quickly forgot about the AAGPBL as it faded into a quiet memory of the past. Fifty years after the demise of the League, historians have yet to examine this important piece of American history. It was the effort of former All-Americans themselves that reminded people of the AAGPBL, or introduced them to it. Former players came to realize the importance of their accomplishments and began campaigning for the overdue recognition that they deserved. They formed the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League Players Association in 1987 and fought to obtain induction into the National Baseball Hall of Fame, which finally recognized the League by installing the permanent exhibit “Women in Baseball” and inducting the All-Americans in 1988.

One year before the opening of the exhibit a documentary aired on national television that told the story of the All-Americans. *A League of Their Own: The Documentary* attracted the attention of filmmaker Penny Marshall and inspired her to attend the opening of “Women in Baseball.” Marshall subsequently made a motion picture about the AAGPBL in 1992 and gave it the same title as the documentary that inspired her.⁴¹ The film was a success not only in theaters, but also in the sense that it introduced many people to the AAGPBL. The film inspired authors to write about the League, and in the years following its release the first books on the League became available to the public.

Many of these books are institutional histories of the League in which the authors praise the AAGPBL for merely existing and giving women an opportunity to

⁴¹ *A League of Their Own: The Documentary*, prod. Kelly Candaele and Kim Wilson, dir. Mary Wallace, 27 min., Columbia/Tristar Home Video, 1987, videocassette; *A League of Their Own*, dir. Penny Marshall, Columbia/Tristar, 1992, motion picture.

play professional baseball.⁴² Many of these authors fail to place the League in the perspective of women's sports. Women had been playing sports for a long time, including baseball.⁴³ By overlooking the predecessors of the AAGPBL, authors have minimized the importance of the Bloomer Girls and misrepresented the importance of the League's mere existence. The exception to this is Barbara Gregorich who in her book *Women at Play: The Story of Women in Baseball* places the League in the perspective of women's baseball by providing a history of women's baseball from the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. Gregorich places the AAGPBL in the category "League Years," which is preceded by the "Early Years" (late nineteenth century to early twentieth century), and the "Bold Years" (1920s – 1930s), and followed the "Modern Years" (1950s – 1990s). The author shows that the League is an important component of the history of women's baseball, and that this history did not begin with the AAGPBL but almost eighty years earlier at elite women's colleges. Giving little attention to the players' feminine image, she argues that the All-Americans had unquestionable talent and proved that women could play professional baseball. Gregorich succeeds at showing the All-Americans' athleticism, but fails to show the feminine image they had to uphold in order to play in the League.

With so many changes in the gender boundaries during World War II, it is no surprise that women began playing baseball again. The war had a liberating effect on women as they broke free from the limitations of the past; America expected women

⁴² See Browne, Gregorich, Helmer, Johnson, and Macy.

⁴³ For more information on the history of women's sports, see Cahn, Berlage, Berlage, Lenskyj, and Allen Guttmann, *Women's Sports: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

to temporarily break traditional gender boundaries in order to support the war effort.⁴⁴ The most drastic of these changes was their entrance into territories traditionally dominated by men. In Doris Weatherford's *American Women and World War II* and Susan M. Hartmann's *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*, the authors argue that typical women supported the war effort by joining the ranks of paid employment as secretaries, nurses, test pilots, engineers, heavy machinery operators, and also joining military service. Just as the workforce and military capitalized upon the talents and abilities of women to fill the void created by the large number of men serving overseas, so did baseball. The public embraced the All-Americans, for the players were talented and able to entertain the crowds that went to see them play. The League was also able to distract the public from their worries. The All-Americans continued playing after the war ended because of their remarkable ability to entertain the public.

Just as the League's development reflected the social culture of the 1940s, the demise of the League reflected the social culture of the 1950s. In Sue Macy's *A Whole New Ball Game: The Story of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League*, Susan K. Cahn's *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport*, and Gai Ingham Berlage's *Women in Baseball: The Forgotten History*, the authors argue that the conservative attitude toward women of the 1950s contributed to the collapse of the League. They argue that the post-WWII years were a much more conservative time than were the early and mid 1940s. The

⁴⁴ For further information on the roles of women on the homefront during World War II, see: Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York: Facts on File, 1990); Paul D. Casdorff, *Let the Good Times Roll: Life at Home in America During WWII* (New York: Paragon House, 1989); Roy Hoopes, *Americans Remember: The Home Front* (New York: Hawthorn Books,

prevailing attitude, they argue, was that women should be at home, not at work or on the ball diamond. Men came home from the war to resume their role in sports as well as at the workplace. Women gave up their jobs and baseball careers to concentrate on the family.

The 1950s, however, were more complex than these authors imply.⁴⁵ In Susan J. Douglas' *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* and editor Joanne Meyerowitz's *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, the authors argue that during the postwar years society sent mixed messages to women concerning their gender role. At the center of this confusion lay the Cold War. One on hand, the preservation of the family unit was key to the United States' triumph over the Soviet Union. Some felt as if a woman's place was at home taking care of the family and raising her children to be responsible, patriotic Americans. On the other hand, the Cold War taught the United States that, if they were to triumph over the Soviet Union, they would need to draw upon all available resources, especially in the field of science. Soviet women worked in the science and technology fields, and in turn many Americans felt the need to educate and employ women in these same areas.

In reality, many working and middle class American women sought employment during the 1950s. Most of these women were not in the fields of science

Inc., 1973); and John W. Jeffries, *Wartime American: The World War II Home Front* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996).

⁴⁵ For further information on women in the 1950s, see: Eugenia Kaledin, *Mothers and More: American Women in the 1950s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984); Margaret A.M. Murray, *Women Becoming Mathematicians: Creating a Professional Identity in Post-World War II America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000); Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1995); and Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

and technology, but in fields traditionally deemed more appropriate for women. In *Women Becoming Mathematicians: Creating a Professional Identity in Post-World War II America*, author Margaret A.M. Murray writes that, despite the rising importance placed on the sciences in the postwar years, women earned relatively few degrees in this field in comparison with men.⁴⁶ Although women did not hold the same types of jobs in the postwar years as they did during the war, many remained in, or reentered, the workforce. A shortage of teachers, secretaries, and nurses resulted in a call for women to work in the mid-1950s.⁴⁷ Even mothers worked outside of the home when their children became old enough to attend school.

The League inadvertently promoted the idea of a strong independent woman as a professional baseball player, which conflicted with the prevailing image of the happy housewife at home with her children. Unlike in the 1940s, the strong woman stepping out of the traditional gender boundaries was not as universally accepted in the 1950s, and this attitude contributed to the League's demise.

The AAGPBL was not significant just because it existed. What is remarkable is that the administration capitalized upon the middle-class notion of femininity and used it to promote women's professional baseball at a time when the sport had a masculine image. After women's baseball fell from prominence in the early twentieth century, the competitive and physical nature of the sport came to exemplify masculinity. Baseball was a men's game, and softball was associated with manly

⁴⁶ Between 1940 and 1944 women earned 11.8% of the 364 Ph.D.'s awarded in Mathematics in the United States. In the postwar years women earned even fewer; from 1950 to 1954 women earned only 4.8% of the 1,059 degrees awarded. See Murray, 5.

⁴⁷ Douglas, 55.

women.⁴⁸ So Wrigley justified women's baseball by portraying his players as feminine and all-American. Without promoting this all-American image, the League likely would not have succeeded but would have instead succumbed to allegations of masculinity and lesbianism that plagued women's softball teams.

I will argue that, although the administration expected the women to appear feminine, they were to play like men. In order to impress the public, the administration continually challenged the athletic skills of the women by evolving the game to baseball. This change created elite athletic standards to which women were not accustomed, resulting in problems finding women who could play baseball at the level that the AAGPBL established. National, non-local, and local periodicals covered the League, and gave varying reports of the women's femininity and athleticism. As Michael Oriard writes in *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle*, the cultural power of sport is its ability to tell a story.⁴⁹ The League tells a story about the status of female athletes participating in masculine sports, and it tells how the public received these women. In order for the League to gain the respect and admiration of the public, the administration reconciled the masculine nature of women's baseball by promoting the players in a feminine, all-American image.

⁴⁸ For more on masculinity and sport, see: Susan Birrell and Cheryl L. Cole, eds., *Women, Sport, and Culture* (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Books, 1994); José Alamillo, "Mexican American Baseball: Masculinity, Racial Strength, and Labor Politics in Southern California, 1920-1950" in John Bloom and Michael Willard, eds., *Sports Matters: Race, Recreation, and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Wilbert Marcellus Leonard II, *A Sociological Perspective of Sport*, 5th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998); Barry D. McPherson, James E. Curtis, and John W. Loy, *The Social Significance of Sport: An Introduction to the Sociology of Sport* (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Books, 1989); and Richard E. Lapchick, ed., *Sport in Society: Equal Opportunity or Business as Usual?* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 1996).

⁴⁹ Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 9.

CHAPTER I
HISTORY OF THE ALL-AMERICAN GIRLS
PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL LEAGUE

The league that gave Dorothy “Snookie” Harrell Doyle and other young women like her the opportunity to play professional baseball was not its founder’s answer to giving women the chance to prove their athleticism, but rather his attempt to save the game of baseball and protect his financial interests. Philip K. Wrigley worried that men’s professional baseball would not survive the war. As owner of the Chicago Cubs he had a financial interest in the game’s survival. Without a reason for fans to go to Wrigley Field and fill the stadium, Wrigley was bound to lose money. He developed an idea that would allow him to capitalize upon the current women’s softball craze and at the same time fulfill his own monetary interest: a professional women’s softball league. By targeting factory workers as a fan base, Wrigley could promote his league as entertainment for weary war workers. With softball’s popularity among female athletes, he would not have trouble recruiting talented players for his league. Wrigley perceived this new league as a perfect opportunity to ensure the survival of baseball and the Chicago Cubs, thus protecting his financial interests, and support his country in a time of need.

Wrigley’s league would accomplish this and more, and undoubtedly surpassed his expectations as both a spectator and participatory sport. It entertained thousands of fans and challenged the athletic abilities of hundreds of women. But after twelve seasons, it succumbed to both internal and external pressures. Yet its legacy remains

and reminds society that women are capable of playing a masculine sport, and that femininity does not hinder women's abilities to play competitive ball.

In 1942 Wrigley collaborated with advertiser Arthur Meyerhoff, lawyer Paul Harper, and promoter of women's softball Ann Harnett to organize his new venture.¹ Wrigley's original plan was to establish a respectable women's professional softball league that was not associated with the negative issues that plagued other women's softball leagues. Although amateur women's softball was popular at the time, semi-professional women's softball did not have this same success. Female softball players had a strong reputation as rough, masculine women known for crude behavior such as bar hopping and physical brawls. Many of these teams played against and beat their male opponents. In the eyes of many, it was not acceptable for the women to beat men. This contributed even more to the women's masculine reputation.

Meyerhoff proposed that the new league play not softball but baseball. After all, if it was Wrigley's goal to preserve the national pastime, should not the new league preserve the game by playing it? Wrigley agreed. This would also allow Wrigley to distinguish his respectable league from the rough semi-professional softball leagues. The only trouble was that women and young girls of the 1940s had grown up playing softball. There was not enough time to teach these players how to play baseball at a competitive level. Wrigley compromised—the game would be a hybrid of softball and baseball. It would feature the underhand pitch, 12" ball, and the 65' basepaths of softball, but players could lead off and steal bases as they did in

¹ Ann Harnett would be the first woman signed to play for the League. As such she also acted as a recruiter, telephoning prospective players to inform them about the League and urge them to not make a commitment to any other team. See Lois Browne, *Girls of Summer: In Their Own League* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1992), 32.

baseball.² These changes, Wrigley hoped, would make the public more inclined to support the new league.

Wrigley introduced his idea of the All-American Girls Softball League to fellow owners of National League baseball teams, but it did not go over well. None agreed to lend the use of their stadiums; some did not believe in Wrigley's idea, and others feared that the women's games would compete with their own team for fans. They assumed that fans would not want to spend their money and extra gas on both teams. Although he would not lend use of his ballpark, Brooklyn Dodgers owner Branch Rickey supported Wrigley's idea and became a League trustee.³ Not being able to use National League Baseball stadiums meant that the League would have to play in medium sized cities. Wrigley looked at industrial cities within one hundred miles of Chicago, the city from which he based the League, that were close enough to allow travel amongst the teams.

Wrigley chose South Bend, Indiana; Rockford, Illinois; and Kenosha and Racine, Wisconsin as the initial host cities of AAGPBL teams. Wrigley had already donated \$100,000 of his own money for the All-American Girls Softball League, a nonprofit organization. Each city was expected to contribute \$45,000 from local businesses to the League. A portion of the gate revenue would go to the

² Diana Star Helmer, *Belles of the Ball Park* (Brookfield, Connecticut: Mellbrook Press, 1993), 13. Throughout the League's existence the size of the ball, length of basepaths, the distance between home plate and the pitcher's mound, and the pitching delivery changed to more closely resemble baseball. For charts documenting these changes see: Barbara Gregorich, *Women at Play: The Story of Women in Baseball* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1993), 89; Merrie A. Fidler, "The Development and Decline of the All-American Girls Baseball League, 1943-1954," (M.S. thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1976), 110; Sue Macy, *A Whole New Ballgame: The Story of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1993), 111; and Gai Ingham Berlage, *Women in Baseball: The Forgotten History* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1994), 145.

³ Macy, 7-8.

administration to pay for the League's expenses, and the rest would return to the host cities for local improvement. Therefore, each city had a monetary interest in the popularity and success of its team.

In September 1942 Wrigley sent scouts to Detroit to evaluate the players participating in the World Softball Championship. Several players impressed the scouts and later signed to play in the League. In the spring of 1943 thirty of Wrigley's Chicago Cubs scouts, headed by Jimmy Hamilton, searched further for young women from fifteen to twenty five years old to try out for the All-American Girls Softball League. Initially the scouts had difficulty finding women. Since high schools did not offer teams specifically for girls, they sometimes played on boys' teams. Hamilton and the other scouts visited high schools and local churches with softball leagues for which males and females played. Oftentimes girls and young women developed their own independent teams in their community. The local press followed these teams and therefore aided the scouts in their search for potential players. The Girls Athletic Association, an after-school club where girls learned to play sports, also aided the scouts.⁴

Once they found the talent, the scouts had little trouble convincing the athletes to try out for the League. Selling the League to parents proved a different story. In the 1940s young women did not typically leave their parents' home until they were married and ready to begin a family of their own. Most of the girls came from working class backgrounds and never expected to leave their hometowns. Potential

⁴ Helmer, 17.

players saw the League as an adventurous opportunity that would allow them to play ball. Parents feared for what their daughters might be getting themselves into.

Scouts conveyed to parents Wrigley's middle-class notion of the League, ensuring them that their daughters would be in a safe environment. Each team would have its own female chaperone to watch over the players, making sure they behaved and appeared properly and obeyed League rules concerning curfew, socializing, and drinking. During the season the League organized host families in the team's hometown to house players. These families were well-respected members of the community and oftentimes served as second families to the young women. While on the road the teams would stay together in nice hotels and would not patronize restaurants serving liquor.⁵ Scouts assured parents that, by playing games and entertaining weary war workers, the players would be doing a service to the country and helping the war effort.

If this assurance from scouts was not enough to ease the worries of parents, they were likely calmed upon learning the amount of money players would receive. The League offered players a financial opportunity that most women did not have in the 1940s. Each player would start by making at least forty-five dollars a week. This was more than the monthly salary of a schoolteacher, and more than most of the girls' fathers made.⁶ Wrigley knew that in order to attract players away from war-related and other jobs, he would have to offer them a competitive salary. He offered players even more money than many of the male minor league players made at the time.⁷

⁵ Helmer, 18-20.

⁶ Helmer, 18-20, Macy, 10.

⁷ Berlage. *Women in Baseball*, 143. Information concerning players' pay being higher than that of minor league players is from Sharon Roepke, *Diamond Gals: The Story of the All American*

The League paid for all expenses. By playing for the League, the young women could earn and save enough money to go to college.⁸

Prospective players attended tryouts in twelve major U.S. cities. In May 1943 scouts invited 280 women from twenty-six states and five Canadian provinces to Chicago's Wrigley Field for final selection. The League selected sixty women, fifteen for each of the four teams: the South Bend Blue Sox, the Rockford Peaches, the Racine Belles, and the Kenosha Comets. Before the season began the players trained together. This was important not only so that the team managers and players could become accustomed to each other, but also so that the players could learn this game, a combination of softball and baseball.

Wrigley recognized the negative images associated with softball players, such as masculinity and lesbianism, and did not want the public to associate these images with his players. If his All-Americans did not play softball, but rather a game that resembled both softball and baseball, the public, Wrigley felt, would see a distinction between the two sports, and would therefore be more inclined to support the AAGPBL.

Female softball players were neither new nor surprising in the 1940s; both men and women recognized that women could play softball. However, women's baseball was much less prominent. Those women who did play the game did not do so in an established professional organization but on community teams. By changing

Girls Professional Baseball League, 2nd ed. (Flint, Michigan: AAGBL Cards, 1988), 7, copy in All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, Northern Indiana Historical Society, South Bend (hereafter NIHS).

⁸ Many players saved their money and went to college after leaving the League. Former players went on to professions in such fields as teaching, medicine, and law. See Gregorich, 88.

the hybrid game over time to regulation baseball, which required greater skill and was more physically demanding, Wrigley and his administrative team believed that the All-Americans would intrigue the public even more and gain the respect of men's baseball fans.⁹ This evolution may have further distinguished the League from women's softball teams and gained more respect for the League, but it also presented the challenge of finding talented players who were able to play baseball, a game that most women were not accustomed to playing. This difficulty finding women who could play baseball plagued the AAGPBL in its later years and contributed to its demise.

When the All-Americans first took to the field in 1943 they found themselves playing a game that closely resembled softball. Pitchers threw a 12" ball to home plate, a distance of 40' from the pitcher's mound. The path between bases measured 65'. Unlike in softball, runners could lead off and steal bases. Because the game was not truly softball, before the season's end Wrigley instructed the press to refer to his league as the All-American Girls Ball League. The next year the ball decreased to 11½" and the basepaths increased to 68'. In 1945 the League underwent more changes as the distance from home plate to the pitcher's mound increased by two feet.¹⁰

During the fourth season the administration introduced even more changes. The ball decreased to 11", the distance between home plate and the pitcher's mound

⁹ The League's administration changed throughout its twelve-year existence. Wrigley operated the League with a president and Board of Trustees. When Meyerhoff assumed control of the AAGPBL after the 1944 season, he replaced the trustees with a Board of Directors. The League then came under local control after the 1951 season when Meyerhoff sold it to the local team owners.

