

Panel: “Explorations in American Culture”

Fiona Sackett

Title: ““At Least They Aren’t Wearing Pants!’: The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League”

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Fiona Sackett is a sophomore History major with a minor in Theatre who is also part of the Honors Program at IPFW. She is interested in American cultural history from the Civil War era until post-World War II, with a specific interest in popular fashion of the different eras. She is from Huntington, Indiana and the oldest of four siblings.

Abstract

The All-American Girl Professional Base Ball League was created in 1943 by Philip Wrigley, owner of the Chicago Cubs, to support the war effort from the United States and to maintain baseball as the American pastime. What came out of this decision was a juxtaposition of masculine athleticism and the feminine ideals of the 1940s. The women who made up the league came from all over the United States and Canada and later Puerto Rico. To create and maintain the interest of the league, the women were not only selected based on their talent, but also their looks. The general idea was that it was easier to make a moderately attractive ballplayer glamorous, instead of making a model an athlete. Once established, the league gained media attention, which focused on the bodies and looks of the women. As the teams continued their season, the focus transitioned to the actual abilities of the different players. While some players began playing as a way to travel beyond their hometowns, there are different stories of various players using their high paychecks to pay their way through college, including a few who became doctors. This is where the importance of the almost forgotten league comes through. The All-American Girl Professional Base Ball League was an unusual bookmark in sports history in that it was an entire league of women who played baseball that was decent and proper in comparison to the softball leagues of the time. The women involved had a rare opportunity to not only support the wartime effort in a unique way, but also play professional baseball, which was the main factor in their joining the league. To the young women who joined the league, the opportunity to play baseball was worth the different responsibilities that came with the All-American Girl Professional Base Ball League.

Bibliographical Note

My research is primarily based on the accounts that were recorded by a childhood fan of the AAGPBL in her book *When Women Played Hardball*, as well as other secondary sources focusing on various aspects of women playing baseball in different eras of history. The primary sources that are included in my research is newspaper advertisements, a newsreel, and the newsletter sent out to remaining members of the AAGPBL.