

Baseball has long been a tradition of the American culture. Since 1845, the sport has existed in hearts and ballparks all across the country in one form or another. Primarily a masculine sport, baseball has inspired leagues and leagues of aspiring athletes. Its future, however, has not always been secure. During World War II, all United States citizens were called to step up to the plate and serve their country: men on the fronts, and, to preserve America's pastime, women on the diamonds.

As the second World War was beginning, President Roosevelt stated: "I honestly feel that it would be best for the country to keep baseball going. There will be fewer people unemployed and everybody will work longer hours and harder than ever before. And that means that they ought to have a chance for recreation and for taking their minds off their work even more than before." Although the American population felt comfortable with the continuation of sports, specifically baseball, during the war, it was clear that many professionally trained male athletes were being drafted into the armed forces and could no longer resume their place on playing fields. This threatened a cornerstone of America. Yet those who controlled male sports were skeptical of

elevating female athletes. During this time of crisis, however, the priority was to distract the country from the conflict overseas; the compromise to use female athletes in sports would have to be made.

The institution of women's professional baseball during the years of the second World War triggered a strong wave of feminism throughout the entirety of its brief existence from 1943 to 1954. Although adjacent decades to this era restricted the images of females, these eleven years saw an unprecedented outburst of brave and confident women. Although years to follow would reconform women to a secondary position in society, this feminist era laid the groundwork for future female athletic opportunities.

The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, the first and, to date, the only women's professional baseball league in United States history, produced female pioneers in the field of sports, revolutionizing the female image into a more powerful and confident shape---as well as inspiring a powerful female workforce---against the tides of the time period, technology, and the changing image of the desirable woman.

The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was not an acknowledged part of American history for decades after the league's demise. It wasn't until the 1992 film, *A League of Their Own*, documented the organization. The movie, starring Tom Hanks, Geena Davis, Rosie O'Donnell, and Madonna, served an important purpose in creating a slot in sports history dedicated to the recognition of the league. Before this movie premiered, the league had a history but no historians. It was a non-entity for around forty years, with nothing of importance documented about the strong female athletes who, against the will of many, demonstrated, with considerable panache, that they could, and would, play ball.

Once World War II ended and the men returned home, they felt threatened by their newly working, independent women, and forced them back into the stereotypical female pre-war role. The pre-war theory was that a woman in the workforce took up a spot that an unemployed man rightfully deserved. When the troops returned, the theory was resurrected, this time with over twice as many women in the workforce. The way

in which society viewed them, however, was forever altered, even if its origins were temporarily buried.

Another often forgotten aspect of female baseball was that it did not begin in 1943 with the start of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. In fact, the league was only the first professional organization of women's baseball, not by any means the first organization. Although athletic positions for men were infinitely more achievable than those of women, the pre-World War II conditions for female athletes in America were either nonexistent or unpromising. That, however, did not halt the most determined.

The first known women's professional team was a team of nine African-American women called the Dolly Vardens. A full two years before the first male professional team was formed, in 1867, team members were often sighted practicing their game wearing corsets, boots, and long skirts. Although they were a professional team, they were not a popular team, and therefore largely ignored. The first women's professional game was in 1875, where the Blondes played the Brunettes in Springfield, Illinois.

Female baseball was not publicly or politically recognized until Amelia Bloomer reached a landmark in feminism. Upon designing her famous Turkish-style pants, excitement of the revolutionizing garment encouraged women to adopt them as a uniform. The “Bloomer Girls,” who traveled the country competing against male teams were the first women to earn their living playing ball from the 1890s until the early 1930s. Yet, the public opinion of the time was that baseball was far too dangerous and strenuous for the “dainty” female constitution.

The 1920s saw the formation of women’s factory teams. The most famous of these teams was the Philadelphia Bobbies, founded in 1922 by Mary O’Gara, Edith Houghton and Loretta “Stick” Lipski, who made headlines by travelling all over the East Coast. They even traveled abroad to play in Japan. The 1920s was a decade famous for cultural evolution, in suffrage, music, and industry. Women nationwide were pushing for equal rights in the voting booths, the homes, and in businesses; they also found more opportunities in baseball in the era of jazz. Although the 1920s was a

landmark for the role of women in society, they did not again have a breakthrough until new opportunities were presented when America entered the second World War.

Immediate precautions to preserve the traditional sport were taken as World War II began. With conscription in 1940, all able men between 18 and 45 were automatically registered. As a result of the draft, by the fall of 1942, many minor league teams disbanded. Formerly a dependable plethora of baseball expertise, these incubator teams were seriously affected by the manpower shortage. With 4,076 players involved in the armed forces, no more than twelve minor leagues survived during the years of the war, compared to 44 circuits that operated in 1940. Talent was drained from the game as promising young athletes who had spent seasons developing their athletic skills were plucked from the baseball diamonds all across the country and taught to fly planes, shoot weapons, and maneuver tanks. Young men that were cherished on the baseball diamonds were being drafted into the armed services.