¹⁰ Gregorich, 89.

increased to 43', and the basepaths increased to 72'. The most notable change, however, was the introduction of sidearm pitching. The administration allowed pitchers the option of either an underhand or sidearm delivery. Many pitchers who trained to pitch underhanded during their years playing softball had trouble adapting to the new style. Those who had difficulty did not have much time to adjust, for the following year only the sidearm pitch was acceptable. Although the change was difficult for some, the administration believed that it was in the best interest of the League, for players had become very talented in the batter's box and the administration hoped to heighten competition by modifying the pitching.¹¹

The administration recognized the increasing demands on players, especially rookies. In 1946 the League held its first intensive spring training in Pascagoula, Mississippi. After intensive training and the establishment of rosters, teams traveled north to begin their season, and along the route home played exhibition games in several southern cities. The spring training and exhibition tours proved important for the League, for they helped players adjust to changes made to the game and gave them more practice before the season began. They also gave the League national exposure and allowed scouts the opportunity to recruit new All-Americans.

Spring training and exhibition tours were arguably most needed in 1948, the year that the League trained in Opalocka, Florida. This season marked the introduction of the League's most fundamental change, the overhand pitch. Pitchers did not have the option of using a sidearm or overhand delivery that year, but instead suddenly found themselves throwing the ball strictly overhand. Pitchers who could not adjust to this change either switched positions or left the League. Team managers

¹¹ Gregorich, 99.

moved some overhand-throwing outfielders to the pitcher's mound, for in some cases outfielders adjusted to pitching more easily than pitchers adjusted to the new delivery. Further, the ball was now 10 ¾" with a 50' distance between the pitcher's mound and home plate. The basepaths remained at 72', the distance established in 1946.

The game became even more similar to baseball in 1949 as the ball decreased to 10" and the basepaths increased to 55' by the end of the season. These changes lasted until 1953, at which time the distance from home plate to the pitcher's mound increased by one foot and the basepaths by three feet. In 1954 the ball decreased to 9¼", the distance from the pitcher's mound to home plate increased to 60', and the basepaths increased ten feet for a total of 85' in length.

With the game resembling baseball more and more, the challenge of finding skilled rookies who could adapt to the overhand pitch and base stealing became increasingly difficult. With new players harder to find, seasoned veterans became more valuable and therefore expensive. Unfortunately for the League, a growing number of veterans who had been playing for years were now ready to get married, go to college, or pursue a different career. Others retired due to injury or the increased challenges of playing the game. The administration came to realize that women could play baseball at a professionally competitive level, but the expectations imposed upon them proved too much in the end. In a society that looked down upon women who were more athletic than feminine, there were not enough women who could meet the standards the League established.

The League's elite athleticism proved too much for some women. This provided the National Girls Baseball League (NGBL) the opportunity to lure All-

Americans to its league. The NGBL, founded in 1944, was actually a women's softball league in Chicago. Softball teams in the Chicago area, from which Wrigley raided some of his All-Americans, decided to turn the tables on Wrigley and attempted to raid players from his league. The NGBL was appealing to some of the All-Americans; they would play softball rather than baseball, they would not have to adhere to strict conduct rules, and they could hold other jobs while playing. As the AAGPBL game became more like baseball and therefore more difficult for some of the women to play, many opted to join the NGBL. The women looked favorably upon the lesser athletic demands of the NGBL and not having to fit the AAGPBL's image of femininity. The battle between the two leagues escalated until 1950 when the two were finally able to come to an agreement concerning players.

Despite difficulties maintaining the caliber of athleticism that it established, the League prospered and thousands of cheering fans filled the stadiums, especially during the first six seasons. The AAGPBL experienced success from its first season of operation. From Memorial Day to Labor Day that year, each team played a total of 108 games and attracted a total of over 176,600 fans.¹² The administration decided to capitalize upon the success of the first season by expanding to six teams in 1944. They chose two host cities, Minneapolis (home of the Millerettes) and Milwaukee (home of the Chicks), that were notably larger than the original four cities. Here AAGPBL teams had to compete with the many other forms of entertainment that the larger cities had to offer, and League attendance suffered. The Chicks moved to Grand Rapids in 1945. Because other teams did not like traveling the distance to

¹² *All-American Girls Baseball League Manual*, ca. 1948, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS; Macy, 10.

Minnesota, the Millerettes became the Minnesota Orphans, a traveling team playing all of their games on the road. In 1945 they found a permanent home in Indiana and became the Fort Wayne Daisies, the most winning team of the League. Despite problems with the two expansion teams, the League had an impressive sophomore year as total attendance increased by 49 percent.¹³

As the 1944 season concluded Wrigley believed that the war would soon end and men's professional baseball would survive. He sold the League to Meyerhoff, who had been in charge of publicity, in order to concentrate his efforts on the Chicago Cubs. Unlike the trusteeship period under Wrigley's rule, Meyerhoff ran the League through the profit-making Meyerhoff Management Corporation. For its services rendered, such as promotion, scheduling, and spring training, the corporation received a portion of the gate revenue which, as originally agreed upon, would go back to the host cities.¹⁴ The payment for these services, which under Wrigley were provided free of charge, would create further financial and other problems for the League.

With 1945 came the end of World War II. The country was ecstatic. Fans crowded stadiums and celebrated by watching the All-Americans play. Attendance skyrocketed from 259,000 in the previous season to 450,000. League officials credited the annual increase in attendance to the League's appeal to the entire family, including men, women, and children.¹⁵ The following year the League expanded

¹³ *All-American Girls Baseball League Manual*; Helmer, 40.

¹⁴ Berlage, *Women in Baseball*, 146, note 66.

¹⁵ *All-American Girls Baseball League Manual*.

again, adding the Muskegon Lassies and the Peoria Redwings, for a total of eight teams.¹⁶ Attendance continued to increase to a season total of 754,000.¹⁷

As a spectator sport women's baseball was successful; overall attendance rose every year from the previous season. Devoted fans went to the ballparks to cheer on their favorite players. Yet the League did not make a profit.¹⁸ Teams that did not fare well created a financial burden that affected all teams in the League, for the less profit the League made, the less money the administration gave to host cities for local improvement. These financial problems stayed with the League throughout its twelve years, but play still continued. In 1948 the League expanded yet again by adding Illinois' third and fourth teams, the Chicago Colleens and the Springfield Sallies. As with Minneapolis and Milwaukee in 1944, these expansion teams proved that the AAGPBL could not succeed in large cities. Sparsely filled ballparks reflected the cities' competing forms of entertainment. By the end of the season both the Colleens and the Sallies folded due to financial problems. Despite difficulties with these new teams the League reached its peak attendance at over 910,000 fans.¹⁹

The year 1949 brought with it signs of bad times to come. League financial troubles resulted in spending cuts. With less publicity League attendance fell for the first time, plummeting to approximately 586,000. Centralized spring training gave way to individual teams holding their own training; preseason exhibition tours ceased to exist. National publicity dropped, rookies lost valuable practice time, and scouts gave up the chance to hold tryouts for prospective players on the road. Local team

¹⁶ This was the second team each for Michigan and Illinois, respectively.

¹⁷ *All-American Girls Baseball League Manual*.

¹⁸ Helmer, 74.

¹⁹ *All-American Girls Baseball League Manual*; Macy, 87.

sponsors voted to decrease the portion of gate revenue sent to the administration. As a result, players and even board members were asked to take pay cuts; some women went so far as to play without any pay for the sake of their team.²⁰

Unlike the first six seasons, which improved each year, the next six seasons got worse each year. The League was facing financial problems that forced a number of teams to fold. In 1951 financial problems drove the Racine Belles, one of the four original teams, to Battle Creek, Michigan. The Muskegon Lassies moved to Kalamazoo for the same reason. The Kenosha Comets and the Peoria Redwings folded. Successful teams helped carry the financial burden of unsuccessful teams. Because the League had less money to give back to host cities, those cities received less money to spend on community projects. At this point the sponsors had had enough, and Meyerhoff sold the League to local owners. Independent team ownership, rather than a central managerial body, began governing the League in the 1951 season.

This change was not able to save the League; by the end of the season all teams in the League had a combined debt of \$80,000 and the Muskegon Belles had folded. League President Van Orman announced that the League would not go on, but protests urged him and the club directors to continue for one more season.²¹ Although attendance was down, devoted fans still went to see the All-Americans play. By 1954 the League that once totaled ten teams now had five: the South Bend Blue Sox, the Rockford Peaches, the Fort Wayne Daisies, the Grand Rapids Chicks, and the Kalamazoo Lassies. These five teams were not stable enough to commit to

²⁰ Browne, 181.

²¹ Browne, 188.

another year, and team owners canceled the 1955 season. They intended to reorganize in the future, but did not.

Both internal and external forces contributed to the League's collapse. Financial problems had plagued the League for years, but by the early 1950s the situation worsened with decreasing attendance and the rising costs to keep veteran players. As the game evolved into baseball, the League had greater difficulty finding skilled athletes who could play this different game. With the abandonment of localized spring training new players did not have adequate time to learn the game.²² Most women simply could not meet the athletic standards that the League demanded.

Also, many players, and Americans in general, were eager to focus on the family as boyfriends and husbands came home from the war. These All-Americans were no longer interested in playing baseball, but instead wanted to adhere to society's conservative attitudes and become wives and mothers. In 1950 twenty-five players left the League; one half claimed family reasons for their decision.²³ Likewise, many women left the workforce in order to return to the home. Those who stayed performed "women's work" rather than the "men's work" they took on during the war. Nonetheless, the latter decade was more conservative than were the 1940s. The League represented the strong independent woman, an image that did not fit within the more conservative gender norms of the 1950s.²⁴

Further, the changing opportunities for leisure offered Americans many luxuries, including the widely available television. In 1949 there existed one million

²² Macy, 95.

²³ Berlage, *Women in Baseball*, 153.

²⁴ Macy, 93.

televisions in the United States. Within two years the figure increased to ten million.²⁵ By the early 1950s many families entertained themselves by staying at home and watching television. As families watched men's professional baseball games on TV attendance decreased for both minor league and AAGPBL games.²⁶ Those who did not stay home had new opportunities to enjoy; more families owned cars and drove them to big cities and other places of entertainment. By 1950 approximately 52,500 bowling alleys existed, and between 1947 and 1950 2,000 drive-in movie theaters opened in the United States.²⁷ The AAGPBL was unable to compete with these other forms of entertainment.

Prior to its demise the AAGPBL entertained thousands of fans over a twelve-year period and gave female athletes the opportunity to show that they could play competitive baseball. The League also gave women the chance to challenge gender boundaries via sports by proving that they were capable of accomplishing goals which, at that time, only men attempted. The women's gender did not make the All-Americans lesser athletes, but, as Wrigley had planned from the start, made a spectacle of them as legitimate athletes with feminine appeal.

²⁵ Macy, 90.

²⁶ Macy, 91-93; "TV Can Kill Baseball," *Newsweek* (June 8, 1953), 67.

²⁷ Macy, 90.

CHAPTER II

PRESENTING AN ALL-AMERICAN IMAGE

With the stands full of fans anxiously awaiting the start of the game, the All-Americans finished their pre-game warm-ups. A voice sounded throughout the ballpark as an announcer described the game that the fans were about to witness. His message included, “These girls of the All-American League are skillful, clever, fast and daring on the base paths—hit well—know the game—and are great competitors. Besides being wonderful ball players they are feminine and charming young American girls.”¹

This announcement exemplified the League administration’s desire to promote the All-Americans in a feminine image. Wrigley wanted the public to perceive his players as skilled athletes who did not sacrifice their femininity for athleticism. The announcer assured the crowd that, although the All-Americans were tough, competitive athletes, they were still feminine women. He implied that the public had no reason to see the women’s baseball game as controversial; even though the women were engaging in a competitive, masculine sport, they, unlike other women who played competitive sports, maintained their femininity.

From the beginning Wrigley envisioned that his new league would feature women who were both talented athletes as well as upstanding citizens. The entrepreneur consciously and actively sought to present the players in a feminine manner, which he referred to as “all-American,” in order to attract the interest of the

¹ Chet Grant records, All-American Girls Baseball League collection, University of Notre Dame (hereafter UND).

public. Wrigley wanted the players to mirror a white, middle-class notion of femininity consisting of physical attractiveness, neatly combed hair, makeup, dresses, and speaking and acting in a polite manner. He sought to distance the new league from the rough, unladylike stereotypes of female softball players. By appearing as nice “girls next door” the players would appeal to all members of the family regardless of age and gender, thus increasing the fan base of the League. This middle-class femininity would allow Wrigley to sell the League to the public, although it was not always easy to get the players to maintain the image.

The new league would impress the public with feminine appeal *and* athletic ability. “The highest possible standard of femininity with skill is, therefore, the aim of all administrative regulations adopted by the All-American League. For the benefit of self and game every player devotes himself to cultivation of both skill and femininity; management enforces this standard faithfully.”² Skilled female athletes were nothing new in the 1940s, but skilled feminine athletes, the administration anticipated, would be quite a sight to see. It believed that the emphasis on the players’ femininity would create a spectacle that intrigued the public. Fans would come to watch the games and see if feminine women really could play ball; they would come back to see a good ball game. Each game was “staged as a show as well as a competitive sport” as evidenced in the pre-game announcement’s emphasis that the players were feminine and charming yet skillful competitors. In the *All-American Girls Baseball League Manual*, the administration emphasized, “*The more feminine*

² *All-American Girls Baseball League Manual*, ca. 1948, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, Northern Indiana Historical Society, South Bend (hereafter the NIHS).

the appearance of the performer, the more dramatic her performance.”³ The players knew that the administration was relying upon them to uphold a feminine image in order to attract fans.

Wrigley mandated that the players follow strict rules both on and off the field in order to convey this feminine image to the public. Four main factors allowed Wrigley to ensure that his All-Americans would not appear too mannish or unladylike and therefore unappealing to the public. First, only feminine women, or those who the scouts believed could successfully undergo a makeover to appear so, would earn the right to play in the League. Second, while playing, the All-Americans would wear a feminine uniform with their hair and makeup neatly done. Further, when off the field they would attend charm school classes and abide by the *Guide For All American Girls: How to Look Better, Feel Better, Be More Popular* which spelled out for the players rules concerning proper dress, behavior, and appearance. Finally, the administration expected the players to engage in social activities that fit the image of a proper lady, and employed chaperones to oversee the women’s social behaviors.

Throughout the League’s existence the administration struggled to maintain this feminine image. This was not always easy, for most of the women did not naturally meet the standards that Wrigley initially established. The players were not necessarily polite women who wore dresses, high heels, and makeup. Differences between the all-American image and the reality of the women’s personalities created tension that emerged when players disregarded rules, ridiculed efforts to become more feminine, and challenged the authority of team chaperones. Despite this behavior, the All-Americans also recognized that the administration enforced the

³ *All-American Girls Baseball League Manual*. Emphasis in the original.

rules for a good reason—to promote the League—and generally accepted League rules, even if they did so grudgingly.

In order to appeal to men, women, and children, the players would have to be (or at least appear to be) heterosexual women. As Jimmy Hamilton and the other scouts set out to find players, the League administration instructed them to not consider mannish women. In the 1940s society often questioned the sexuality of women who appeared or acted mannish rather than feminine.⁴ At a time when homosexuality was a taboo subject, Wrigley did not want these issues to negatively affect his League. Ken Sells, first League president, best represented the administration's view when he stated, "Femininity is the keynote of our league; no pants-wearing, tough talking female softball player will play on any of our four teams."⁵ Scouts refused prospective players who did not fit the All-American mold: those who were uncouth or had a mannish appearance, such as a short haircut.⁶ Arthur Meyerhoff, head of publicity under Wrigley and owner of the League from 1945 to 1950, denied that the League turned away talented players due to unattractive appearance, claiming they preferred to make ballplayers beautiful than make ballplayers of beautiful women.⁷ Athletic skill was more important, he implied, but the administration expected all players to appear feminine whether or not they were naturally attractive.

⁴ Helen Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport, and Sexuality* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986), 81-83.

⁵ Sharon L. Roepke, *Diamond Gals: The Story of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League*, 2nd ed. (Flint, Michigan: AAGBL Cards, 1986), 8, copy in All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

⁶ "Ladies of the Little Diamond," *Time* (June 14, 1943).

⁷ Lois Browne, *Girls of Summer: In Their Own League* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1992), 27.

Wrigley instructed his scouts to only look for Caucasian women and not African-Americans unless they were of exceptional talent.⁸ African-American women, and female athletes especially, did not fit within the white, middle-class notion of femininity. The League had no interest in taking on the added challenge of race boundaries, something that Major League Baseball had also refused to do. It would not be until 1947 that Jackie Robinson became the first African-American to play major league baseball when he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers. The AAGPBL followed such segregation and did not include any African-American players.⁹

In order to promote a feminine image of the League, Wrigley mandated that the women appear and act as ladies while on the field. This included giving the teams, and the League, feminine names. The name All-American Girls implied that the players were wholesome young American women.¹⁰ Some team names were popular nicknames for girls or women, including the Belles, the Peaches, the Chicks, and the Lassies.¹¹ Others were popular women's names: the Daisies, the Colleens, and the Sallies. The Blue Sox were likely named in reference to the bluestockings, educated literary women, while the Millerettes were the female version of Milwaukee's men's baseball team, the Millers. These team names reinforced the feminine image that the

⁸ Sue Macy, *A Whole New Ball Game: The Story of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1993), xvi; Susan K. Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 151-152.

⁹ For more information on the League's attitude toward African-American players, see Macy, 53. Beginning in 1947 the League recruited Latino women from Cuba. For information on Latin baseball players, see Samuel O. Regalado, *Viva Baseball!: Latin Major Leaguers and Their Special Hunger* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

¹⁰ In the 1940s society referred to young women as girls, so naturally the administration referred to players as girls rather than women.

