

Women in Baseball



Reading for Information

For: Grades 5-7

Objectives: After reading the attached article, students will be able to articulate its main points, establish a brief timeline for the AAGPBL, list key words that related to the main ideas, develop a vocabulary learning list, and generate questions about women in baseball before the live program.

Materials: attached article and note organizer



The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League

A Brief History

Adapted by the Center for Interactive Learning & Coordination



Introduction

The history of women playing baseball goes back over 150 years ago to a game students played at a women's college in New York state. Women continued playing baseball and softball but, unlike men, had no chance of playing professionally until World War II when the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was created..

What Did a War Have to Do With Women's Baseball?

During World War II, hundreds of thousands of men over the age of 18 volunteered for or were drafted into the armed forces. In many cases, this meant there weren't enough men left to do jobs that needed to be done. For the first time, employers began hiring women to do what most Americans thought of as "men's work." They took the factory jobs over the jobs men had left behind, building tanks, planes, and ships for the military. They also finally got the chance to play professional baseball.

In 1942, just months after the United States entered the war, dozens of Major League Baseball players had already left their teams to join the military. As spring training approached, team owners feared they wouldn't have enough players to hold a regular season. They wrote to President Franklin Roosevelt to ask for him to exempt professional baseball players from serving in the military. Roosevelt responded that, although he would not let able-bodied men like baseball players get out of serving in the armed forces, he did feel baseball was important to national morale and encouraged owners to find a creative solution to their problem,

"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."- President Franklin Roosevelt in a letter written to Baseball Commissioner Kennesaw M. Landis, Jan. 15, 1942

The owners considered bringing back older players, but realized they still wouldn't have enough men to field full teams. It was businessman Philip K. Wrigley, owner of the Chicago Cubs and Wrigley's Chewing Gum, who proposed the idea of recruiting players from women's amateur softball leagues. Many people were skeptical that Americans would be interested in watching women play, but Wrigley moved ahead with his plan, believing that Americans would rather watch women's baseball than no baseball.

The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League



Wrigley and his fellow owners hired scouts to travel the country and recruit the best players from women's amateur softball leagues. By 1943, there were four teams in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League: the Racine Belles (Wisconsin), Kalamazoo Lassies (Michigan), Fort Wayne Daisies (Indiana), and Milwaukee Chicks (Wisconsin). Each team featured:

- 15 players
- A manager, usually a former major league player
- A business manager to make sure players, their bus drivers, and the hotels they stayed at got paid

- A chaperone to make sure the players behaved according to League rules. Some players were as young as 15, so the presence of a chaperone also reassured their parents that their daughters would be safe while out on the road.

The players couldn't hold any other jobs during the season, and they were paid as much as \$85 a week, which would buy 1,316.57 worth of goods today. The woman worked hard for that money, playing a grueling schedule of practices, traveling for games, and attending charm school classes at night.



Sophie Kurys of the Racine Belles slides into the bag. Bettmann Archive

"It was pretty hard to put in the bus rides and the daily practices and stuff like that. It was almost a 16-hour job for us by the time we went to practice, and then we went home and kind of rested a while, and then we'd come back and sometimes play a doubleheader." -Marge Villa

Different Rules for Women

At first, the rules of the game were a modified form of slow-pitch softball. The women played with a large, almost softball-sized ball, and pitched underhand. The distances between bases and between the pitcher's mound and home plate were all shorter than in men's professional baseball. That began to change the next season as coaches learned that the women could play with the same distances, hard baseball, and overhand pitching as men.

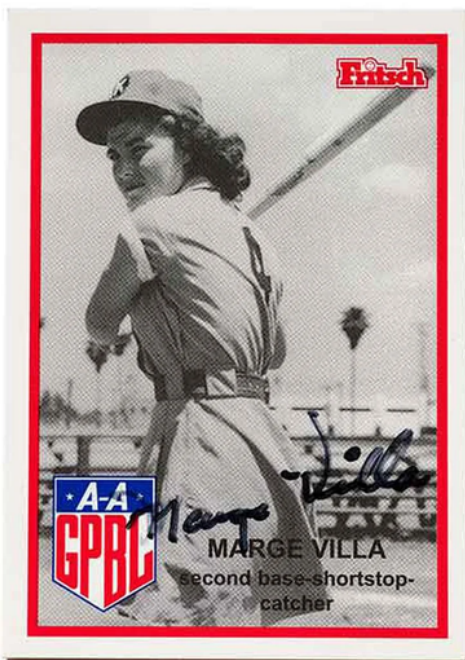
Women players were required to "be in all respects a truly All American girl." They had to wear a full face of makeup, including lipstick, at all times, even during games. Their uniforms weren't the pants men wore, but short dresses, which made sliding into bases painful. Away from the game the players were issued beauty kits and had to attend charm-school classes. They were not allowed to wear slacks or short skirts, cut their hair short, or drink alcohol and smoke.

"We had to look like ladies and play ball like men," -Lavonne "Pepper" Paire



"Femininity is the keynote of our league; no pants-wearing, tough-talking female softball player will play on any of our four teams." -Max Carey, president of the AAGPBL

Racism in the League



National Museum of American History

Just like Major League Baseball, the AAGPBL was segregated, and prohibited players who were not white from joining. Although many African American, Latina, Asian American, and Native American women played baseball and softball, some semi-professionally, they were kept out of the AAGPBL no matter how talented they were. The one exception was Marge Villa, a gifted Latina catcher and base-player from California who played over 500 games for the Kenosha Comets (Wisconsin).

In 1953, Toni Stone, who had been kept out of the AAGPBL, joined the Negro Leagues and became the first woman and the first Black woman to play professional baseball full-time outside the AAGPBL.

"People weren't ready for me." -Toni Stone

What Happened ?

In its most successful years it included 10 teams and attracted more than 900,000 fans. Altogether 545 women from the United States, Canada, and Cuba played in the AAGPBL. Several teams started and failed, or moved from one city to another, during the league's 12 years. Just two teams—the Rockford Peaches and South Bend Blue Sox—were in the AAGPBL from beginning to end. After the war ended and men returned home, Major League Baseball came back with regular seasons, which were broadcast on the radio. The women of the AAGPBL were encouraged to leave baseball behind and return to their lives as wives and mothers. Promoters stopped trying to bring fans to AAGPBL games and the league could not compete with Major League Baseball. The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League folded in 1954.

"We would rather play ball than eat. We put our hearts and souls into the league. We thought it was our job to do our best, because we were the All-American girls. We felt like we were keeping up our country's morale." -AAGPBL catcher Lavonne "Pepper" Paire

Sources: Britannica Kids; National Baseball Hall of Fame, How They Play, Smithsonian Magazine, and MNopedia

<https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/All-American-Girls-Professional-Baseball-League/309773>

<https://baseballhall.org/discover-more/stories/baseball-history/league-of-women-ballplayers>

<https://baseballhall.org/discover/inside-pitch/roosevelt-sendsgreen-light-letter>

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/record-setting-latina-player-marge-villa-made-huge-strides-leveling-playing-field-180978121>

<https://howtheyplay.com/team-sports/When-Girls-Ruled-Baseball>

<https://www.mnopedia.org/person/stone-marcenia-lyle-toni-1921-1996>

Name: _____

Note-Taking

Directions: Use this organizer to take notes on "The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League: A Brief History."

list key words

words I need to define

summary of main points

timeline of key events

questions I have