The fear that this pattern would continue, and that Major League Baseball parks across the country were in danger of abandonment, sent national leaders desperately

searching for alternate solutions. More than 500 major league players swapped flannels for khakis during World War II. Talented players, including Stan Musial, Joe DiMaggio, and Ted Williams, served their nation on the foreign fronts. With the loss of many national stars, the public began losing faith in the future of the traditional American baseball. In the heat of the panic, Philip K. Wrigley took it upon himself to find a solution. The millionaire Wrigley was known to have wild ideas ever since he inherited his father's gum and baseball empire in 1932. The public seldom approved of his previous schemes, including Ladies' Day at big-league ballparks, his introduction of sticks of gum to U.S. Army combat rations, and his investment in the Dizzy Dean company. Many believed that his glory days of investments had come to an end, and were ultimately aghast when he revealed his vision for, debatably, his most radical vision of his career: a professional baseball league for women.

Although professional women's teams had formerly existed, the creation of a women's league was extremely controversial. If women were to play, they were expected to partake only in the juvenile sport of softball. First played in 1887, softball was

completely different than baseball both conceptually and in practice. Because of its different rules, including shorter base paths, a smaller field, a larger and differently decorated ball, and its coined underhand pitching, many people inferred that it was an easier game, and therefore, more suited to the feminine temperament.

The majority of the public, including President Roosevelt, was unsupportive of women's baseball at first. After some convincing, though, Roosevelt recognized that a national sport was necessary and the future of baseball was, at the time, questionable.

Unlike the modern world, where televised channels can accommodate a variety of popular sports, baseball was the only mainstream sport in the U.S. during World War II.

With the hesitant approval of the president, the idea of a women's professional baseball league was given a green light.

On paper, the idea was seemingly straight forward. In reality, bringing the blueprint to life was a complicated process. A committee emerged to ensure the success of the new sport to its completion. Founder Philip K. Wrigley took on a primary role, along with other colleagues, Max Carey and Jimmie Foxx, who had similar investment



interests. Max Carey specialized in scouting female athletes, and so he became famous for traveling "from west to east" in pursuit of young, attractive girls who could play ball. From its start 1943 to the time of its termination in 1954, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was comprised of 545 athletes, all recruited from the United States, Cuba, and Canada. Its very first player, Ann Harnett, signed in 1943; she was followed by future teammates Claire Schillace, and Edie Perlick. Ann proved to mature into a consummate athlete in her many years with the league. Her contract was a milestone in the construction of the league because, as speculated, her signature attracted many more.

The athletes in the first season of the The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League were promised generous salaries in return for cooperation with the league.

The salaries of the athletes were significantly less than those of the male athletes; however, it served as a respectable income for a working lady in the mid-1900s.

Compared to other employed women, the pay and the benefits of being in the league were remarkable. Salaries ranged from \$45–\$85 a week during the first years of play;

however, it grew to as much as \$125 per week in later years. For this salary, players were required to cooperate with the demanding rules and needs of the league.

The sport, against the public will, was set up differently than traditional softball or baseball. The country's desire was to have the sport be as authentic as possible, with the theory, that, if the sport was losing its men, it should not also have to lose its tradition and standards. Despite this, investors, including Wrigley, made the decision to alter the rules of the sport. Although they did not seek to ignore the public, they instead needed to fit the boundaries of the players and the program. It was settled that the sport would be more of a hybrid of baseball and softball. Like softball, the ball was to be 12 inches, as opposed to the 9 or 9 1/4 inch baseball. The pitcher's mound was to be forty feet from home plate, rather than the baseball distance of 60 feet, 6 inches.

Pitchers threw underhand windmill. The distance between bases was 65 feet, five feet longer than in softball but 25 feet shorter than baseball. Despite these differences, major similarities between the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League and baseball included nine player fielding set-ups, and the use of a pitcher's mound. The

ball shrank from season to season until it was regulation baseball size. By 1948, the ball had shrunk to 10 3/8 inches, and overhand pitching was allowed and encouraged.

The mound was also moved back to 50 feet. Although the rules of the league were closer to softball at its initiation, over its history, the rules were gradually modified to more closely resemble baseball.

To ensure appropriate supervision, each team consisted of fifteen players, a manager, and a female chaperone. It was believed that, by recruiting notable male sports figures to serve as managers for the teams, a greater amount of curiosity and public interest would arise. The managers were often acquired from baseball teams that had been temporarily dismissed due to the war. Although their main purpose was to advertise the league by simply being present, they also had coaching, business, and scheduling responsibilities.