¹¹ The inspiration for the name Chicks may have been the popular book *Mother Carey's Chickens*, for Max Carey was their first team manager. See Browne, 58.

administration emphasized. This only helped bring home the notion of women playing baseball as a spectacle.

One of the most feminine aspects of the League was the dress uniform. Helen Wrigley (wife of Philip), artist Otis Shepherd, and Ann Harnett worked together to design the official uniform that was notably more feminine than women's softball uniforms.¹² Most softball players wore shorts or pants similar to those that male baseball players wore. In Wrigley's mind, these unfeminine uniforms contributed to the masculine association of women and softball. Wrigley wanted his players to look more like middle and upper class tennis players and figure skaters. The one-piece short-sleeved dress buttoned up the left front to allow room for a team logo on the center of the chest. The uniform was universal throughout the League with the exception of color; each team featured a different pastel color. Players had the responsibility of hemming the flared skirt to no more than six inches above the knee. A matching pair of satin shorts (necessary because the skirts oftentimes flared up, creating quite a sight for the crowd), tights, knee socks, belt, jacket, and a ball cap completed the look.¹³

The players had to wear more than just the dress, ball cap, and socks. League rules mandated that each player took the field with neatly combed hair and makeup. Team chaperones accompanied the players and manager on the bench and reminded players to apply lipstick before taking the field. More concerned with the game than

¹² Macy, 12; transcript of oral history interview with Arthur Meyerhoff, Merrie Fidler research files, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS

¹³ Macy, 40; Mary Pratt, "The All-American Girls' Professional Baseball League" in Greta L. Cohen, ed., *Women in Sport: Issues and Controversies* (Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1993), 49-58, 51.

their appearance, the players oftentimes disregarded the comments and thus expressed their contempt for the emphasis on a feminine image. The women were willing to abide by the feminine image, but did not feel it was important enough to interfere with their playing—the real reason they were in the League.

The dress uniform offered little protection when sliding into bases. The uniform may have made the women look more feminine and shown off their legs, but it also revealed the battle wounds they earned from rough play. The usual expected injuries were made worse since there was no material or protective gear to shield the bare skin from the rough ground. Although the players had the option of wearing sliding gear, they refused to because the equipment was awkward and made running difficult. Players oftentimes had bruises and scrapes that lasted the duration of the season; injuries did not have time to heal before the player once again slid and re-injured herself. The short skirts also failed to provide protection from the weather. With the season lasting from late spring to early fall, the All-Americans sometimes played in less than desirable conditions.

The uniforms undoubtedly caught the eye of male spectators and showed the players' feminine side, but the players had mixed emotions about the dress. Some players embraced the uniform's feminine appeal as a factor in distinguishing the AAGPBL from women's softball leagues. Marge Pieper stated that she was happy to wear a skirt so that she did not look like a Bloomer Girl.¹⁴ Pieper appreciated Wrigley's emphasis on the players' femininity and his effort to distinguish them from more masculine-appearing female athletes. If Pieper, an athlete herself, applauded

¹⁴ Marge Pieper papers, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

these efforts, members of the general public undoubtedly joined in her appreciation. June “Lefty” Peppas also enjoyed the uniform. “I had the option to play in either the All-American League or the Chicago Professional Softball League [National Girls Baseball League]. Because of the skirts...I decided on the All-Americans.”¹⁵

Others, such as Jenny Romatowski, did not like the short dress uniform because it was not ideal for an aggressive ball player. But she realized that fans liked the attractive, revealing uniform and learned to accept it out of necessity. “It was not very practical—however it was cool [and] sharp-looking for spectators—but tough on legs when sliding! Fans liked it and it was a drawing card and crowd pleaser.”¹⁶ Looking back, LaVonne “Pepper” Paire agreed that the feminine uniform caught the attention of the public and made the game more interesting to fans.

When we first saw the uniforms we almost packed up [and] went back to California because it was like a tunic...[They] were colorful...[and] very good-looking, and I realize now [that] they added to the game. Right there you got a lot of people who liked to see the legs and laugh, but they didn’t expect you to play good baseball.¹⁷

Earlene “Beans” Risinger’s reservation did not stem from the impracticality of the uniform, but from the skin it exposed. Growing up in a rural area sheltered Risinger from things such as short feminine dresses; she was more accustomed to pants. But Risinger became used to wearing the revealing uniform and having her legs exposed. “I’d always worn overalls—no shorts—so I was very bashful about it and many other

¹⁵ June “Lefty” Peppas papers, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

¹⁶ Jenny Romatowski papers, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

¹⁷ *A League of Their Own: The Documentary*, prod. Kelly Candaele and Kim Wilson, dir. Mary Wallace, 27 min., Columbia/Tristar Home Video, 1987, videocassette.

things, but I learned fast about the outside world.¹⁸ Maxine Kline did not like the uniform initially, but later found a respect for it and what it represented. “I felt [really] exposed, playing in a skirt. But you got used to it. Then after a while it was just like an honor to put that old uniform on.”¹⁹ After initially disliking the uniform, she wore it with pride because she was proud of being an All-American.

Some players, especially pitchers, did not like the uniform because the skirt flared up and interfered with their playing. This made running fast and throwing the ball underhanded particularly difficult. Many All-Americans broke the rule of hemming the skirts to no more than six inches above the knee, either to prevent the skirt from hindering their play or to make it more physically appealing. Faye Dancer recalled, “The uniform did look like a tennis dress. But I [made] modifications [to] mine. I wanted mine shorter....[You would] take tucks in them because if you didn’t ...your buns would stick out like bowling balls.”²⁰ Dancer, like other players, was willing to break League rules in order to make her uniform more attractive and suitable for playing.

The style of the uniform became more player friendly as the years progressed. The skirt became straighter rather than flared and, as photographs show, shorter. This was likely due to women hemming them shorter rather than the League adopting more lenient rules. As time went on the League also became more specific in its

¹⁸ Earlene “Beans” Risinger papers, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

¹⁹ Susan E. Johnson, *When Women Played Hardball* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1994), 133.

²⁰ *A League of Their Own: The Documentary*.

language regarding dress code, implying that the players pushed the limits of these restrictions.²¹

In order to sell the image of All-American players, the administration insisted that the women appear like ladies off the field. When playing the women followed game rules. Off the field the League enforced conduct rules to carry out the All-American image. To realize this goal, the administration required that players attend evening charm school classes during spring training, issued the *Guide for All American Girls: How to Look Better, Feel Better, Be More Popular* to encourage feminine appearance and demeanor, and enforced these rules via fines and other forms of punishment (including expulsion from the League). As with the uniform, players received these expectations with mixed emotions and risked punishment by defying League rules.

For the first two years the League required all players to attend charm school classes during the evenings of spring training. In 1943 Wrigley hired Helena Rebenstein, owner of the Chicago based Helena Rubenstein Salon, to teach the players how to appear and act in a respectable ladylike fashion. She instructed, "Women can be athletes, and still be feminine and charming, and therefore a double attraction. Men do not want to come to see women in athletic competition who look like men."²² Wrigley agreed, and shaped the rules accordingly. Rubenstein taught lessons in applying makeup, conversing with strangers, and walking with good posture. The following year Frances McCune, director of the Ruth Tiffany School,

²¹ Merrie A. Fidler, "The Development and Decline of the All-American Girls Baseball League, 1943-1954." (M.S. thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1976), 285, 290. For a summary of changes in conduct rules, see 286-289.

²² Quoted in Browne, 46.

led the lessons in proper ladylike behavior. The players received notebooks entitled, “How a Ball Player Becomes a Star” in which they took notes of the lessons learned. Examples of such notes included: lead with your chest, do half turn in order to sit down, and express yourself simply, easily, and well.²³ When at any kind of social function the All-Americans were to appear and act as proper middle class ladies in order to make the public believe that they truly were feminine women.

The emphasis on a feminine image created a tension that was clearly visible in players’ attitudes toward charm school classes. Most of the players saw charm school as more of a pain than benefit. Expecting the women to act in a dignified manner was one thing; mandating charm school classes seemed ridiculous to many. Many did not want the administration to impose this femininity upon them, for they felt that learning how to apply makeup, initiate conversation with strangers, and sit properly was not necessary for them to play ball. Wearing and maintaining nice hairdos and lipstick while playing was almost an impossible expectation. The women ran, sweated, and played hard in order to win the game; worrying about their appearance was a distraction they did not welcome. Irene Hickson recalled, “[Charm school] was sickening. How could you wear all that makeup and your hair up the way they wanted you to and get out there and play ball?” Hickson felt that this was unreasonable and not necessarily helpful, either. Not all of the All-Americans were attractive women; some were beyond the help of makeup and fancy hairdos. “Some of us didn’t look any better if we had makeup on.”²⁴ Dorothy “Dottie” Schroeder

²³ Unknown player’s “How a Ball Player Becomes a Star” notebook, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

²⁴ Roepke, 9.

agreed that charm school pushed the emphasis on femininity too far, and saw it for what it truly was—an effort to promote an image of the women that did not represent most of their personalities. “Charm school was mainly treated as a joke, it was a promotional deal.”²⁵

Like Hickson and Schroeder, LaVonne “Pepper” Paire dreaded the charm school classes, but later in life came to realize that it was not as bad as she originally thought, and recognized its importance as a publicity angle. Paire believed that, although many of the players felt they did not need to take lessons on how to act like a lady, many were not as sophisticated and knowledgeable about proper etiquette as they should have been.

It was something we sort of endured. Some of us felt we didn’t need it but I won’t deny that maybe some of us did need it. And it was a great publicity angle. But some of the things I laughed at then—I was, you know, eighteen, nineteen years old—right now I can see where, yeah, I could [have used] that little bit of polish. But I tell you it was kind of difficult walking in high heels with an up-sweep, carrying a book on top [of] your head with a charley horse saying, “bounce the ball.”²⁶

Other players recognized the benefit of charm school. “ ‘Course, we giggled and laughed and made fun [of charm school]. You know how girls are. But it helped me; it has stuck to me to this day,” recalls Maxine Kline.²⁷ Like many other players, Dorothy “Dottie” Kamenshek came from a working class or rural background and had not previously had exposure to the lessons she learned while attending charm school, such as how to properly use multiple forks when dining at restaurants.²⁸ Alice Pollitt Deschaine agreed that there was room for improvement. “We just laughed

²⁵ Roepke, 8.

²⁶ *A League of Their Own: The Documentary*.

²⁷ Johnson, 133.

²⁸ Roepke, 9.

about charm school, you know, like we knew it all anyway. Of course, the truth is we didn't know it all."²⁹ Thelma "Tiby" Eisben understood the importance of image. "I think a lot of the girls needed it. They had no polish. I always figured if you were going to be in the public eye, you might as well have a little class."³⁰ Regardless of their opinion, all players endured the week of charm school. Even if they made fun of it, charm school had an impact on them.³¹

The administration also gave each player a copy of *A Guide for All American Girls: How to Look Better, Feel Better, Be More Popular* which lay out helpful hints for appearing and acting properly that were parallel to those that Rubenstein and McCune taught during charm school.³² The guide advised the women on such topics as beauty routines (for the morning, night, and after games), physical fitness, appropriate clothing, and proper etiquette. The women should at all times carry with them the official All American Girls Baseball League beauty kit containing cleansing cream, lipstick, rouge (medium), cream deodorant, mild astringent, face powder for brunettes, hand lotion, and hair remover. The manual also instructed players on how to care for their teeth, body, eyes, hair, mouth, hands, and face. Physical fitness was also necessary. The guide provided instructions for loosening and circulation, as well as specific instructions for targeted areas such as the abdomen and legs.³³

The *Guide for All American Girls* instructed players how to present themselves to maintain a ladylike image. It advised the women how to introduce

²⁹ Johnson, 95.

³⁰ *Los Angeles Daily News* (January 22, 1984). See Johnson, 144.

³¹ Likely upon the realization that these classes were too intensive, the League did not require this form of charm school after the 1944 season. See Johnson, 145.

³² *A Guide For All American Girls: How to Look Better, Feel Better, Be More Popular*, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

³³ *A Guide For All American Girls*, 5-7.

themselves, speak, and act properly when in public, and how to be a good sportsman and treat fans appropriately.³⁴ The guide also offered helpful hints about clothing. Suggested “useful and practical” apparel included: a dark suit, skirts, blouses, sweaters, and dresses for social functions. Although the dress code did not permit slacks, women could wear shorts or sportswear for engaging in such activities as tennis and golf, two sports associated with the middle and upper classes. Of course, the beauty kit would always accompany the All-American on road trips. In summation the guide read, “Be neat and presentable in your appearance and dress, be clean and wholesome in appearance, be polite and considerate in your daily contacts, avoid noisy, rough and raucous talk and actions and be in all respects a truly All American girl.”³⁵ It was the responsibility of each player to take care of and present herself in a proper manner in order to maintain a feminine middle class image. Doing so would benefit them, their teammates, and the League as a whole. The guide reminded them,

It is most desirable in your own interests, that of your teammates and fellow players, as well as from the standpoint of the public relations of the league that each girl be at all times presentable and attractive, whether on the playing field or at leisure, study your own beauty culture possibilities and without overdoing your beauty treatment at the risk of attaining gaudiness, [practice] the little measure that will reflect well on your appearance and personality as a real All American girl.³⁶

The administration was clear that each All-American was responsible for upholding the League’s feminine image, and that doing so would benefit the players as well as the publicity of the League.

³⁴ *A Guide For All American Girls*, 8-10.

³⁵ *A Guide For All American Girls*, 10.

³⁶ *A Guide For All American Girls*, 1.

In addition to this guide the players abided by the “Rules of Conduct for Players.”³⁷ Penalties for breaking rules included fines of five or ten dollars per incident and even expulsion from the League. This illustrated the extent to which the administration desired to promote a feminine image. The first rule required the players to ALWAYS appear in feminine attire (dresses or skirts rather than slacks or shorts) when not practicing or playing in games. Next came the rule regarding hair length; long hair was most preferable, boyish bobs were not allowed. All social engagements, including dates, must first obtain the approval of the team chaperone. Social engagements could not involve members of other All-American teams; in the spirit of maintaining rivalries and avoiding friendships among non-team members fraternizing among teams was not permitted.

The dress code remained strict throughout the League’s existence. In 1950 windbreaker jackets were not permitted outside of the dugout. At no time could the players wear men’s sports jackets. The All-Americans could only wear attire available in women’s dress shops. This would ensure that the women would not wear masculine clothing. Further, although players could consume beer with dinner, they could not patronize bars.³⁸ Though working class softball players might, proper middle class women did not participate in such activities.

The administration wanted the players to not only learn how to be a lady, but also adjust their social lives in order to maintain a positive image for the public. They needed to know how to act properly when attending important dinners and other

³⁷ “Rules of Conduct for Players,” All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

³⁸ News release, May 11, 1950, Merrie Fidler research files, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

social functions, but it was also important that they act in a respectable manner on a day-to-day (or night-to-night) basis. To oversee the All-Americans when off the field the League administration required that each team employ a full-time chaperone. Teams traveled to different cities to play games, requiring that the players spend a significant amount of time away from home. It was not socially acceptable for young women to travel the Midwest with only each other and their male team manager. Social norms made necessary a female chaperone to watch over the young women.³⁹ Chaperones were important to not only society as a whole, but also the parents of the young players. These authority figures assured parents that their young daughters would be in good hands while on the road, encouraging them to allow their daughters to join the League.⁴⁰

Many of the chaperones, especially in the early years, had previous experience overseeing girls in school or other sports. Some were former physical education instructors.⁴¹ Others did not have a background overseeing women or in athletics. Before chaperoning the Peoria Redwings in 1949 Elizabeth Daily served in the Army Nurse Corps from 1940 to 1945. Helen Hannah worked as a secretary and spent three years in the service before becoming the Muskegon Lassies' chaperone from 1947 to 1949.⁴² Some All-Americans went on to become a team chaperone upon retiring from play. Others pulled double duty and served as a chaperone-player in the later years of the League.

³⁹ *Kenosha Evening News* (May 13, 1943). See Fidler, 245.

⁴⁰ *Kenosha Evening News* (May 13, 1943). See Fidler, 245-246; Marge Pieper papers, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

⁴¹ Fidler, 246.

⁴² Fidler, 249-250.

Chaperones' responsibilities included: assuring the appearance, conduct, and behavior of the women; making traveling and dining arrangements when on the road; acting as team nurse; approving social engagements and the host families with which players lived; caring for uniforms and team equipment; and enforcing League curfews. At all times chaperones were available to the players for any concern not involving the game.⁴³ This might include anything from homesickness to monthly "problems" that were too awkward for the male coaches to address. Chaperones were not only charged with enforcing League rules, but were also subject to punishment if their players did not behave properly. The League assured the public, "[The players] meet the highest standard of feminine [appearance] and deportment [and] behavior are guided by their chaperones...[who] acts as a counselor and friend."⁴⁴

Although they acknowledged chaperones as figures of authority, most of the players did not take the chaperones too seriously. Former chaperone Helen Hannah laughingly recalled players putting snakes in her bed. Player Faye Dancer explained the chaperone initiation process as involving such pranks as replacing the cream in Oreo cookies with toothpaste and spreading Limburger cheese on light bulbs. After about a month and a half of such behavior, chaperones became accustomed to their players.⁴⁵ The 1947 *Grand Rapids Chicks Yearbook* best explained the relationship between chaperones and players.

In the dugout [team chaperone Dorothy "Dottie" Hunter] makes every play, feels every emotion right with the girls. Off the field she is healer of wounds, homesickness, and many other ills. All in all the

⁴³ "All-American Girls Baseball League Chaperone Contract." See Fidler, 254.

⁴⁴ *All-American Girls Baseball League Manual*.

⁴⁵ *A League of Their Own: The Documentary*.

girls would be lost without her, and they stop at nothing (such as throwing her, dressed, in the shower) to prove it.⁴⁶

While Hannah, Dancer, and the *Grand Rapids Chicks Yearbook* implied that the women played these pranks in a good-natured spirit, the games also signify the players' resentment of the League conduct rules and having a chaperone watch over them. The women accepted these rules and the authority of chaperones, but did so on their own terms.

