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"A League of Their Own"

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It may come as a surprise to some that "A League of Their Own," the new motion picture starring Geena Davis, Tom Hanks, and Madonna, is based on fact. The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) was founded in 1943 by Philip Wrigley, with the encouragement of Branch Rickey and Bill Veeck.

"A League of Their Own" is a very good film with strong performances by nearly all those having speaking parts. Geena Davis plays Doris Hinson, a star catcher for the Rockford Peaches, who played only one season in the League. The story centers on her, and on her relationship to her younger sister Kit Keller. Kit lives in Dori's shadow, and is desperate to break out and away, while still having a strong bond with Dori. Lori Petty as Kit gives what may be the best performance of the film as a troubled young woman looking for an identity of her own, and as an athlete who is competitive and talented. Tom Hanks as manager Joe Dugan gives a vintage baseball character performance, as a washed up major leaguer who ruined his career with alcohol and who is on the fast track to oblivion. Offended by the notion of leading a women's baseball team his life is transformed as he gets caught up in the action of a good team, a great pennant race, and the lives of his players.

Supporting roles by Madonna, Rosie O'Donnell, Megan Cavanagh, Tracy Reiner, Bitty Schram, Ann Cusak, Jon Lovitz and several others make this an excellent entertainment with something to say about baseball and about the female role in American life. Madonna, who one might not expect to be convincing in a baseball role, is. She plays "All the Way" Mae Mordabito, who got her name for more than her base-running. Mae is but one of a wide variety of women who came into the league. This film goes to great pains to show that the female athlete is not confined to one type of woman, from one kind of background. As with the league, the women came from all over the U.S. and Canada, and range from the beautiful to the ugly, the feminine to the masculine. And they were in the league for all sorts of reasons and with all sorts of motives. The country of baseball is a varied one, and "A League of Their Own" offers a portrait of this variety.

The film also has much to say about baseball and about the woman playing baseball. First, it is clear that the game itself has a charm all its own, whether played by men or women, boys or

girls. The game is the thing, and for the people who play it, as Joe Dugan says, "its gets inside you." The film and the League also show that baseball can be played by women, and played very well. It shows that when marketed correctly women's sport can draw fans to the ball park, and fans can get involved with women's sport as well as men's sport.

Some 600 women played in the AAGPBL. Many were veterans of school and public recreational softball leagues, and some had experience playing on boy's and men's baseball teams. One of the most prominent "Girls of Summer" was Connie "Iron Woman" Wisniewski, a perennial league all-star averaging 25 wins over five seasons as a pitcher, and then playing five seasons as an outfielder with a lifetime batting average of .275, well above the league average. Wisniewski was a power hitter, and Grand Rapids manager Max Carey estimated that some of her homers would have reached the seats in the Polo Grounds.

Dorothy Kamenshek was the league's all-star first-baseman during her eight years with the Rockford Peaches. Known for her defensive play Kamenshek led the league in hitting during two seasons. At one point in her career she was offered a contract by the minor league team in Fort Lauderdale.

The best players were probably three sisters. Six foot, 180 pound Betty Foss began playing for the Fort Wayne Daises in 1950 and became one of the League's greatest hitters. Her younger sisters, Jean and Jo Weaver came into the league the following year. Jo, who was only fifteen, hit .357 during her four years in the league, and stunned league officials in 1954 when she hit 29 home runs and had an average over .400. Some observers believe that these three sisters were good enough to play in the majors.

One of the all-time greats of the League was Dotty Schroeder who played all twelve years the league was in existence. She was an excellent shortstop whom Charlie Grimm once said would have been worth \$50,000 if she had been a man.

The women of the AAGPBL were not to be seen as outside the norm, and league officials were especially conscious of the image of "tomboy," a euphemism for lesbian. Mrs. Wrigley designed uniforms for the league, Helena Rubenstein was brought in to teach proper grooming and make-up techniques, and Ruth Tiffany conducted a charm school for the players. AAGPBL president Ken Sells let it be known up front that femininity was the watchword. This league would have "no pants-wearing, tough-

talking female softball player" on its teams. The image-conscious public relations unit stressed the beauty of Bonnie Baker and Carolyn Morris, who were models in the off-season.

"A League of Their Own" has done a remarkable job of recreating the league. It is a funny movie with remarkably moving moments woven through a season of action. The end of the film including the run through the credits is a wonderful tribute to the women of the AAGPBL, so don't leave the theater until all the credits have rolled.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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