A strict set of rules and consequences were bestowed upon the newly acquired female athletes. First, if athletes wanted to play at all, they were required to wear a particular uniform. Although the fans adored the uniform, consisting of a belted, short-

sleeved tunic dress with a slight flare of the skirt, it was not ideal athletic wear, and was not popular with the players. The uniform was to be unquestionably worn during league events and games. Although complaints from league members offered compelling reasons as to why the uniform was not appropriate for sliding and all-around play, failure to comply to the rules resulted in expulsion from the league. The rules stated that the skirts were to be worn no more than six inches above the knee, but the regulation was most often ignored in order to facilitate running and fielding. A circular team logo was sewn on the front of each dress, and baseball caps featured flexible elastic bands in the back so that they were one-size-fits-all. The uniform conformed to the expected dress code of 1940s women. Even though the sport called for pants and, at the time, masculine attire, the dresses suggested that a lady-like attitude must have been kept at all times while playing the sport.

In addition to the uniform, attendance at beauty school was mandatory, as adherence to rules dictating the conditions of hairstyles, facial routines, makeup, and curfews.

Because femininity was a high priority to the league, Wrigley contracted with Helena

Rubenstein's Beauty Salon to meet with the players periodically during spring training.

After their daily practices, the women were required to attend Rubenstein's evening charm and beauty school classes during the preseason. The proper etiquette for every situation was taught, and every aspect of personal hygiene, mannerisms, and dress code was presented to all the players. In an effort to make each player as physically attractive as possible, athletes received a beauty kit and explicit instructions on its function. There was a specific section on each facial body part and how to maintain it in the pamphlet that accompanied the kit. The two largest sections were hair and lips. Hair was the one of the most significant aspects of showing the world that the female athletes were not removed from their previous position as ladies. The beauty kit, complete with a brochure, provided explicit instructions on makeup as well. In the brochure, the section on lipstick clearly states:

With your lipstick, apply two curves to your upper lip. Press your lips together. Then, run your brush over the lipstick and apply it to your lips, outlining them smoothly. This is the artistic part of the treatment in creating a lovely mouth. Patient practice and care

make perfect. Open your mouth and outline your own natural curves. If your lips are too thin to please you, shape them into fuller curves. Now, use a tissue between your lips and press lightly to take off excess lipstick. If you wish to have a "firmer foundation," use the lipstick a second time and use the tissue 'press' again. Caution: Now that you have completed the job, be sure that the lipstick has not smeared your teeth. Your mirror will tell the tale—and it is those little final touches that really count.

The amount of unnecessary detail the brochure goes into proves that the league had little confidence in their athletes to maintain their physical charm. It also reinforces the value put into femininity.

There were some, moreover, who refused to support an institution that, they believed, was detrimental to the delicate female image. Although its fan base grew, and although it proved to be an asset to the nation during, and even after, World War II, it was largely unrecognized by the majority of the public mainly because of issues having to do with femininity. Consequently, it wasn't until 1988 that a section of the Baseball Hall

of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, dedicated to female baseball in wartime

highlighted individual efforts of certain league stars.

Claire Schillace, for example, played in the league from 1943 to 1946 as a starting center fielder. Over the course of her career, she stole 153 bases and maintained a .202 batting average, an impressive statistic compared to her fellow teammates. Also receiving recognition was Joanne Winter, a pitcher who played from 1943 through 1950. She was one of the select sixty original members of the league, and was a three-time All-Star who twice led her team to the championship game.

What the exhibit unfortunately left out were the efforts of female stars who made major breakthroughs in baseball before the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League.

In the decades before the league, few female athletes were given a chance to prove themselves by playing professionally. Although it was a dream for female athletes to have the opportunity to play alongside men, only one woman actually accomplished breaking that barrier. Jackie Mitchell was one of the greatest female pitchers in baseball history to this day. She is forgotten because she peaked well before the

league. In 1931, she joined the Class AA minor league team, the Chattanooga Lookouts, in an exhibition game against the New York Yankees. Although she only pitched part of the first inning, seventeen-year-old Mitchell struck out Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig in succession before walking Tony Lazzeri. Sadly, the owner of the Lookouts decided that one walk was enough reason to pull the young pitcher from the game, and her contract was cancelled shortly after. In a newspaper article, Babe Ruth, Mitchell's first out, was quoted saying "I don't know what's going to happen if they begin to let women in baseball. Of course, they will never make good. Why? Because they are too delicate. It would kill them to play ball every day." Perhaps out of intimidation at what the teen could accomplish, the Lookouts, among other teams, dismissed Mitchell claiming that the game was "too tough for women."