This is further evidenced by the players' occasional refusal to follow the rules, thereby testing the patience of chaperones. June "Lefty" Peppas admitted that chaperones were necessary to keep the players in line.⁴⁷ From sneaking out of hotels and violating curfew to playing pranks in a graveyard to initiate (and scare) rookies, the All-Americans found various ways to enjoy themselves off of the field. Chaperones had greater difficulty keeping their players in line while playing home games. With most players living with a different host family throughout the city, players slipped under the radar of the chaperone's watchful eye. The women might be at places that the administration frowned upon such as bars, or socializing with men without the chaperone's supervision.

Mischievous behavior such as this did not always go on. Playing six games a week took a toll on the players. They spent a significant amount of their time off the field traveling to the next city. After a night on a crowded train or bus, players rested in their hotel rooms before having to prepare for the evening's game. Jean Winsch

⁴⁶ *Grand Rapids Chicks Yearbook*, 1947, 12, Merrie Fidler research files, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

⁴⁷ June "Lefty" Peppas papers, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

recalled, "Well, there wasn't too much to keep track of because we were on a very rigid schedule. You didn't have the energy to do anything."⁴⁸

Occasionally players' mischief carried onto the field, sometimes in the form of brawls. One of the most noted of these occasions occurred when Grand Rapids Chick Ruth "Tex" Lessing purposely struck an umpire and gave him a black eye. After she received a \$100 fine, sympathetic fans passed around a hat to collect money to pay it for her. Fans donated a total of \$2,000. Chaperones frowned upon this type of unladylike behavior; managers laughed it off.⁴⁹ The fans and even coaches were more willing than were the chaperones to tolerate the players' unladylike behavior. The administration specifically charged chaperones to oversee the women and ensure that the players presented themselves in a dignified manner at all times. Negative behavior, such as that of Lessing, reflected poorly upon the chaperones and implied that they were not doing their jobs well.

Although considered a main component and guarantor of the League's All-American appeal, full-time team chaperones disappeared in the later years of the League. Due to financial troubles, in October 1949 the Board of Directors voted to adopt a policy by which each team had the choice of employing a player-coach-chaperone rather than a separate full-time coach (team manager) and chaperone.⁵⁰ This action shows that although the administration was willing to cut corners by allowing for a player-chaperone-coach, they still maintained the importance of having

⁴⁸ Oral history interview by Merrie Fidler with Jean Wunsch, January 6, 1973, Merrie Fidler research files, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

⁴⁹ Diana Star Helmer, *Belles of the Ball Park* (Brookfield, Connecticut: Millbrook Press, 1993), 63-64.

⁵⁰ Note of Board Meeting, October 2, 1949, Merrie Fidler research files, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS. For information regarding the reason of the decision, see Fidler, 257.

a chaperone. Some teams took this option, others chose to still employ a full-time chaperone. Teams who had a player-chaperone had to define when and where the woman would act as a player and chaperone. On the field she would take on the role of player. Off the field she would serve as the chaperone and oversee her fellow teammates. Before the 1952 season the administration stated that chaperones should wear their uniforms at all times when in public. In the case of player-chaperone situations, women would wear their player uniforms when on the field. After games, when on the bus, and at hotels they would wear their chaperone uniforms.⁵¹

Whether or not the chaperones were full-time, they still had the responsibility of overseeing their players' social lives. The effort to control the players' social and sexual behavior created yet another tension between the women and the feminine image that the administration created. Some of the players were lesbians, and their homosexuality did not fit within the All-American image that the administration insisted upon creating. By the 1940s many female athletes (especially those who looked unfeminine) were accused of being homosexual. Society did not accept this orientation, and homosexuality was therefore often kept quiet. For this reason it is difficult to study the existence of lesbian behavior in the AAGPBL, but former players do recall that such activity did occur.

Despite society's disapproval of homosexuality, it existed nonetheless and even increased during the war years. Young adults became free from the constraints that their families and communities created as they moved away from home to join the military or take on war-related jobs. Young adults thus had more freedom and

⁵¹ Note of Board Meeting, February 20, 1952, Merrie Fidler research files, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

channeled it into sexual activity.⁵² Both men and women had the freedom to carry out their desires to engage in relationships with members of the same sex, or simply experiment in an effort to better understand confusing feelings about their sexual orientation.

The AAGPBL gave lesbians, as well as those who had confusing feelings about their sexuality, the opportunity to engage in same-sex relationships. The relocation from their homes to another city and the intense traveling schedule gave players the freedom to experiment sexually away from their watchful, and likely judgmental, families and communities. It is unlikely that All-Americans engaged in lesbian behavior just to rebel against the League's feminine image. With so many women coming together there was bound to be at least a small percentage of lesbians among the group. Living and working closely together gave them the opportunity to establish connections with each other, sexual or otherwise.

Homosexual behavior came as a shock to many of the younger players who had never before heard of or seen lesbian behavior. Some feared lesbian players might approach them. To avoid this they formed friendships with women that they trusted would not make advances toward them and did not associate much with the lesbian players. Once the heterosexual players became accustomed to the behavior and sexual orientation of their lesbian teammates, however, they accepted them just as they would any other member of the team.⁵³

⁵² John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 260.

⁵³ Browne, 63.

The All-Americans may have had a sense of freedom from being away from their homes and communities, but chaperones still kept a watchful eye over the women, especially those whose lesbianism was no secret. Although it was clear that the administration did not want the public to accuse any of the All-Americans of being lesbian, there was no official administrative rule prohibiting homosexual behavior. The administration knew of its existence and seemed to tolerate it so long as the public remained oblivious, older players did not approach the younger women, and it did not in any way compromise the image of the AAGPBL. One manager held a meeting with his players to discuss the issue and told them, "I'm not going to pry into your private affairs. But if you put your private affairs onto me and the chaperone, then I'm going to take action. It could be that some of you might have to go home."⁵⁴ Chaperones attempted to monitor this by assigning different hotel rooms to women suspected of being romantically involved with each other. More drastic actions involved trading players to other teams and even dismissing players from the League in order to break apart relationships between teammates.⁵⁵ The administration took necessary steps to maintain the positive feminine image of the League, even if it meant meddling with players' sexual lives.

Despite their differences with the rules, most of the All-Americans seemed to have understood the administration's motives. They recognized that a feminine image was important to the League's success and experienced first hand the measures the administration took to ensure this image. Former player Kate Vonderau realized that in order for society to accept the All-Americans it was important that they did not

⁵⁴ Quote from an unnamed manager in Johnson, 115.

⁵⁵ Johnson, 115.

emulate men in appearance. “[The feminine image] was more show for the fans than anything else. I don’t know if we accomplished that, but we’ll say that we did anyhow. We went to all that trouble!”⁵⁶ Marilyn Jones Doxey realized the drama of seeing a professional women’s baseball game.

I think the fans wouldn’t come to see a bunch of girls that acted like boys. They wanted to see a bunch of girls that acted like girls, and looked like girls...and played like boys. The public thinks it’s great if you’ve got a female-type person, and she can really play ball. They don’t think it’s so great if you’re a tomboy anyway, and you look like a tomboy, and so what if you can play ball.⁵⁷

Mary Pratt had similar sentiments. “I was impressed and still am impressed with the attention that was made to project the image of ‘ladies’ playing baseball....It was these strict regulations that enabled the league to prosper in those early years. Many of us...managed to survive those years when it was not a socially accepted practice for girls to compete athletically (unless it was tennis).”⁵⁸ Pratt and other players realized why the administration insisted upon the feminine image and that the players benefited from it.

Although at times grudgingly, the All-Americans accepted this image and the expectations that came with it. They wore feminine uniforms and makeup on the field, they learned beauty routines, and wore dresses off the field. For the most part they did not patronize questionable establishments, only associated with men of whom chaperones approved, and returned home or to their hotel rooms by curfew. However, many of the women were not the charming ladies that the administration wanted them to portray. They did not always want to appear in dresses with high

⁵⁶ Johnson, 151.

⁵⁷ Johnson, 18.

⁵⁸ Mary Pratt papers, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

heels or adhere to strict conduct rules. The tension between the women and the feminine image that the administration imposed on them oftentimes led to the players intentionally breaking rules. In the end, the players did not follow ever policy verbatim, but compromised with the feminine image by occasionally bending the rules.

CHAPTER III

PLAYING LIKE MEN

Like others involved in men's professional sports, former football player Chet Grant initially did not take the AAGPBL seriously. "At first I wouldn't go around the corner to witness a hybrid travesty on the national pastime; that is, baseball professionally presented by short-skirted young women with oversize ball, undersize diamond, softball pitch and baseball lead off base."¹ Grant could not understand why well respected baseball men such as Max Carey, former base-stealing champion of the National League and team manager of the 1944 Milwaukee Chicks, bothered themselves with the AAGPBL. Carey's association with the League intrigued Grant and inspired him to attend a game. During the 1945 season, South Bend Blue Sox team manager Marty McManus left for St. Louis to visit his son who had just returned from duty in the Pacific. By then Grant had become so interested in the League that he pinch-managed the Blue Sox during McManus' absence, and when McManus left the following year to manage Denver in the Western League, Grant became South Bend's team manager. He managed the Blue Sox in 1946 and 1947, and then the Kenosha Comets in 1948.

Grant was not alone in having doubts about the AAGPBL; many did not believe that feminine women could play ball. Prior to this there was no professional women's baseball league. Women played baseball in the early twentieth century, but by the time the All-Americans were growing up, most girls and women were instead playing softball. Could they actually play baseball? The League's emphasis on

creating a feminine image was a double-edged sword that both attracted fans and created skeptics. On one hand, playing ball in short skirts distinguished these women from mannish female softball players and enticed people to attend games. On the other hand, this feminine image caused some to doubt that the women really could play baseball.

The success of the League depended upon more than just feminine appearance and demeanor. The AAGPBL would not be successful unless there was a balance of femininity and athleticism; one could not overshadow the other. Players would have to look nice and play hard; appear feminine but play like men. After all, the League was an athletic organization rather than a mere show of beauties trying to play ball. The dichotomous elements of femininity and athleticism forced the League into a balancing act. Wrigley did not doubt that the spectacle of women playing baseball would intrigue people enough to come to one game. Getting people to come back as loyal fans would be more of a challenge. Wrigley needed to sell his new business venture as an exciting sport worth cheering for. He hoped the public would look beyond the short hemlines and rouged cheeks and see skilled athletes who trained and played hard, improved their skills under the tutelage of some of baseball's most well respected men, established remarkable records, and adapted as best they could to changes in the game. Only then could skeptics like Grant appreciate the All-Americans; not only as nice looking women but also as athletes.

The administration's efforts to showcase their talent influenced the shape of the season, including spring training and barnstorming tours, as well as the game

¹ Chet Grant, "I Was a Girls' Baseball Manager," c. 1972, Chet Grant records, All-American Girls Baseball League collection, University of Notre Dame (hereafter UND).

itself. The administration tested the women's athletic abilities through a rigorous playing schedule and a physically demanding game that they were not accustomed to playing. Adapting to baseball was a test of athletic ability, for most American women played softball and had few opportunities in baseball. The administration was able to showcase the women's talent, but could not foster an environment in which the players could maintain the League's elite status. It cut spring training and barnstorming tours yet increased the difficulty of the game. As a result fewer women were able to meet the League's standards. The AAGPBL therefore brought about its own demise by demanding an elite status of athletes that it could not support.

One of the most significant tests of the All-Americans' physical endurance was their grueling schedule. Throughout the season each team played over one hundred games between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Teams played every day of the week with doubleheaders on Sundays. Teams made two visits to each of the other teams, playing four games each visit.² Games began at 7:30 p.m. and lasted until approximately 9:00 p.m.³ As the League expanded, teams played more games; in 1948 each of the ten teams played 128 games. As the number of teams in the League decreased in later years, so did the number of games each team played. With only five teams remaining in 1954, each played only 98 games.⁴

² "All-American Girls Baseball League" pamphlet, 1947, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, Northern Indiana Historical Society, South Bend (hereafter NIHS).

³ The first game, and sometimes the second, of doubleheaders only went seven rather than the standard nine innings. See Barbara Gregorich, *Women at Play: The Story of Women in Baseball* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1993), 119.

⁴ W.C. Madden, *The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League Record Book: Comprehensive Hitting, Fielding and Pitching Statistics* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Co., 2000), 282. The less intensive schedule in the League's later years allowed the players more rest. This, however, did not mean that the shorter season was easier, for the All-Americans were playing the more difficult game of baseball by this time.

The All-Americans needed spring training so that they could begin the season physically ready to compete. The administration expected the players to stay in shape during the winter, but this was, for some, easier said than done. For most All-Americans spring training was their first opportunity since the previous fall to practice.⁵ From 1943 until 1948 the League held centralized spring training for all of the teams. This was the main means of recruiting new players; scouts invited prospective players to spring training for try-outs. Centralized spring training, then, helped the League in a number of ways.

During spring training the Allocation Committee assigned players to teams in an effort to maintain equilibrium of talent and competition among them. This player allocation system prevented any one team from dominating the League, a problem men's professional baseball faced with the New York Yankees in the 1930s.⁶ Equally talented teams would help ensure close games and fierce competition in pennant races, and thus a better spectacle for fans. Also, having several teams of talented players, rather than a few with the best players, proved to the public that there were enough women who could play baseball to support a professional league.

During spring training the Allocation Committee observed and rated the players based on a scale that the scouts also used to evaluate players. This rating system allowed the committee to assign players to teams fairly. The committee evaluated the women not on appearance, but athletic skills. It judged them on batting,

⁵ During the off-season some players lived in warm places such as California and had the advantage of being able to play ball throughout the winter. Most of the players, however, did not have this opportunity.

⁶ Lois Browne, *Girls of Summer: In Their Own League* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1992), 21-22. Despite the efforts of the Allocation Committee, in 1949 South Bend and Rockford dominated the League, each having a record of 75 wins and 36 losses, leaving third placed Grand Rapids 18 games behind.

running, fielding, throwing, team spirit, behavior, cooperation, and pitching when applicable.⁷ The point scale ranged from 0 to 100, ranging from very bad to superior. On Allocation Day the committee used the rating charts to assign players to teams, and also approved player transactions. Originally no team was guaranteed any returning players. However, by 1945 teams could retain up to ten returning players. This allowed for local fans to develop a favorite player and therefore remain more loyal to the team, and the Allocation Committee could still keep the teams as equal as possible.⁸

After the 1949 season the Allocation Committee underwent modifications, including changes in who served on the committee, how it executed trades, and its name. The Balancing Committee ceased to exist after the 1950 season as the individual clubs bought out Meyerhoff's ownership of the League in 1951. Players then signed to play with individual teams rather than the League itself, and teams could keep as many players as desired. There was no allocation of players. Individual teams, rather than a committee or the League president, made trades.⁹

Spring training was not only an opportunity for the Allocation Committee to establish team rosters, but also a crucial period for the women to learn how to play ball well enough to meet the League's standards. Before play began in 1943 the administration modified the game of softball and combined it with elements of baseball. The game of the All-Americans differed from softball in a number of ways.

⁷ All-American Girls Baseball League point rating charts, c. 1945, Chet Grant Records, All-American Girls Baseball League collection, UND.

⁸ Under this player allocation system many women played for different teams throughout their careers, and most players found themselves traded at least once. For more information on the player allocation system, see "Rules and Regulations of the All-American Girls Baseball League," Harold T. Dailey Notebook, 1943-1946, All-American Girls Baseball League collection, UND.

League games featured nine players (who, unlike softball players, all used gloves) rather than softball's ten, a distance of 40' from the pitcher's mound to home plate rather than softball's 43', and a baseball-sized pitcher's box. Players could lead off and steal bases, unlike in softball, and the basepaths were eight feet longer than softball's 60' ones.¹⁰ Because the game was more demanding than softball, women needed practice to master this game and prove their athletic abilities to the public.

Initially the League held spring training in the Midwest but later trained in the southern United States and even South America. Due to travel restrictions during World War II, the League remained in the northern United States from 1943 to 1945, training at Chicago's Wrigley Field, in Peru, Illinois, and at Chicago's Waveland Park, respectively. After the war the League capitalized upon the opportunity to travel outside of the Midwest and went to Pascagoula, Mississippi. The following year they went to Havana, Cuba, and then to Opalocka, Florida the next. After training for ten to fourteen days, teams traveled in pairs and played exhibition games on their route home, giving the players added preparation as well as increasing the exposure of the League.¹¹

Training in the South and in Cuba not only allowed the women to practice in warm weather, but it also gave the League national publicity and expanded the pool of prospective players. This allowed the League to capitalize upon the talented female ballplayers throughout the country and in Cuba. This proved beneficial for the

⁹ *Fort Wayne Daisies Official Program and Scorebook*, 1951, p. 18, All-American Girls Baseball League collection, UND.

¹⁰ *All-American Girls Baseball League Manual*, c. 1948, All-Americans Girls Baseball League collection, UND.

¹¹ Merrie Fidler, "The Development and Decline of the All-American Girls Baseball League, 1943-1954" (M.S. thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1976), 144 -145.

League, for as the game became more similar to baseball the administration had greater difficulty finding qualified players, and needed to have as broad a talent pool as possible.

Despite its benefits, the League discontinued centralized spring training and exhibition tours after the 1948 season due to financial troubles. Instead, each team was responsible for its own training and held it locally. The player talent pool decreased from the loss of publicity and scouting opportunities outside of the Midwest. All-Americans also lost the extra practice they needed to adapt to baseball and adjust to the changing rules of the game.

Meyerhoff did not want his league to suffer from the discontinuation of localized spring training and exhibition tours; he knew that the public would doubt the women's athletic abilities if they could not play baseball. By the beginning of the 1949 season the game had already changed enough that some players, especially rookies, were having trouble playing baseball at a professionally competitive level. Between 1943 and 1949 the size of the ball had decreased by 1 3/8" in circumference, pitchers had adopted a strictly overhand pitch, the basepaths had increased by fifteen feet, and the distance between the pitcher's mound and home plate had increased by seven feet. The administration recognized the problems that players were having adjusting to these changes in the game but, due to monetary issues, could not afford to finance spring training. Meyerhoff, therefore, funded two barnstorming teams. He purchased the uniforms and equipment of the failed Chicago and Springfield franchises and formed two teams of rookies and other players in need of additional training. They played each other while touring the country. Meyerhoff organized a

tour in various states from June to early September for a total of seventy-six games.¹² Summer barnstorming teams toured in 1950 but, because the League severed ties with Meyerhoff's Management Corporation, there were none in 1951. The following year the administration recognized the importance of giving rookies and other players the opportunity to gain more experience, and scheduled what would be the last barnstorming tour for August 1952.¹³

The administration also used the summer tours as a way of testing changes it planned to make in the game. In the summer of 1949 the tour used a smaller ball with red stitching rather than the larger white ball of official League games.¹⁴ Fans liked this ball better; the smaller size and red stitching made it look more similar to a baseball.¹⁵ The barnstorming teams also tested longer basepaths. In 1950 players ran 80' basepaths, rather than the 72' distance of official League games. The administration decided whether to implement these changes in official League games based on how well the barnstorming teams handled the changes and the public's response to them.

