

## Pass It On®...

### Diamond Girls.

*Nearly half of the young men in America — 16.5 million Americans — served in World War II. They left behind a lot of work to be done in fields and factories. And when families wanted to relax and enjoy a game of baseball, many of the clubs couldn't field a full team.*

Major League Baseball faced a shutdown during World War II. Rosters were filled with old veterans and teenagers just to keep games alive. Naturally, the level of play declined. In those tight times, who would pay hard-earned money to watch a bunch of has-beens and never-weres play what seemed like a sandlot game?

It's not that there weren't athletes capable of putting on a good game; there were. They just happened to be women.

Chicago Cubs owner Philip K. Wrigley and other baseball minds came up with a way to save the integrity of the game and make it worth watching. They created the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. These weren't just weekend bat-swingers. These were skilled athletes who had grown up playing the game in amateur softball leagues. They knew they could play ball. All they wanted was a chance to prove it.

For that first tryout in Chicago, over 200 young women showed up. Sixty were chosen to make history. Ultimately, more than 600 women played in the league.

More than just a sporting spectacle, the AAGPBL was a cultural phenomenon. These women, often scouted from their local softball diamonds, became local heroes in the 10 Midwestern cities that hosted teams. In 1948, the league reached its peak, drawing an astounding 900,000 spectators.

The Rockford Peaches emerged as the dynasty of the league, clinching an impressive four championships. Throughout the 1940s, the league's popularity soared, fueled by extensive national and local publicity. Major magazines like Time and Life featured the "swinging skirts" and impressive skills of these female ballplayers.

The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was more than just a wartime substitute; it was a testament to the talent, dedication and passion of hundreds of women who dared to play ball. They shattered stereotypes, captivated audiences and left an indelible mark on the history of American sport. Their story serves as a powerful reminder of the pioneering spirit that paved the way for the opportunities that female athletes enjoy today.

Stroll the urban parks on a Saturday afternoon, and you see ponytails bobbing underneath baseball caps. You see young girls deftly dribbling soccer balls. Tiny tots track teams lead half-pint girls on runs along the grass as well as the oval. Today, the percentage of girls who play sports is roughly equal to that of boys as they slide, kick, swing and steal their way into our American story. Proud parents couldn't be happier to fill their weekends with more games.

We have come a long way since those first few young women stepped off a Greyhound bus, wearing shorter dresses than normal for their day and carrying worn baseball gloves along with a little chip on their shoulders. Hats off to you, ladies.

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By The Foundation for a Better Life®

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