The decades before and after the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League's existence conformed women to familiar stereotypes. Holding secondary positions in society, especially before the war, female progression in the mid 20th century cannot be measured as an inclination, but rather a period-specific level of attainability. Before



World War II, the Great Depression swept the country in the 1930s. Women were discouraged from working because, not only was it improper, but each woman with a job was viewed as preventing males from earning jobs. Depending on the social class, some women found jobs in education and nurturing the sick; however, these were the limitations of the female workforce. Unable to pursue a higher education, athletic opportunities, or a useful career, women were confined to domestic responsibilities.

The beginning of the 1940s looked like it would prove to be the same. The country had not yet healed from the wound of the stock market crash, and its economic future was still in jeopardy. To prepare for the war, it borrowed \$1 billion to spend on armed forces and manufacturing shot up by 50%. Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, and from that moment on, a new era began. Following the attack, patriotism and a sensation of obligation spread throughout America, causing many young men to enlist. Many baseball players, including Hank Greenberg and Bob Feller, gave up the prime of their careers to aid the war effort. With the arrival of the war came the arrival of new job opportunities for women. The 1940s America saw ambitious women seeking

opportunity in the absence of men and presence of vacant jobs, promising careers, and generous salaries. The women of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League were among the first to become a part of the strong, unprecedented female workforce.

Although working women were not alien to the American society, this role-reversing opportunity was a pivotal event for women's establishment as an equal part of the workforce. By the end of the war, the number of employed women had risen to 18 million, one third of the total workforce. The ideal working woman, at this point seen as strong, tough, and attractive, was portrayed in the 1943 song, "Rosie the Riveter," by R. Evans and J. Loeb, depicting a tireless female assembly line worker. With the lack of men, many factories were forced to hire female employees, and images such as Rosie the Riveter became ideal. From this paradigm, a 1940s female icon was born as an image featured in posters and magazines. She later became the origin of most stereotypes of the working woman. Rosie the Riveter was, during the 40s, an

obsession for women taking on the roles of men. It was from this image that the idea for a professional female baseball league was born.

When the war ended in 1945, many men returned home to find that they could not resume their former position in society because they had been taken over by women.

But even those who remained in the workforce after the end of the war did not all preserve their career. A number of women were laid off and of those, many settle for “womanly” positions such as domestic workers, secretaries, and clerical workers. Thus, the alteration of the female image was only temporary for all, including female athlete.

The later years of the league extended through the mid 1950s. The 1950s, renowned for being a conservative and conformist decade, produced the stereotype of the housewife. The housewife is remembered for always dressing to impress, and portraying nothing more than a humble cook, maid, loyal wife, and mother. New technological advancements, such as television, aided in marketing commercials designed to enforce desired stereotypes. Also produced during this decade was the “cultivation theory,” stating that learning can occur without comprehension or

deliberation. This theory helped to undermine women and served as yet another reason to embody the quintessential female as a domestic creature.

Although technology, specifically television, harmed the female image during the 1950s, it actually temporarily helped to enlarge the fanbase of the female baseball league. Television allowed families to discover the league. Although this initial wave of feminism was dying out, the All All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was the last remnants of the wave's legacy. During the brief opportunistic window for women, the idea took hold. The imposed stereotypes and ideals of the 1950s women terminated the feminine movement. This, and a growing interest for only televised major league baseball, led to the league's demise in 1954.

Although the decade after the extinction of the league only led to the return of the traditional female image before the existence of the league, the women of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League were not unaccomplished. For eleven years, they broke free of societal limitations and lead the largest breakthrough in female sports of their time. The league had given the women the chance to test their

physical and emotional limits. Playing in the league gave these women the chance to get out of poverty and to better their lives.

The female athletes were ahead of their time, and their experiences paved the way for future female opportunities in sports. What once was considered an experiment proved to become a major factor in the incorporation of female sports. Although they were not recognized for decades, without their courageousness in pioneering a movement of gender equality in sports, the groundwork for future women's sports would not have otherwise been laid. Their success created a new model for female athleticism that later expanded opportunities for girls in sports. Power, strength, and determination became female attributes over the league's history. The league offered the public an expanded view of female capabilities and demonstrated that athleticism and femininity need not be mutually exclusive.

World War II provided an unexpected opportunity for women to shed traditional stereotypes and expand into male dominant realms. A good example of this is women taking men's place on the baseball diamond. While the All-American Girls Professional

Baseball League lasted only eleven years, and although the gains made by the women were quickly reclaimed by men, the seeds of feminism were planted. Although the feminist movement wouldn't become a true force until the 1960s, the women athletes of the All-American Girls Professional League broke important and unprecedented barriers for women and, in this way, the baseball diamond truly was a girl's best friend.