The AAGPBL needed centralized spring training and the exhibition tours to highlight the women's athleticism and promote the League. The administration discontinued these practices yet increased the difficulty of the game, and as a result the League began to decline. Without centralized spring training and the exhibition tours rookies especially suffered by not having the much-needed extra practice. The

¹² Fidler, 156.

¹³ Fidler, 161.

¹⁴ At the beginning of the 1949 season the All-Americans used a ball 10 $\frac{3}{8}$ " in circumference. On July 16 the League adopted a 10" ball and used it throughout the remainder of the season.

¹⁵ Letter from tour advance man Murray Howe to Arthur E. Meyerhoff, July 28, 1949, quoted in Fidler, 158. The League later adopted a ball with red stitching that looked more similar to that which Major League Baseball used.

discontinuations also affected returning players who had to adapt to the changing rules. Their struggles with the game made it more difficult for the All-Americans to prove that they were talented baseball players.

The League added to the pressures of rookies and newer players by relying on them to fill the voids of retiring players. Veteran players were leaving and the League looked to the younger women to become the new stars. In 1948 twenty-one players had been in the League since it began—a total of six years—and thirty-four had played for five years.¹⁶ If rookies and younger talent could not fill the vacancies left by retiring veterans, the administration knew the League would not survive.

Even though some players had trouble adjusting, the administration slowly changed the game to baseball in order to make the AAGPBL different from other women's athletic organizations, and to make the game more exciting for spectators. Wrigley and his successors wanted to distinguish the League from semi-professional and professional women's softball leagues. Softball players had a negative reputation as crude, unladylike women. By playing a different game, the All-Americans would be set apart as more athletic and, ironically, also more feminine. Second, softball is a pitcher's game, oftentimes slow moving and not as exciting as baseball. Ken Sells, the first president of the League, said the, "Game of softball was a very slow game, as far as spectators were concerned. Most softball games, as played prior to 1943, were just battles between two pitchers.... We, therefore, decided from the beginning that we would write completely new rules...."¹⁷

¹⁶ Dailey Notebook, 1947-1949.

¹⁷ Letter from Ken Sells to Dr. Harold T. Dailey, date unknown, Dailey Notebook, 1943-1946.

Changing the game so that the focus shifted from the pitcher to the batter also made a greater spectacle. Feminine women playing the tougher, more challenging game of baseball intrigued the public more so than did feminine women playing softball, a game that the All-Americans had already proven they could play. Recalled former owner Carl Orwant,

[The players] began to make the old game look easy, and that was what we tried to avoid. We tried to make this look like it was something unusual, and it was way above average. They had so mastered softball... When the hard ball came in they made greater plays and we had [fewer] errors with the hardball. The scores looked more respectable; they looked more like baseball.¹⁸

Changes in ball size, ball delivery, distances between the pitcher's mound and home plate, and basepath lengths made the game look increasingly like baseball. From 1943 to 1954 the size of the ball decreased by $2\frac{3}{4}$ ", the pitching changed from underhand to strictly overhand, and both the distance between home plate and the pitcher's mound and that of the basepaths increased by twenty feet. By the League's last season the ball was $9\frac{1}{4}$ ", the basepaths were 85', and the distance from the pitcher's mound to home plate was 60'.¹⁹

Moving up the pace of the game made it more lively and likely piqued the fans' interest, but it also increased the athletic ability required at the pitcher's mound. Despite the adjustments batters made in order to adapt to the shrinking ball and lengthened basepaths, no player had to undergo more changes than did the pitcher. First she had to change to a sidearm pitch, and then to an overhand pitch. Those who

¹⁸ *A League of Their Own: The Documentary*, prod. Kelly Candaele and Kim Wilson, dir. Mary Wallace, Columbia/Tristar Home Video, 1987, videocassette.

¹⁹ For information on the changes in the game throughout the League's existence, see Gregorich, 89. The game of the All-Americans in 1954 was most similar to that of Major League Baseball (MLB). However, it was still different. In MLB, the basepaths were 90' long, the distance

had grown up playing softball rather than baseball had greater difficulty adjusting. Not only was it different from what they were accustomed, but it was also more strenuous.

The League had greater difficulty finding talented pitchers once they adopted the strictly overhand delivery. Many pitchers adapted to the change, as they had done with the sidearm delivery. Others, however, could not. They either switched positions or left the League. In many situations managers moved overhand-throwing outfielders to the pitcher's mound.²⁰ Eventually talented veteran players chose to leave the League in order to pursue college, marriage, and new careers. The pool to replace them grew smaller, for the League was now playing baseball while girls and young women still played softball. Although the League had always stressed femininity, toward the end of the League's existence the administration became more lenient when scouting for new players. Former player Wilma Briggs recalls, "I think by the time they got to overhand pitching, they were looking for ball players."²¹

For many years, talented pitchers dominated batters. Kenosha's Helen "Nicki" Nicol Fox was one of the League's best pitchers, winning 163 games, more than anyone in the League.²² During the League's first year she had the lowest

from the pitcher's mound to home plate was 60' 6", and the ball was 9" to 9 ¼" in circumference. See "The Great American Pastime," All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

²⁰ Gregorich, 142.

²¹ Sue Johnson, *When Women Played Hardball* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1994), 60.

²² W.C. Madden, *The Women of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League: A Biographical Dictionary* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Co., 1997), 179-180.

earned run average (ERA) with 1.81.²³ In the following years pitchers' records improved and the best ERA stayed below 1.00 until 1950.²⁴

Batters had trouble hitting the ball in the early years of the League. They could see the bigger ball easily, but they had difficulty hitting it far into the outfield. As a result batting averages were relatively low. During the first season only two players achieved a .300 batting average—Rockford's Gladys Davis at .332 and Racine's Charlotte Smith at .316.²⁵ Likewise, few players scored home runs. In 1944 Merle Keagle of the Milwaukee Chicks hit only seven home runs and still clinched the League's season record; runner-up Eleanor Dapkus of the Racine Belles hit five.²⁶ In fact, home runs were so rare that many ballparks did not have a fence in the outfield to designate home runs. Umpires called these feats if the ball went over the head of the outfielder attempting to catch it. In ballparks that had fences, batters had to hit the ball 225' in order to achieve a home run.²⁷

Pitchers' ERAs did not solely reflect their skills, but other statistics as well, including no-hitters and strikeouts. Rockford's Olive Bend Little threw the League's first no-hitter in 1943. By season's end she and Nicol Fox pitched eight no-hitters each. The following year Rockford's Carolyn Morris topped the League with eleven shutouts. In 1945 she threw fifteen, a close second to Fort Wayne's Dottie Wiltse's

²³ Dailey Notebook, 1943-1946.

²⁴ Because the All-American game was different from both women's softball and men's baseball, the All-Americans' statistics are not comparable to either. One must consider this when evaluating League statistics.

²⁵ Dailey Notebook, 1943-1946.

²⁶ Dailey Notebook, 1943-1946.

²⁷ Official Girls' Baseball Rules pamphlet, c. 1946, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS. In comparison, men's baseball rules mandated that the distance between home plate and the fence be at least 250' but recommended that it be 320' to 350'. See "Rawlings Official Baseball Rules, 1953" pamphlet, All-American Girls Baseball League collection, NIHS.

seventeen.²⁸ Wiltse and Racine's Joanne Winter would go on to tie for the League's record in shutouts, throwing seventeen each, Wiltse in 1945 and Winter in 1946.²⁹ South Bend's Jean Faut was a remarkable pitcher, winning the title for striking out the most batters from 1951 to 1953. During her best season she tied Rockford's Marie Mansfield in 1953 with 143 strikeouts.³⁰ Pitchers fared much better in the strikeout category during the League's second half. South Bend's Theda Marshall and Peoria's Faye Dancer threw the most strikeouts during the League's first six years, throwing seventy-nine each in 1947 and 1948 respectively.³¹ The next year Rockford's Lois Florreich threw 210 strikeouts, 131 more than the record the previous year. This improvement may have been due to changes made to the game that made it harder for batters to hit the ball. By 1949 pitchers were in their second full season of the overhand pitch, and the distance between the pitcher's mound and homeplate increased by five feet from the year before. Also, the ball measured 10" in circumference, the smallest ball used at that time. In later years the record would remain above 100 strikeouts until 1954 when Annabelle Lee of Rockford threw only ninety-four.³²

In the final year of the League, pitching reached its nadir. South Bend's Janet Rumsey had the lowest ERA with 2.18; teammate and runner-up Dollie Vanderlip averaged 2.40. In the last years of the League the number of shutouts decreased. In

²⁸ Dailey Notebook, 1943-1946.

²⁹ In the last years of the League the number of shutouts decreased. In 1953 Maxine Kline threw seven for Fort Wayne, and only six the following year. See Madden, *The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League Record Book*, 91.

³⁰ Madden, *The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League Record Book*, 86.

³¹ Dailey Notebook, 1947-1949.

³² Madden, *The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League Record Book*, 91.

1953 Maxine Kline threw seven for Fort Wayne, and only six the following year.³³ These disappointing numbers coincided with the League's imposition of the longest basepaths in its history. With the basepaths measuring 85' one would think that batters would have had greater difficulty scoring runs. However, it was at this time that the best pitchers allowed the most runs per nine-inning game.

Not only were pitchers' ERAs, shutouts, and strikeouts reflective of their athleticism, but so was their endurance. Teams played over one hundred games during the four-month season. There were relief pitchers, yet teams relied upon their starters to pitch consecutive games. It was not uncommon for games to go over the standard nine innings due to strong pitching. In 1947 Racine's Eleanor Dapkus made a name for herself during her first start as a pitcher by throwing a twenty-two inning game against South Bend. Her second pitching start, against Grand Rapids, lasted almost as long at eighteen innings. In two consecutive starts, Dapkus pitched a total of forty innings.³⁴

As the game evolved into baseball, the focus moved from the pitcher to the batter, and the players' hitting statistics increased. In the early years batting averages were low, reflecting the domination of the pitcher. In 1943 Racine had the League's best team batting average at .246. No team was able to surpass this record in the following six seasons. In fact, the lowest average of the entire history of the League occurred in 1944 when the Milwaukee Chicks averaged only .207.³⁵ Batting averages increased as the size of the ball decreased, for batters could hit the smaller ball further

³³ Madden, *The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League Record Book*, 86, 92.

³⁴ *All-American Girls Baseball League* pamphlet, 1948.

³⁵ Dailey Notebook, 1943-1946; Dailey Notebook, 1947-1949.

and faster. Beginning in 1950 teams' overall batting averages improved remarkably. Between 1950 and 1954, the lowest batting average was .249, the average of the Fort Wayne Daisies in 1950. The changes in the game gave the All-Americans the chance to prove they were talented athletes. The more difficult the game became, the better they hit.

The League had many power hitters who dominated the record books. Fort Wayne's Joanne Weaver earned the all-time record in 1954 by hitting twenty-nine home runs (Weaver accomplished this record as Rumsey pitched the League's worst record for lowest ERA of the season). Runner up Doris Sams of Kalamazoo hit twelve in 1952.³⁶ As modest as these records appear, they were even lower in earlier years. In 1945 Fort Wayne teammates Helen Callaghan Candaele and Faye Dancer tied with three home runs each, and in 1949 Fort Wayne's Thelma "Tiby" Eisen clinched the season record by hitting the same number.³⁷

As with the home run records, players' individual batting averages also fared better in the second half of the League's twelve years. Not only could the women play baseball, they hit better than they ever had. In 1951 Fort Wayne's Betty Foss had a batting average of .368, the second-best record in League history. In 1954 Joanne Weaver of Fort Wayne batted .429, the League's best average in its history. Weaver excelled in other areas as well. She led the League in most home runs, total bases (254), stolen bases (79), hits (143), and runs scored (109).³⁸ However, the 1949 season proved a period of adjustment for batters. From the previous year the ball

³⁶ Madden, *The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League Record Book*, 79, 90.

³⁷ Dailey Notebook, 1947-1949; Madden, *The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League Record Book*, 58.

³⁸ Madden, *The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League Record Book*, 90-91.

decreased from 10 $\frac{3}{8}$ " to 10" and the distance from the batter to the pitcher increased by 5'. These changes likely influenced the records of 1949. Jean Faut of South Bend earned a .291 batting average, the lowest the seasonal record had been thus far. Eisen's three home runs that year tied for the lowest seasonal best of the League's history.

Base stealing was also an important part of the game, a component that players were not accustomed to during their days of playing softball. Sophie Kurys of Racine was by far the best in this category, holding the season record from 1944 to 1950. In 1946 she clinched the League's all-time record by stealing 201 bases in a single season.³⁹ Lengthening the basepaths did not hinder Kurys' base-stealing. In the first two seasons of her reign the basepaths measured 68'; from 1946 to 1950 they measured 72'. Charlene Pryer stole fifty-nine bases, the season's best, in 1952. This low record is likely a reflection of good pitching, for in that year South Bend's Jean Faut had an ERA of .93.⁴⁰

Oftentimes the All-Americans received injuries from playing hard, such as by sliding into bases they were attempting to steal. With few exceptions, players did not allow injuries to hinder their game.⁴¹ There was not much room on an injured players list. Team rosters averaged only fifteen to twenty players, so the women tried to keep themselves healthy. Marilyn Jones Doxey remembered, "We tried to take care of ourselves, because if you couldn't play, you were hurtin' yourself. And

³⁹ Dailey Notebook, 1943-1946; Dailey Notebook, 1947-1949.

⁴⁰ Madden, *The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League Record Book*, 80.

⁴¹ Injured women who were unable to play received compensation as covered by the Workman's Compensation Insurance Policy as well as two weeks' salary. See "Rules and Regulations of the All-American Girls Baseball League," Dailey Notebook, 1943-1946.

everybody else.”⁴² Most injuries were leg bruises from sliding into bases. Ruth Richard remembered participating in games despite broken bones. “A lot of my fingers were broken but never taken care of because you didn’t dare have anything wrong with you. Because you had to play ball... Very seldom did you have an injury x-rayed or anything.”⁴³

When it came to sliding, some ballparks were worse than others. South Bend’s Playland Park was a cinder racetrack that made sliding extra rough. Blue Sox power hitter Betsy “Sock’um” Jochum recalled not sliding into the home plate of Playland Park unless absolutely necessary.⁴⁴ Other ballparks doused the field with oil and burned it in order to cut down on dust. These rough playing fields made sliding even more painful.

The players’ injuries, long seasons, and adaptations to a changing game proved that the All-Americans were athletes. In order to strengthen their abilities, the administration hired coaches, or team managers, who knew baseball well and could lead their teams and the League to success. The administration had another agenda as well. The League hired many former professional baseball players and coaches as team managers in order to give the All-Americans more credibility in the eyes of the public. Approximately two-thirds of the team managers had experience in either major or minor league baseball.⁴⁵ Thus, the administration gave players exposure to

⁴² Johnson, 16.

⁴³ Johnson, 79.

⁴⁴ “Dames of the Diamond,” *Across Indiana*, #802, produced by Todd Gould, 1997, copy in All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

⁴⁵ Fidler, 226; Sue Macy, *A Whole New Ball Game: The Story of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1993), 26.

talented men who conditioned and trained them, introducing the women into the male-dominated world of baseball.

The coaches reconciled the players' femininity and their job of playing a male sport in different ways. For the most part coaches did not allow the gender of the players to hinder training and competitive play. They capitalized upon the talent that the women already had and encouraged them to play hard.⁴⁶ Some acted as a father figure to the women as well as a coach. Others viewed the players as women as much as they viewed them as athletes.

Bill Allington, former minor league baseball player and coach of women's softball, coached in the AAGPBL longer than anyone else. Between the Rockford Peaches and the Fort Wayne Daisies, Allington managed for ten years, leading the Peaches to four play-off championship wins and the Daisies to two League championships.⁴⁷ Many players and others associated with the AAGPBL remembered Allington as the League's sternest coach and a gifted teacher. Millie Lundaho served as the chaperone of the Peaches when Allington coached Rockford. She said of his work, "Allington was marvelous. He knew everything about the girls, and he used good psychology in getting them to do things, and he was a teacher as well as a coach."⁴⁸ Allington taught his players the importance of understanding baseball. He quizzed his players in order to keep them on their toes. He would ask them, for instance, "In a run down play, the runner's progress is impeded by a

⁴⁶ Diana Star Helmer, *Belles of the Ballpark* (Brookfield, Connecticut: Millbrook Press, 1993), 66.

⁴⁷ Lois Browne, *Girls of Summer: In Their Own League* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1992), 73, 205.

⁴⁸ Johnson, 106.

defensive player without the ball. Ruling?”⁴⁹ He took advantage of the ride from one city to the next to discuss details of games.⁵⁰ Allington did not allow his players’ gender to affect his coaching techniques. He treated them as athletes who happened to be women, rather than women who created a spectacle by playing baseball. Allington recognized their athletic abilities and encouraged them to strengthen their talents and make a name for themselves in baseball. He not only sharpened their athletic skills, but expected them to master the game.

While Allington’s players observed him as a strict coach who expected his players to work hard and learn the strategy of playing good baseball, one of Max Carey’s players saw her coach differently. Carey was well known by baseball fans for his accomplishments in Major League Baseball. He led the National League in base stealing ten out of fifteen years, averaging fifty-one steals per season, and later managed the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1931 and 1932.⁵¹ In 1944 Carey joined the League and coached the Milwaukee Chicks, who, by the end of the season, moved to Grand Rapids. Despite their problems in Milwaukee, the Chicks played well and won the playoff championship. Thelma “Tiby” Eisen played for the Chicks under Carey and remembered him fondly. “He was a wonderful father figure. He really took care of his girls. He was just a wonderful teacher. He taught me everything he knew about being an outfielder, running, and stealing bases.”⁵² Carey took a different approach as team manager, opting to be more supportive rather than demanding like

⁴⁹ Johnson, 108.

⁵⁰ Browne, 79.

⁵¹ *Fort Wayne Daisies Official Program and Scorebook*, 1950, p. 5, All-American Girls Baseball League collection, UND.

⁵² Johnson, 186.

Allington. He believed his responsibilities as a coach included looking after the women in a caring manner as well as strengthening their athletic skills.

In 1945 Carey left coaching to serve as League president. After the 1949 season the administration replaced him with the League's publicity director, Fred Leo. Meyerhoff delayed telling Carey of his dismissal until he had secured a place for him with the Chicago Cubs.⁵³ Under the supposition that he would go on to work with men's professional baseball, Carey wrote a letter to the All-Americans explaining his departure. "I don't want you to think that because I am going back to men's baseball that I am not 100% sold on girls' baseball and the All-American Girls Baseball League.... I shall never lose my interest in the development of the All-American Girls Baseball League....I will be pulling for all of you to hit [.300] or more."⁵⁴ The support Carey expressed in this letter to the players is evidence of his compassion for the women as well as his belief in their athletic talent. Carey did not go on to coach men's baseball, but remained with the AAGPBL and coached the Fort Wayne Daisies in 1950 and 1951.

Dave Bancroft played professional baseball from 1915 to 1930, playing for the Philadelphia Phillies, New York Giants, Boston Braves, and Brooklyn Dodgers. After five seasons Philadelphia sold Bancroft to the New York Giants in 1920 for \$100,000 and four players, quite a deal for the time.⁵⁵ Bancroft joined the AAGPBL in 1948 and coached the Chicago Colleens, and then the South Bend Blue Sox in

⁵³ Browne, 178.

⁵⁴ Letter from Max Carey to the Girls of the All-American, November 28, 1949, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

⁵⁵ *Battle Creek Belles Official Program*, 1951, All-American Girls Baseball League collection, UND.

1949 and 1950 and the Battle Creek Belles in 1951. Bancroft also celebrated the ability of his players, and went so far as to compare the women to male professional baseball players. Bancroft stated his opinions in a letter to Marty Ross. “I don’t think there is one man in a thousand, being of the same age as the girls, can go out [to] the field and perform near as good as these girls. If some of them were men they would be playing in the major leagues.”⁵⁶

The initial skeptic Chet Grant also compared the All-Americans to male baseball players, stating that the women could do anything that the men could, and would do something that the men would not—slide without protective gear.⁵⁷ Although the skill of the All-Americans impressed Grant so much that he went from refusing to watch them to becoming their coach, he did not treat them as men. In the article “I Was a Girls’ Baseball Manager,” he reminisced on his days in the League and referred to his players’ feminine qualities—the “beautiful [Mary “Bonnie”] Baker” and “short, dark, vivacious [Senaída “Shoo Shoo” Wirth]” who was “cute as a bug.” Grant saw the women’s femininity as an interesting twist on their athletic skills that made watching them more interesting. He noted that Merle “Pat” Keagle was an “attractive blond mother of a young child,” and that “her unaffected accent on the feminine side heightened the wonder of her skills.”⁵⁸ Although he respected the women as players, Grant also appreciated their feminine qualities without hesitation.

While the administration only hired male coaches, in some cases players acted as temporary team managers in the case of the full-time male coach losing his job in

⁵⁶ Letter from Dave Bancroft to Marty Ross, February 15, 1950, Dailey Notebook, 1950, All-American Girls Baseball League collection, UND.

⁵⁷ Grant, 2.

⁵⁸ Grant, 6-9.

the middle of or toward the end of the season.⁵⁹ After the 1950 season the club directors voted to only allow women to manage teams in emergency situations.⁶⁰ The administration's decision to not allow women to serve as coaches unless in extreme situations is evidence that, although they recognized the women as talented athletes and expected them to play a men's sport, they did not approve of them serving as authority figures by coaching their teams. The administration wanted to showcase the women as baseball players, not as team managers. In order for the League players to be appealing as both athletes and women, a man needed to be in charge.

Some people involved in men's baseball compared the women with men, noting that many of the women were just as talented as the men. Helen Callaghan Candaele became known as the "Feminine Ted Williams" because of her power hitting. This was something to be proud of, for Williams was a stand-out player for the Boston Red Sox in the 1940s, known for his powerful hitting and high batting averages. Former professional baseball player Charlie Grimm said that Dorothy "Dottie" Schoreder would be worth \$50,000 if she were a man. Dorothy "Dottie" Kamenskek also received praise from her male counterparts. Wally Pipp, former first baseman for the New York Yankees, stated that she was a better fielder than most male first baseman, and that she had the potential to become the first woman to play Major League Baseball. This statement may not have been too farfetched. The Inter-

⁵⁹ Such was the case when, with only a few weeks remaining in their respective seasons, Thelma "Tiby" Eisen, Vivian Kellog, and Mary Rountree together coached the Fort Wayne Daisies in 1948, and Ernestine Petras coached the Keneosha Comets in 1951. Doris Tetzlaff served as the coach-chaperone for the Fort Wayne Daisies in 1950, assisting Carey in his management duties. Mary "Bonnie" Baker managed a team longer than any other woman when she coached the remainder of the 1950 season after the Lassies moved from Kalzamazoo to Muskegon. See Fidler, 235-236; *Fort Wayne Daisies Official Program and Scorebook*, 1950, p. 23; and Browne, 182-183.

⁶⁰ Johnson, 185.

state League's Senators offered Eleanor Engle a contract with their minor league ball club, but she refused to sign.⁶¹ In complimenting the women, the men confirmed that the All-Americans were talented athletes who could play baseball at an elite level.

One might observe that, because the All-Americans did not play under the same regulations as the men, the women were not as talented. It was this exact situation that the administration hoped to avoid by insisting that the public not compare the men and women. Dottie Schroeder recognized a difference between men's and women's baseball.

The men can hit the ball farther, and they're stronger, of course. And most of them can run faster than the girls. But we have the ability and the grace and the knowledge of the game. Even though we're not as strong and can't run as fast, we still have the same skills, on a graduated scale. We could still do it. In fact I think the girls are smarter than the men.⁶²

While some players, like some coaches, recognized differences between male and female ball players, they also recognized women's athletic skills as comparable and even superior in some ways. Marilyn Jones Doxey disagreed with Schroeder, claiming that there were fewer differences than similarities between the two. "We played as hard, ran as hard, and slid as hard. We hit as [well], and threw as [well], and thought better! No, I think we didn't play any [differently] than what they played. Except we got a hell of a lot less money!"⁶³ Doxey felt that women could be just as talented in sports as their male counterparts, but faced discrimination in the form of unequal pay.

⁶¹ Sharon L. Roepke, *Diamond Gals: The Story of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League*, 2nd ed. (Flint, Michigan: AAGBL Cards, 1986), 10, copy in All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS

⁶² Johnson, 195.

⁶³ Johnson, 15.

Whatever their opinion on this matter, no one could argue that the All-Americans lacked athletic ability. And it was more than just talent that won games; competitive spirit went a long way as well. Dottie Collins remembers that a winning attitude complemented her weaknesses in other areas. "I don't have the ability that a lot of other people have. But I'm a competitor. And that is very important. If you put me in a tough situation, I'll beat you nine times out of ten."⁶⁴ Mary Rountree was similarly tenacious. "It's like breathing, winnin' was. It was everything."⁶⁵ This determination to win fueled Rountree's athletic drive.

Not all players felt as strongly about the importance of winning. Rose Gacoich was satisfied with a good competition and the opportunity to play. "You want to win, especially if you're pitchin'. And you help other people out to try to win, because I know how they feel. But it wasn't [really] important for me. I loved the game of baseball, and I'd do anything I could to win, but I wouldn't go break my neck."⁶⁶ Isabel Alvarez regretted not having been more aggressive in her play, assuming that it would have made her a better player. Irene Applegate concluded the opposite. She felt that her aggressive pitching style may have done more harm than good. Applegate had a much more aggressive approach to her game than Gacoich. She worried about winning and always doing her best so much that it wore her out. Applegate later felt that trusting and relying upon her teammates to play good defense would have benefited her pitching.⁶⁷ Throughout their playing careers, many of the All-Americans struggled with an appropriate level of competitiveness.

⁶⁴ Johnson, 72.

⁶⁵ Johnson, 71.

⁶⁶ Johnson, 75.

⁶⁷ Johnson, 74.

The administration would learn the difficult lesson that, although the women were very talented and some were very competitive, they could not adequately adapt to the changes the League imposed upon them. This inability was not due to a lack of athletic ability, but rather a lack of experience in the new game. Talented coaches taught their players valuable lessons in the game of baseball and trained them to become elite athletes. However, this was not enough to sustain the League permanently. As an increasing number of veteran players left the AAGPBL in its later years, the game evolved into baseball, and rookies who had grown up playing softball could not adapt to the new game quickly enough to fill the shoes of retiring players.

Throughout the League's existence the administration attempted to showcase the athletic skills of the players in order to sell the AAGPBL as a legitimate athletic organization of elite female baseball players. This was a central focus that shaped the season as well as the game of the All-Americans. The administration continually changed the game to more resemble baseball in order to show the public that the women were able to play baseball on a professionally competitive level. The administration expected more of the women's athletic skills, but it was unable to maintain the means by which the All-Americans adjusted to the changing game.

CHAPTER IV

NEWSPAPER AND MAGAZINE COVERAGE

William Wrigley, Jr. once said, “Advertising is pretty much like running a furnace. You’ve got to keep on shoveling coal. Once you stop stoking, the fire goes out.”¹ Wrigley understood the importance of advertising and its influence on the success of a business, and passed this knowledge on to his son. Philip Wrigley inherited the chewing gum business and the Chicago Cubs, and also learned sharp business skills including the importance of advertising. Philip continued his father’s business philosophies, and later applied them to his new women’s softball league.

During 1943 and 1944 when he owned AAGPBL, Wrigley made sure that the press covered his new venture and funded the effort with his own money. He knew that the League would only be as successful as its promotional campaign was strong. Wrigley wanted to make sure that the press promoted the women as talented athletes who played competitive ball as well as wholesome, athletic, young, and good women. He issued press releases and information about players, conduct rules, and game rules to the media so that the public would have more exposure to the League and therefore be more likely to support it. Ken Sells, first League president, even discouraged the local press from writing their own articles in order to better control the image of the All-Americans and emphasize their athletic skills as well as feminine talent such as cooking and sewing.²

¹ Quoted in Merrie A. Fidler, “The Development and Decline of the All-American Girls Baseball League, 1943-1954” (M.S. thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1975), 106-107.

² Diana Star Helmer, *Belles of the Ball Park* (Brookfield, Connecticut: Millbrook Press, 1993), 21-22. Despite Sells discouraging them from writing their own articles, journalists for local newspapers appear to have done so and focused primarily on the athletic skills of the women.

Wrigley employed Arthur Meyerhoff, who headed his corporate advertising, to handle the League's publicity and promotion. When Meyerhoff purchased the League from Wrigley after the 1944 season he governed the League in the same manner as did his predecessor, and expanded promotional efforts. Spring training and barnstorming tours helped the players to prepare for the upcoming season, but they also were great promotional tools that introduced people outside of the Midwest to the League, resulting in a larger fan base and player talent pool. When the individual team owners bought out Meyerhoff after the 1950 season, the owners decentralized the management of the League. At this time the League's financial troubles were mounting, and the owners decided to cut expenses by decreasing publicity. Most of these men, unlike Wrigley and Meyerhoff before them, did not realize the significance of publicity and the League suffered for it. This lack of publicity had a profound negative impact on the League and contributed to its low attendance figures in its later years.

Press coverage not only informed the public, but also reflected the way that sportswriters and the public reconciled the players' femininity and athleticism. It also showed the extent to which the League met Wrigley's goals of selling the All-Americans as feminine women as well as talented baseball players. The press covered the AAGPBL differently depending upon the journalists' hometown connection with the All-Americans. Host city newspapers covered the All-Americans on an almost daily basis throughout the season, focusing on their athleticism and covering the games as serious competitions. The national press, mainly popular magazines such as *Time*, *Life*, *Collier's Weekly*, *Newsweek*, and *American Magazine*,

also provided readers with information about the League and its players. This coverage concentrated more on the players' femininity and physical appearance and less on their game skills. Journalists covering barnstorming games fell in between the local and national media in their coverage of the League, giving attention to both the athleticism and femininity of the players. Wrigley's goal of creating a league of feminine athletes varied in its success depending upon how well the audience knew the players.

National magazines introduced many Americans outside of the Midwest to the AAGPBL. Although most midwesterners were familiar with the League, people who lived in other areas of the country knew less about it. National magazines were therefore more likely to report on general information about the League rather than specific games. The journalists were not easily sold on the All-Americans' athletic skills because they had never seen them play. However, they could see the women's physical attractiveness through photographs. Most journalists for national magazines did not balance the players' femininity and athleticism but instead focused more on their attractiveness.

The *Time* magazine article "Baseball, Maestro, Please" represented the League as a spectacle of women playing ball rather than serious athletic competition. The author reported Wrigley's efforts to promote his "Midwestern softball carnival" in Milwaukee by holding concerts at the ballpark before the beginning of the game. The author wrote that neither the concert promotions, charm school, nor the League itself was a success. Despite charm school classes, the women were not "chic,"

which, in the opinion of the author, was more important than the game or general quality of play.³

The tone of “Baseball, Maestro, Please” was similar to many others that appeared in national magazines in that the authors focused more on the women’s appearance and minimized their talent and dedication to the game. Many writers for national magazines focused more on the women as objects of desire. Writing for *Time* during the League’s first season, the author of “Ladies of the Little Diamond” focused heavily on the middle-class femininity of the players. The author noted that Wrigley made a conscious effort to distinguish his league from other women’s softball leagues by, for instance, not giving his teams undignified names similar to those of women’s softball, such as Slapsie Maxie’s Curvaceous Cuties or the Dr. Pepper Girls of Miami Beach. Under the subtitle “Appleblossom Beauties” the author wrote about the dress uniform, calling it dignified yet provocative, and informed readers that scouts would not accept prospective players that they deemed too masculine or uncouth. During “spring training” the players attended evening classes of Helena Rubenstein’s charm school. By placing the phrase spring training in quotation marks, the author implied that he/she did not believe the women attended a legitimate athletic training camp. The author was more concerned with the femininity of the players than their abilities to score runs, slide into bases, and strike and throw out their opponents. To this writer the League was a spectacle of beautiful women attempting to play ball rather than a serious organization of talented athletes.⁴ Similarly, the *Sunday World Herald* magazine article “As Beauty Goes to Bat”

³ “Baseball, Maestro, Please,” *Time* (July 31, 1944), 40.

⁴ “Ladies of the Little Diamond,” *Time* (June 14, 1943), 73-74.

emphasized the physical attractiveness of the All-Americans through numerous photographs of players. The author wrote that Racine's Gloria Marks was a former participant in a beauty contest, and included a picture of Mary "Bonnie" Baker looking into a mirror and smiling as she applied lipstick. By giving so much attention to the women's good looks and the care they gave to their appearance, the author allowed their feminine image to overshadow the players' accomplishments as ball players.⁵

Herb Graffis also capitalized upon the All-Americans' wholesome image and wrote about how the League compared to women's softball in *Click* magazine's "Queens of Swat." He wrote that amateur softball teams did not give much attention to their uniforms and appearance, but the All-Americans wore attractive dress uniforms to emphasize their looks. During charm school they took notes on how to act properly, and in addition to these lessons they also learned how to become good ball players. Graffis helped readers to see the All-Americans as different from female softball players, not only in the way they played but also in their demeanor. His article showed that the League administration's strategy of distinguishing the AAGPBL from women's softball leagues was working.⁶

In the summer of 1946 "Baseball: Babette Ruths" appeared in *Newsweek* and offered readers a glimpse of the All-Americans' combination of femininity and athleticism. Rather than emphasizing the women's skills, the author counteracted his comments on their athleticism with comments on their femininity. For example, a

⁵ "As Beauty Goes to Bat," *Sunday World Herald* magazine, ca. 1943-1944. Newspaper and magazine articles, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, Northern Indiana Historical Society, South Bend (hereafter NIHS).

⁶ Herb Graffis, "Queens of Swat," *Click* (September 1944), 48, 50.

picture of the All-Americans completing exercise drills appears above the caption, “The girls limber up in the name of beauty and baseball at the Pascagoula training camp.” The author’s implication that the All-Americans placed as much importance on their physical appearance as they did on their baseball skills misrepresented the players’ desires to keep themselves in shape in order to benefit their game. Further, by mentioning that women who attended spring training included former schoolteachers, models, students, and stenographers as well as women who were married with children, the author implied that the All-Americans were respectable women who were not going to make a career of sports, for they had day jobs.

The title “Baseball: Babette Ruths” itself was patronizing and characterized the women as diminutive feminine versions of the great baseball player George “Babe” Ruth. This tone continued as the author compared three All-Americans to well-known male baseball players, Ty Cobb, Honus Wagner, and Christy Mathewson, respectively, by giving them nicknames—“Tina Cobb” to Sophie Kurys, “Honey Wagner” to “Pretty Dorothy Schroeder,” and “Christine Mathewson” to Connie Wisniewski. The author recognized the women’s athleticism by comparing them to male baseball players who were inductees of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, but discredited his compliments by referring to them in a condescending tone.⁷

Carl L. Biemiller’s *Holiday* article “World’s Prettiest Ballplayers,” as the title implies, portrayed the All-Americans’ femininity, but also the quality of their ball playing. On the first page of the article appeared a posed photograph of three players in the locker room placing finishing touches on their hair before taking the field. The

⁷ “Baseball: Babette Ruths,” *Newsweek* (July 29, 1946), 68-69.

caption read, “The scent of cologne mingles with the smell of wintergreen oil in the locker room of the Rockford, Ill., Peaches where pepper-pot second baseman Barbara Payne and pitchers Audrey Daniels and Margaret Jurgensmeier make sure they retain the feminine look their fans expect.” The picture and its caption assured readers that the women were not sacrificing their femininity for the opportunity to play professional ball; even though a game was about to begin the women took the time to make sure they looked attractive before taking the field. Biemiller then wrote of the popularity of the Peaches in Rockford and a short history of the League as well as women’s baseball, thereby justifying both women’s baseball and the fans that supported it. Biemiller left his readers with the lasting impression of the AAGPBL by referring to it as the “lipstick league.” They might be ball players, he implied, but they were first and foremost women concerned with their appearance.⁸

Rockford Peach Carolyn Morris was featured in *American Magazine’s* “Beauty at the Bat.” Despite the implication of its title, the author of the article discussed Morris’ athletic abilities as well as her appearance. Six photographs depicted Morris, four of which showed her in an athletic setting, from pitching to running on the beach in workout clothes to stay in shape. Another picture showed Morris at her off-season job modeling scarves at a women’s store in Chicago. By showing that Morris was both an athlete and a feminine woman, the author implied that being an athlete was only a part of her life—it did not completely define who she was or what she did. She spent only a portion of the year as an All-American, and during the remaining months donned a nice dress and make-up as she worked in a department store. The caption under a picture of Morris modeling scarves read, “Few

⁸ Carl L. Biemiller, “World’s Prettiest Ballplayers,” *Holiday* (June 1952), 50, 85.

of Carolyn's co-workers in the store knew she was a star ballplayer." As talented as she was, Morris looked and acted more like a respectable, beautiful model than an athlete.⁹

Appearing in *Collier's Weekly*, "Belles of the Ball Game" used men associated with the League to explain the athletic nature of the game. The author quoted a former manager as saying that the public loved the All-Americans' pitching, base stealing, and sliding so much that if managers could not produce winning teams for the public they would lose their jobs. The author wrote that coaching the women posed problems for some team managers, citing that Grand Rapids Chicks' team manager Benny Meyer upset his wife by posing with his players—eighteen "ballet-skirted, bare-thighed, pretty girls." Even coaches who saw their players as talented athletes could not deny that many were very attractive. This had the potential to cause problems for team managers, such as Meyer, whose wives were uncomfortable with their husbands working so closely with attractive young women.¹⁰

Although not as common, other articles placed greater emphasis on the athletic abilities of the players. The author of *Life* magazine's "Girls' Baseball" praised the All-Americans as skilled athletes who threw balls hard and slid into bases with bare legs. The author informed readers about the unique rules of the All-Americans' game that made it different from softball and baseball. The majority of the article consisted of captioned pictures of uniformed players pitching, batting, and sliding into base. Occasional references to conduct rules and the dress uniform reflected the author's interest in the femininity of the players, but the author primarily

⁹ "Beauty at the Bat," *American Magazine* (June 1945), 24-25.

¹⁰ "Belles of the Ball Game," *Collier's Weekly* (August 13, 1949).

focused on their athletic ability. The pictures especially conveyed that the women were tough athletes and showed the injuries that they sustained from their hard play. Most of the pictures are action shots of games in which the women appear in make-up but nonetheless swing hard and slide into bases. The exception is the photograph of Mary “Bonnie” Baker, who posed for the camera in her catcher’s gear while smiling and clenching her fist as if cheering on a teammate.¹¹

An article that appeared in *American Magazine* also represented both the athleticism and femininity of the players. The author of “Dotty is a Slugger” focused on the athletic accomplishments of Dorothy Kamenshek, specifically her batting records. Kamenshek posed for the camera as if she were looking intensely at the pitcher and calculating her swing. To balance the coverage of her athleticism, the author wrote that Kamenshek was looking toward the future and life after baseball, for she majored in physical and health education at the University of Cincinnati and only played baseball during her summer vacations.¹²

National magazines informed audiences across the country about the AAGPBL, and focused primarily on the physical attractiveness and femininity of the players. Some were even condescending in their coverage. By not balancing the players’ femininity with their athleticism, these articles minimized the All-Americans’ athletic skills and fueled the administration’s wholesome middle-class image of the players. However, they did capture the spectacle of feminine women playing a men’s sport that Wrigley envisioned, and emphasized how the All-Americans were different from female softball players of the time.

¹¹ “Girls’ Baseball,” *Life* (June 4, 1945), 63-66.

¹² “Dotty is a Slugger,” *American Magazine* (August 1950), 57.

National magazines were not the only medium outside of the Midwest that covered the League. The local newspapers of cities hosting the barnstorming teams covered games when the All-Americans were in town. The journalists balanced the players' femininity and athleticism more so than those writing for national magazines. They emphasized the attractiveness of the women and their feminine qualities, but also covered the games as athletic competitions. Oftentimes the focus of the articles was not consistent with the titles of the pieces; many headlines emphasized the femininity of the women, in an effort to attract the attention of readers, but in the articles themselves the authors recognized the athletic talents of the women. All agreed that the female players were intriguing and definitely worth the fanfare that they attracted, not only for their beauty and the spectacle, but also for the game they played. In May 1946 two All-American teams played exhibition games in Texas before returning north to begin the regular season. A journalist for the *Sunday Enterprise* of Beaumont, Texas, wrote of the upcoming games between the "professional baseball beauties," and reported that women's baseball was becoming one of the best spectator sports in women's history. "It is proving itself a 'natural' because of the players' ability to put on an attractive spectacle while excelling in every department of what at one time was considered strictly a man's game."¹³

Unlike national magazines that introduced the League as a news story, newspapers in cities that hosted barnstorming tours advertised the games as local events for people to attend. Writers for Texas' *Beaumont Journal* awaited the barnstorming teams' arrival with great anticipation, encouraging readers to purchase

¹³ *Sunday Enterprise* (May 5, 1946), clippings file, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, NIHS.

tickets early as many people were expressing interest in the game. Wayne Phillips wrote, "It takes time for girls baseball to click, but when it does, the male and female fans won't trade it for anything short of a championship team."¹⁴ The All-Americans had to win over the public, but once they did the fans were devoted to the women and cheered them on. Two days later another article appeared in the *Beaumont Journal* in which the author referred to the players as "Diamond Cuties" and explained that the All-Americans believed that men did not have a monopoly on baseball, for they played their own version of the game.¹⁵ By referring to them as "cuties" the author emphasized the physical attractiveness of the women rather than their athletic skills, and promoted the administration's image of the women as middle-class ladies rather than legitimate ball players. However, Dick Oliver, writing for the *Beaumont Enterprise*, praised the visiting All-Americans for their athletic skill. "And these girls are not merely powder-puff wielders," he said. "They represent the top athletes in the nation and Canada in that particular field and their fielding and hitting and general all-around play has few short comings." Oliver sent mixed messages about the women by referring to them as great ball players as well as "diamond darlings" and the "sweethearts of swat."¹⁶

In July 1950 the Springfield Sallies and Chicago Colleens played in Newport News, Virginia. Although local journalist Sam Banks, writing for the *Daily Press*, covered the plays of the games, he focused on the gender of the "weaker sex" in his

¹⁴ *Beaumont Journal* (May 13, 1946), clippings file, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

¹⁵ *Beaumont Journal* (May 15, 1946), clippings file, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

¹⁶ *Beaumont Enterprise* (May 16, 1946), clippings file, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

article “Baseball, The Female Way Brings Out Crowd of 2000.” The women’s athletic skills did not impress Banks much, which is not surprising considering that these were summer barnstorming teams of players who needed to sharpen their skills before participating in League games. However, the feminine appearance of the players pleased him. He wrote, “The games may not be diamond classics, but it is refreshing to say the least to see legs that aren’t bad looking peering out from under a baseball uniform.”¹⁷ The following month the two teams played in New Castle, Pennsylvania. Like Banks, the writer covering the event for the *New Castle News* was more interested in the fact that the players were women than in their baseball skills, referring to them as “tantalizing darlings of the diamond.” The writer encouraged readers to attend the game not to see a good baseball game, but rather the spectacle they made in their “efforts to bring fans a new type of girl entertainment...”¹⁸ To this journalist the All-Americans were not playing good, competitive baseball but rather creating an entertaining spectacle. A short piece that appeared in the *San Antonio Evening News* also emphasized the barnstorming game as a spectacle. The writer dedicated just a few sentences to Helen Callaghan’s accomplishments with the Daisies, but included a revealing picture of players from both teams lying on their backs completing bicycle drills, thus exposing their muscular thighs and calves. The editors treated this as a titillating image rather than a serious one, and that is how they tended to characterize the games as well.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Daily Press* (ca. July 1950), clippings file, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

¹⁸ *New Castle News*, August 26, 1950, clippings file, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

¹⁹ *San Antonio Evening News* (May 1, 1946).

These newspapers did not represent the All-Americans as tough competitors, but rather as feminine athletes. Unlike the national magazines, which concentrated mainly on the physical attractiveness and sexual appeal of the women and gave minimal notice to their athletic skills, the newspapers recognized the players both as attractive women and athletes. These journalists witnessed the talent of the women themselves, and even if they were distracted by bare flesh, they wrote about the game itself as well as the spectacle of the women playing ball.

Sportswriters for hometown newspapers covered the League differently than did national magazines and barnstorming newspapers, for they accepted the women as legitimate baseball players. Article titles and headlines referred mainly to the game rather than the players' gender. Titles such as "Daisies Win Double Bill From Kenosha, 2-1 and 8-1," "Daisies Set Back Chicks, 7-6, 12-6," and "Blue Sox Nip Chicks For Third Win in Row" were representative of local coverage and emphasized the narrative of the game over the novelty of women playing ball.²⁰

Local coverage was different because the writers and readers knew the players, home team, and the game itself well. For them the AAGPBL was more important as a local athletic competition than a spectacle, and coverage of League games showed this.²¹ The League enjoyed immense success with the public, especially from 1943 to 1948. Community members of host cities were fond of their All-American teams and fans quickly found favorite players. The athletes did not just

²⁰ *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette* (July 23, 1951); *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette* (August 4, 1954); and *South Bend Tribune* (July 21, 1952).

²¹ For more information on the importance of local connection to a region's interest in an athletic organization, see Michael Oriard, "Home Teams" in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 95 (Spring 1996): 471-500.

play for a city, but lived there throughout the season. Some even lived there during the off-season, and many stayed with well-respected members of the community. Star players quickly became hometown heroes to their fans. Local citizens cheered on their teams throughout the season by attending home games and following others in the newspaper. Writers became familiar with the League and its players because the administration hired local sportswriters as scorekeepers and announcers. While this created an obvious conflict of interest, it was quite common at this time for sportswriters to perform these duties at men's ball games. Still, many sportswriters proclaimed that watching the All-Americans play erased any doubts they had about the women's abilities.²² Local sportswriters did not dismiss the players' athletic skills by focusing on the fact that they were women playing a men's game. Because of their readers' interest in and familiarity with the AAGPBL, local sportswriters regularly covered the League and recognized the All-Americans as athletes in their own right rather than beauties trying to play ball.

When the League was still new sportswriters, like most everyone else, were not sure what to make of the players. It was no secret that women could play softball, but the All-Americans were playing something different. And the All-Americans did not look like softball players. They did not wear shorts and pant uniforms, but short skirts and makeup. Many wondered whether these feminine women could really play ball. An article in the *South Bend Tribune* reflected this skepticism when the League first came on the scene in 1943. Writing about South Bend's upcoming opener against Rockford, he informed readers of the events that fans could expect, including

²² Susan Browne, *Girls of Summer: In Their Own League* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1992), 48.

a parade to mark the opening of the first season as well as Mayor Jesse Pavey throwing the first ball. He wrote of the “radical rule changes” which made the game different from that of regular softball, and commented on the appearance of the women in uniform. Just as Wrigley had planned, the journalist thought that the feminine women playing ball were quite a spectacle. “The girls make quite a shocking appearance in their short plaited skirts, ‘shorter’ shorts, blouses, caps and knee length stockings.”²³ This writer was more interested in the way that they looked than their proficiencies on the diamond.

After watching the first two games of the season in South Bend’s doubleheader against Rockford, however, the writer quickly changed his tone. This witnessing had sold him on the League, and sports editor Jim Costin praised the Blue Sox for their play instead of their looks. “There was action, thrills, and brilliant plays galore yesterday and last night as the South Bend and Rockford teams opened the new All-American Girls Softball league....Both crowds [of the doubleheader] appeared to enjoy the two games immensely....” Costin appreciated the women’s athleticism and fierce desire to win. They were not reserved in their play, he noticed, but aggressive and without fear. He wrote that the players were better than those who played sandlot ball, commenting that the All-Americans had strong accurate arms, slid, crashed into one another, and acted as if they were out for blood. He predicted that the All-Americans would likely have fans in South Bend. Although Costin wrote briefly about the players’ physical attractiveness, he implied that it was secondary to their ball skills. “Their thoroughly feminine uniforms and appearance also added

²³ *South Bend Tribune* (May 30, 1943), clippings file, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS. Although the author of the article is not identified in the clipping, it

color to the scene,” he said.²⁴ Despite initial doubts concerning the athletic abilities of the All-Americans, after seeing them play local sportswriters quickly became fans of the women, and wrote positive reviews of the players’ athletic skills.

Writing for the *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, Bob Reed reported South Bend’s recent defeat of Fort Wayne. “The Daisies opened up auspiciously when [Thelma “Tiby”] Eisen doubled between left and center. Jean Smith laid down a sacrifice and while Faut was throwing her out Eisen came all the way around from second. She slid in safely on a close play. Evelyn Wawryshyn hit safely after that but the next two were easy outs.” Reed viewed the game as an athletic competition rather than a spectacle; the game was more important than the players’ looks. In focusing on the plays and not the players, he legitimized the League as an athletic organization.

Recognizing and enjoying the All-Americans’ femininity did not necessarily distract from the journalists’ appreciation of the women’s athleticism. In the same article Reed also referred to South Bend’s pitcher Jean Faut as the “pitching mother,” because she gave birth to a son the previous year, and called catcher Mary “Bonnie” Baker the “little Blue Sox brunette.” He identified Fort Wayne’s own pitcher as “blonde Betty Luna.”²⁵ These minor isolated instances show that journalists, like Costin and Reed, viewed the All-Americans as athletes whose gender and physical appearance, although interesting, were secondary to the game itself.

Like his counterparts in other host cities writing about their respective teams, when *Grand Rapids Herald* sports editor Heinie Martin wrote about the Chicks he

is probably sports editor Jim Costin who, in other editions, covered Blue Sox games.

²⁴ *South Bend Tribune* (May 31, 1943), clipping file, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

²⁵ *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette* (June 18, 1949).

focused on the plays of the games. He described a game in which the Chicks defeated the Racine Belles in nineteen innings. “With one out, Wisniewski singled sharply to right. Gabby Ziegler then flied to Perlick for the second out and the fans were beginning to look forward to the twentieth inning, but Doris Tetzlaff leaned into one of Hutchinson’s pitches and smashed it into deeper center field, the ball rolling against the outer fence.”²⁶ Martin’s focus on the specifics of the game is evidence that he perceived the women as athletes and did not treat them differently because of their gender. His language created a visual image of the women actively participating in the game, which finally ended after a player hit a home run. Martin’s word choice gave the game action and made it seem competitive.

In his articles Martin expressed admiration for the athletes, not only for the Chicks but for players on other teams as well. In 1947 four Muskegon Lassies contributed greatly to the success of their team. Making no reference to the gender of the “sluggers,” the caption under a photograph of Doris Dams, Dotty Stolze, Jo Lenard, and Sara Reese read, “‘Murderers Row’ That is Keeping Lassies Near the Top.” The reference to the women as murderers de-sexed the women and made them seem ruthless and deadly, a far cry from proper and feminine. Readers of this article may have immediately pictured in their minds the women swinging the bat as hard as they could, cracking the ball into the outfield.

Martin reinforced these images by giving players nicknames, referring to Edythe Perlick as “Poison Perlick,” Inez Voyce as the “Hook,” and Ernestine “Teeny”

²⁶ *Grand Rapids Herald* (date unknown), clippings file, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

Petras as the “Arm” because of her “bullet-like pegs to first.”²⁷ These nicknames were direct references to the women’s athletic strengths and, unlike the nicknames “Honey Wagner,” “Christine Matthewson,” and “Tina Cobb,” gave no attention to the women’s gender or physical attractiveness. In addition to these nicknames, Martin also referred to Petras as “Pigtail Petras.”²⁸ This nickname conjured up a visual image, not of an attractive woman modeling scarves or applying lipstick, but of a young athletic tomboy. Martin’s focus remained with the players’ athletic skills rather than their good looks.

Unladylike behavior, such as physical brawls on the field, tested the way that journalists reconciled the All-Americans’ femininity with their athleticism. On September 15, 1947, a game between the Grand Rapids Chicks and the Racine Belles resulted in a player punching the umpire, meriting an ejection from the game. It was the eighth inning and the score was tied. Grand Rapids catcher Ruth Lessing believed that she had blocked opponent Edythe Perlick from scoring. When umpire George Johnson called Perlick safe, Lessing lost her temper and attacked the umpire. The *Grand Rapids Press* reported on the event the following day.

The score was tied at [two] all. The Belles had three on when a short fly was lofted to Jean Stoll in center. She threw to the plate and Lessing blocked out Edythe Perlick on a close play. Johnson called Perlick safe, whereupon Lessing tore into him with both fists flying, punching straight to the head and face. Lessing was removed from the game and Ruth Richards finished as the Chicks’ catcher.²⁹

²⁷ *Grand Rapids Herald* (September 16, 1947; September 13, 1947), clippings file, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

²⁸ *Grand Rapids Herald* (date unknown), clippings file, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

²⁹ *Grand Rapids Press* (September 16, 1947), clippings file, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

The writer may have steered away from a more vivid account of the brawl because of its rough nature, a direct contradiction to the All-American image that the League administration promoted. However, it is very likely that the writer did not view the attack as yet another spectacle of women's baseball, but rather an understandable, albeit controversial, response to a bad call. The umpires were also not surprised by the event, but perhaps for different reasons. A picture of Lessing appeared in the article with the following appearing underneath.

RUTH GETS ROUGH: President Max Carey announced that a fine of \$100 has been imposed on Ruth Lessing, Grand Rapids catcher for her unwarranted attack on Umpire George Johnson. The four umpires recommended that there be no suspension taking into consideration that pressure in the final Shaughnessy playoffs is terrific and girls can easily lose their heads. However, any reoccurrence in the future will warrant a much stiffer fine.³⁰

According to this the umpires viewed the players, and women in general, as emotionally vulnerable by nature. The umpires considered Lessing's acting out as somewhat acceptable because, as a woman, she would naturally not be able to handle the emotional stress of such an important event as a playoff game.

Despite the umpires' view that women were emotionally weaker than men, the journalist did not make a big deal of the event. Occasional brawls resulting from bad calls were common occurrences in sports, and, although controversial, not shocking. The writer did not criticize Lessing's rough behavior nor did he follow the umpires' lead and refer to women as emotionally weak. The journalist's respect and admiration for the All-Americans was concrete and neither Lessing's controversial

³⁰ *Grand Rapids Press* (September 16, 1947), clippings file, All-American Girls Professional Baseball League collection, NIHS.

actions nor the umpires' comment that women were emotionally weak swayed his opinion.

Local sportswriters saw the All-Americans as legitimate athletes and covered them as such. They knew their readers were more interested in the plays of the game, and focused on them rather than the players' femininity. Coverage of the AAGPBL games closely resembled those of men's baseball. Local sportswriters thus went beyond Wrigley's vision and covered the League as a legitimate athletic organization.

At least one national magazine covered the All-Americans in a similar manner as did the local press. *Major League Baseball: Facts, Figures, and Official Rules* presented the women as athletes so separate from their gendered bodies that they became statistics. The magazine kept baseball fans up to date on the accomplishments of male Major League Baseball players. From at least 1945 to 1949 the magazine included articles on the AAGPBL and featured a picture of the All-American player of the year on the back cover, beginning with the 1946 publication. League Publicity Director Marie Keenan wrote the article appearing in the 1945 issue, providing readers with statistics on batting and pitching, etc., for both individual players and teams. She also provided personal information on players, including birth date, place of birth, and residence.³¹ Articles in subsequent publications were reprints of the annual League-issued *All-American Girls Baseball League Pamphlet*, which recapped the previous season and gave statistics on both individual players and teams.

³¹ *Major League Baseball: Facts, Figures, and Official Rules* (Racine, Wisconsin: Whitman Publications, 1945), 129-144.

Articles that appeared in *Major League Baseball: Facts, Figures, and Official Rules* focused on the athletic accomplishments of the All-Americans and did not give attention to their femininity. The articles represented the players as legitimate athletes even more so than local newspapers, for the statistics put the players' individual accomplishments into a format that baseball fans accepted and understood. The mere coverage of the All-Americans in this periodical provided baseball fans the opportunity to evaluate the All-Americans and compare them with male professional baseball players.

There was a noticeable difference in the way that different publications covered the League, and it is easy to understand why. Only local sportswriters had a hometown connection to the All-Americans. People outside of the Midwest may have known about the League, but they were not as familiar with the players as were their midwestern counterparts. Those who wrote for a Texas newspaper or national magazine were also less likely to have seen an AAGPBL game. Games were not broadcast over national radio or television, so their only means of experiencing a game would have been to travel to the Midwest or see the women play during a barnstorming tour. Because of their unfamiliarity with the All-Americans, these writers were more likely to doubt the ability of women to play baseball, a game they were used to only men playing, and felt less of an obligation to respect the short-skirted women as athletes.

Local sportswriters had a hometown connection to the All-Americans and saw for themselves that these women were indeed talented athletes. The All-Americans' caliber of play easily sold midwesterners on the League. They followed their teams

in the newspaper and accompanied their families and friends to the ballpark to watch them play. In the early years attendance was high, and star players were local heroes. The locals, including sportswriters, appreciated the All-Americans as talented athletes who still retained their feminine charm. They knew that the players did not sacrifice their femininity to play ball, but they were most interested in ball.

Local connection to the League heavily influenced the way in which journalists covered the AAGPBL. The more distant the source, the more likely the journalist was to concentrate on the femininity of the players. In turn, the more local sources were likely to represent the All-Americans as talented athletes and write about the plays of the game. These articles represented not only how the writers perceived the League, but also how their audiences viewed the All-Americans. Those who had not had the opportunity to see the players in action did not take their athleticism seriously, while those who had attended a game realized that they were legitimate baseball players. Newspaper and magazine articles therefore reinforced and represented their audience's perception of the All-Americans.

Wrigley learned from his father that the League's success would in part depend upon its publicity in both the local and national media. The administration issued press releases to national magazines to inform journalists that the AAGPBL was an athletic organization—the women really could play baseball well—and that players did not forfeit their femininity. In fact, well-publicized League rules reinforced their femininity. National magazines took notice of this and turned it into news. The administration also attempted to influence the local press, but the journalists could see for themselves that the All-Americans were great baseball

players with a spectacular fan following. The press represented the women's femininity and competitive drive depending upon their audience's familiarity with the All-Americans. The different ways that the press covered the AAGPBL showed that Wrigley's plan had succeeded; the public perceived women's baseball as a spectacle and as an exciting athletic competition.

CONCLUSION

Dorothy “Snookie” Harrell Doyle came a long way from the little girl who was upset because she could not play baseball with the boys at school. She went on to play nine seasons with the Rockford Peaches and, after a disappointing rookie season, made a name for herself in the AAGPBL. Doyle made her first of four appearances on the All-Star team in 1947, and the following year she led the Peaches in runs batted in (RBIs), and would do the same again in 1949 and 1950. Rockford won the championship each of these years in part due to her skill. As a shortstop she was a career leader in putouts and assists. In 1949 she married her second husband, but continued to play for another four seasons. In the fall of 1952, after nine seasons in the League, Doyle ended her baseball career and went to college. She worked as a counselor and taught until she retired in 1984.¹

Doyle’s story is typical of many All-Americans. The women had grown up playing either softball or baseball and were grateful for the chance to play in the AAGPBL. Although Doyle, like others, had trouble adjusting during her first season, she adapted to the game and was able to lead her team to success. When her days playing baseball were over, Doyle attended college, earned a degree, and began a new career. Even if they did not attend college, many of the All-Americans entered, or remained in, the workforce after they quit the League. Unlike Doyle, many All-Americans did not marry but remained single, possibly went to college, and worked to support themselves.

¹ W.C. Madden, *The Women of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League: A Biographical Dictionary* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Co., 1997), 100-101.

While the AAGPBL had a far-reaching positive effect on different groups of people, it did not have much of an impact on its founder, Philip K. Wrigley. He was not very passionate about the League, for he sold it after the 1944 season upon realizing that men's professional baseball, and his Chicago Cubs, would survive World War II. More than anything else Wrigley saw the League as a way to save the game of baseball. He was not interested in giving female athletes more opportunities, let alone re-establishing women's professional baseball. Nor was Wrigley out to make money; he invested more money into the League than what he received in return. He just wanted to maintain the public's interest in baseball so that his investment in the sport (the Chicago Cubs) would be profitable despite the threat that the war posed.

Although they did not realize it at the time, the women who played in the AAGPBL changed the history of women's sports. For the first time women were playing professional baseball in an established, and respected, league. They were also proving that women were capable of great athletic skill, and in many cases were just as talented as their male counterparts. The All-Americans proved that it was not just men who could excel at baseball; women could, too. But in order to legitimize their playing of a men's competitive sport, the women had to emphasize their femininity and show the public that they did not forfeit it in order to play baseball. The All-Americans had the burden of proving that they could be both respectable ladies as well as competitive athletes.

The effect that the League had on the players themselves was at least as profound as the impact it had on the history of women's sports. The League gave the

women an opportunity to play baseball professionally—a dream come true. At the time women had few opportunities in baseball, and semi-professional and professional female softball players did not have much prestige. Society believed that physically demanding competitive sports like softball and baseball were not appropriate for white, middle-class women. The League suspended that assumption, at least, and paid its players well for doing something that, at the time, society deemed only appropriate for men. In 1943 All-Americans started out making at least \$45 per week. Star players went on to earn over \$100 per week. This sent a message to the women that it was acceptable for them to play baseball and that their skills had significant value.

Many of the players had come from small towns or rural areas, so traveling throughout the Midwest was an opportunity for them to visit new places and meet new people. Spring training camps and barnstorming tours allowed them to travel throughout the United States and even South America, places many of the women otherwise may have never visited. These new opportunities, together with their accomplishments as athletes, instilled in the women a sense of adventure and confidence that encouraged them to broaden their horizons. For example, once they had the money and confidence, many All-Americans pursued higher education and went on to professional careers.

The women also benefited from the feminine image that the administration enforced. Players from rural areas and small towns were not familiar with the middle-class notion of femininity, and learned how to appear and behave in a proper ladylike fashion. Although they may not have appreciated them at the time, many

All-Americans, especially those who pursued professional careers, carried these lessons on with them and benefited from them throughout their lives.

The AAGPBL also had a positive impact on the local citizens of host cities. The All-Americans entertained thousands of fans year after year. Giving the people something to look forward to and a team to root for was good for the public. This was especially true during the first three seasons as the games served as entertainment for weary war workers. Also, all of the League's profits went back to the host cities for local improvement. Cities hosting the summer barnstorming teams also received the profits of the games for local improvement.

Beyond making some money and entertaining crowds, the All-Americans also served as role models for young boys and girls. First, their feminine image made them ideal role models for proper behavior. Their respectable femininity served as a goal for girls and young women to achieve. Boys could also learn from the All-Americans, for the women taught them the middle-class notion of the proper demeanor and etiquette expected of both genders.

Second, the League supported both boys' and girls' baseball, and gave young girls an opportunity in the sport that they did not have at that time. Beginning in 1946 the League helped host cities (including South Bend, Kenosha, Rockford, Fort Wayne, and Muskegon) develop junior baseball leagues for girls ages fourteen and older. These leagues allowed young girls the opportunity to play the same game as their role models and wear the same style of uniform. For the most part these leagues played within their respective cities, but in 1952 members from the Fort Wayne Junior Daisy League and the South Bend Bobbie Sox League played each other in a

five-inning game before the start of a Daisy-Blue Sox game.² The junior leagues were important for two reasons. First, they gave young girls the opportunity to play baseball as well as something constructive to do with their time. Also, they trained young girls how to play the game of the All-Americans, thus creating a potential talent pool for prospective AAGPBL players. Most of these junior leagues disbanded after the demise of the AAGPBL, but the Fort Wayne Junior Girls Baseball League was still active in 1963 with over 150 girls playing on ten teams, and mirroring the All-Americans' rules, uniforms, and equipment.³

The AAGPBL not only changed the history of women's sports, but also reflected it. Similarly, the League mirrored the social climate of the 1940s and 1950s. During the war era society expected American women to temporarily step out of their gender roles and into those previously held by men. Once the war was over, much of society expected everything to go back to the pre-war norm. This, however, did not happen. Not all women gave up their new roles when the men came home. The same was true of the AAGPBL. The League did not end with the war. In fact, the League experienced its greatest success in 1948, three years after the war had ended. Even in the 1950s the League was still successful, even though it had seen better days by this time. Just as society sent conflicting messages concerning the role of women, so did the League. In the end, changes in society, such as the more conservative attitude toward the proper role of women, contributed in part to the end of the League. Also,

² *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette* (August 6, 1952).

³ Merrie A. Fidler, "The Development and Decline of the All-American Girls Baseball League, 1943-1954" (M.S. thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1975), 99-101. For more information on these junior leagues, see Sue Macy, *A Whole New Ball Game: The Story of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1993), 51; and Harold T. Dailey Notebook, 1947-1949, All-American Girls Baseball League collection, University of Notre Dame.

new entertainment opportunities, from watching television to joy riding in new cars, distracted people from traditional activities like attending baseball games.

Although immediately after the League failed there was not a rise in the popularity of women's baseball, this is not necessarily a negative reflection on the AAGPBL. It is logical that no such venture took place in the 1950s. The All-Americans had already played their last game, and social attitudes toward women were still conservative. Little League Baseball developed in the 1950s, but only boys were allowed to play. Boys played in the Little League rather than in their communities. This meant that there were fewer opportunities for young girls to play baseball, not only at school but also at home. Instead, when girls did play ball, it was softball rather than baseball. It was not until the passage of Title IX of the Educational Act of 1972 and the 1974 Supreme Court ruling that the prevention of girls participating in Little League was a form of sexual discrimination that there became any hope that girls would have more athletic opportunities at school. Despite the legal right of young girls to play Little League baseball, most girls still play softball.

Since the AAGPBL ended in 1954 women have established several baseball leagues, but they have yet to reach the popularity of the AAGPBL. The success of the League may serve as an inspiration for these aspiring women's teams. One of the most important lessons the AAGPBL may have for these leagues is that timing is crucial. The social climate of the World War II era provided the ideal opportunity for female athletes, as well as women in general, to at least temporarily step outside of their traditional gender roles. The League would not have been as successful as it

was had the social climate not permitted this temporary blurring of gender roles. Aspiring women's baseball leagues therefore need to take advantage of any opportunity that might allow their teams to be successful. For example, if something were to happen again in Major League Baseball that led to a significant loss of players or a decreased fan base, such as another strike like the one that occurred in 1994, women may again have an opportunity to earn their place in professional baseball.

The League may also serve as a lesson to show female athletes of the twenty-first century that not only can they participate in masculine sports, but they can also change society's perception of appropriate gender roles. As trying as it may have been, the All-Americans challenged gender norms through sports and earned the public's approval of crossing gender boundaries by playing a masculine sport. Much of the public initially viewed the female baseball players as a spectacle. Rather than allowing this to discourage them, the All-Americans used this to their advantage. They capitalized upon the public's interest and proved that they were legitimate athletes. The All-Americans appeased the public by accentuating their femininity in order to gain acceptance as talented baseball players at a time when society was accustomed to only men playing the sport and negatively referred to many female softball players as masculine. Promoting their femininity and creating a spectacle for fans provided back channels through which the women were able to showcase their athletic talents and prove that women, not just men, were capable of playing baseball.

The All-Americans have set precedence for female athletes of the twenty-first century who capitalize upon their femininity in order to promote their athleticism and

discourage accusations of masculinity. Like the All-Americans sixty years before them, many of today's athletes take advantage of—and even exploit—their femininity through such actions as modeling and wearing uniforms that accentuate their physical features. These women do not consider the appeal of their femininity as a hindrance to legitimizing their athleticism, but rather back channels through which to intrigue the public and prove that women can also be competitive, talented athletes. Women in such sports as basketball, soccer, and even pool, may learn from the All-Americans that, although the public may view them as spectacles, they have the potential to inadvertently change society's gender norms by proving that women, too, can participate in competitive sports that society determines masculine or traditionally appropriate for men only.

This study is different from other histories of the AAGPBL because it is not an institutional history of the League, but rather a study of one of its most distinctive characteristics. It argues that Wrigley and the League administration promoted players in an image that reflected a white, middle-class notion of femininity in order to showcase their athleticism. The administration also pushed the limits of the players' athletic abilities, creating a new game in order to sell the League as a legitimate athletic organization to sports fans throughout the country. The administration, players, coaches, and the press struggled to reconcile these two images of the All-Americans, as feminine women and competitive athletes, and balanced them differently. As difficult as this was, the administration, coaches, players, press, and the public each had to reconcile the All-Americans' feminine

image with their athletic abilities in order for the League to be successful at a time when only men played the sport.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Traci L. Rucker

EDUCATION

- 2004 M.A. in History, concentration Public History, Indiana University—
Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI)
- Thesis title “Reconciling Femininity and Athleticism: The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, 1943-1954”
- 2001 B.A. in History and American Studies, Muskingum College, New
Concord, Ohio
- Member of Phi Alpha Theta, history honorary
 - Graduated magna cum laude

TRAINING EXPERIENCE

- CURRENT Assistant, Historical Resources Department, Conner Prairie Museum,
Fishers, Indiana
- Clean and repair damaged artifacts
 - Prepare artifacts for storage
 - 16 hours per week
- 2003 - 2004 Intern, Programs Division, Conner Prairie Museum, Fishers, Indiana
- Researched nineteenth-century artifacts
 - Designed and created booklet about Quakers of the nineteenth century
 - 20 hours per week
- 2003 Assistant, Education Department, Indiana Historical Society,
Indianapolis
- Developed topics for National History Day in Indiana participants
 - Presented public programs to adult audiences
 - 20-30 hours per week throughout summer
- 2002 - 2003 Intern, Education Department, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis
- Developed and implemented public programs for adults and children
 - Created a children’s activity for annual History Fest event
 - 20 hours per week

- 2001 - 2002 Research Assistant, Elizabeth Brand Monroe, Director, Graduate Program in Public History, IUPUI
- Identified and abstracted recent local and community history research
 - Participated in various research projects
 - 20 hours per week
- 2001 Intern, John and Annie Glenn National Historic Site and Exploration Center, New Concord, Ohio
- Researched local veterans of World War II for a museum exhibit
 - Investigated and abstracted effects of World War II on Muskingum College
 - 40 hours per semester
- 2000 Intern, Historic Roscoe Village, Coshocton, Ohio
- Co-developed and co-directed a five-day camp for 15 children ages 6-9 years
 - Created hands-on activities on corn, nineteenth-century illnesses, herbal treatments, and other topics
 - 40 hours per week throughout summer

RELATED COURSE WORK

The Practice of Public History

- Studied the application of history to public needs and programs
- Studied the issues and practices of presenting history to public audiences

Material History

- Examined the theory of material culture
- Studied methods of researching and interpreting artifacts

Introduction to Museum Studies

- Studied the philosophies of museum missions and representing and interpreting history
- Evaluated and compared museum exhibits

Museum Methods

- Studied the roles, skills, and training requirements of museum professionals
- Served on the curator team of the class' exhibit design project

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Indiana Historical Society
American Association of Museums
American Association for State and Local History
National Council on Public History

PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOPS

Collection Preservation

- Proper storage of artifacts
- Detecting and preventing pest damage
- Sponsored by the Indiana Historical Society
- March 2004

Artifact Cleaning

- Proper cleaning techniques for various types of artifacts
- Evaluating the potentially damaging effects of cleansers
- Sponsored by Conner Prairie Museum
- January 2004

Historical Administration

- Financial and human resources responsibilities of public history institutions
- Importance of and how to effectively work with the media
- Sponsored by IUPUI
- August 2003