

Research Essay: The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League

KNES 293 A History of Sport in America

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I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this
assignment/examination.

Introduction

Though it is not given much thought, sport and physical culture are a product of society while society is also a product of sport and physical culture. As a result, there is an unintentional dialectical relationship between the two. It is the historical context and historical event which have dialectically shaped each other into what one looks back on now. In response to the social and political context within American society between 1940's and 1950's, sport was unintentionally shaped to reproduce its context. Society's international relations shifted social relations in the American nation as men were enlisted in war. As a result, sport was also shifted to adapt to the new politics by allowing women into the sporting sphere of society. The emergence of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League in 1943 challenged the traditional gender roles within society and gender apartheid within the space of sports as it pertained to women. Traditional gender roles stood to definitively draw a line separating what men could do socially from what women could do socially (Kenow, 2010). While gender apartheid in sports stood to continue to deem women as the inferior sex and men as the superior sex (Kenow, 2010). But in 1943, these traditional ideals would be tested by women.

Context

Throughout American history, the separate spheres ideology has been integrated into most if not all aspects of society. The spheres separate individuals based on gender where men and women have their own spheres that define their expectation and role within society. In the context of the rural society, men tended to possess the public sphere where they go outside the home to make money and participate in politics. While women tend to possess the private sphere where they take care of the home and family. When society shifted from a rural economy to an

industrialized and urbanized entity, the separate spheres ideology was still prevalent (Clevenger, 2017). In this context, men worked grueling jobs such as factory jobs and women were still involved within the domestic part of life but were also allowed to take on society accepted jobs like teaching. This essentially demonstrates the practiced division in gender roles, one's gender determined to what extent they could participate in society.

Just as gender politics had infiltrated society, it had also infiltrated sport and physical culture. Due to the demoralizing effects of the new dense city environment, reformers believed that sport was a necessary antidote that would remedy the feminization that was developing in males. So, sport, for the middle-upper class white male, was used as a way to teach and reproduce masculinity. Because of sports' masculinizing ability, it led individuals to believe that if women were to get involved, they would soon embody masculine traits. If women became masculine and could soon do what men could do, it was thought that the divide the separate spheres ideology created would also soon blur and women would become closer to equating themselves with men. In order to remedy this, women were segregated and restricted from sport causing gender apartheid within the space of sport. In order to go about gender apartheid in sport, society was looking to exploit women on the basis of inferiority, injury and immorality. Men and women were thought to be mental and physical opposites of each other. Victorians mainly believed that men lacked the moral that women had while women lacked the natural physical abilities that men had, highlighting the notion that men were superior and women were inferior. It was also thought that if one could link sport to having a negative effect on women's reproductive abilities it would discourage and prevent women from wanting to engage in such a physically grueling activity. Women still did continue to attempt sport but as they took on male figures, their sexual orientation was questioned. This was the immorality that society thought

would discourage women in participating in sports. But instead when women did play sports, it was done so privately and appeared to be poised and womanly rather than rough and dirty (Clevenger, 2017). So, in order for women's sport to be accepted it had to exploit their femininity in some way. In this sense, women were contradictory female athletes. Women could play sports but had to also be beautiful at the same time.

In 1940, the international relations with neighboring countries shifted the social relations of society when millions of men were drafted for World War II. Most areas of work that were once occupied by men could no longer be filled completely by men due to the extensive war effort that was needed. Millions of women had to step into the physically grueling jobs men occupied and even sporting culture (Graves, Scroggs, Collins, 2008). Women's ability to step in for men, doing the work that men did, was not planned but rather an "unintentional consequence" (Graves, Scroggs, Collins, 2008) of the change in social relations at the time. As women defied gender roles during wartime they also changed what it meant to be feminine. Before the war began, femininity only allowed for women to be beautiful. They were not allowed to step into what one may call the male fields of life. But, after the war began, men allowed women to be strong and enter male fields of life as long as they still adhered to being beautiful. Femininity's newly constructed meaning allowed once powerless women to feel empowered through sport and their positions in industrial work (Kenow, 2010).

Though they were given the ability to step in for men and take part in industrial work, women were still controlled by men and had little power. Women were separated from men when it came to work and worked under different job titles than men in order to continue the ideal that women were inferior to men (Anderson, 1988). In addition, many of the skills that women seemed to possess were played down so that the traditional notions of gender relations

held true (Anderson, 1988), women lacking the ability to be superior like men. Soon, sport too would be shaped to reproduce society's beliefs on gender roles.

Women were great contributors to the sudden societal change in society by stabilizing the economy and soon providing wartime entertainment (Anderson, 1988). It was in this time the notions of gender roles and sporting gender apartheid were challenged and the definition of femininity shifted (Anderson, 1988). War caused this unintentional outcome which would soon leave lasting changes in American society (Graves, Scroggs, Collins, 2008). In addition to war, sport was a heavily commodified space. Sport was produced and sold in order for profit return. So, this too would impact how war time sports would be shaped. Due to such a momentous societal change was the emergence of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League in 1943 where sport and its societal influenced views would be challenged as women stepped on to the field. But this attempt to challenge society's fixed ideals, would be undermined. It was Wrigley and the other organizers want to make sure this wartime sport would sell to its audience by subtly including traditional femininity within the wartime sport (Kenow, 2010).

Discussion

With most men away at war and not enough men at home to continue Major League Baseball, the All-American Girl's Professional Baseball League was created. The main effort of the League was to fill a void in the sports realm and provide an enjoyable wartime sport that would soon draw an audience for economic profit. In order to differentiate itself from softball which had a reputation for manly women players (Graves, Scroggs, Collins, 2008), women's baseball organizers made an effort to accentuate women's femininity through a male dominated sport (Kenow, 2010). In the newspaper article published by *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Wolters

(1949) works to describe women's bodies on the baseball field in the eyes of a man. Women's baseball attire was described as having "natty blouses and shorts and two-toned knee length socks" (Wolters, 1947, p.17). It was also suggested within this article that the cameras broadcasting the game were positioned particularly to get "excellent closeups of pretty girls" (Wolters, 1947, p.17) for viewers. This demonstration by the Wolters is indicative of gender relations within this time period. Women were thought of as needing to be exploited in order to sell a product. So, their attire was specifically designed to catch the male eye in order to draw an audience to watch the game. Men were not keen on the idea of women playing a sport designed for men (Clevenger, 2017). But the idea was that if you could distract them from focusing on women playing a man's sport and use women's bodies and their embodied femininity, you could essentially draw the male gaze and an audience to the games (Kenow, 210). Such an action can be referred to as the female apologetic, where women taking part in athletics could only be accepted if some aspect traditional femininity were exploited (Kenow, 210).

The female apologetic was a major part of the women's baseball league. Though some people did recognize women's athletic ability, it was essentially down played due to the female apologetic (Kenow, 210). In the newspaper articles by *The Sun* and *Los Angeles Times*, it was acknowledged that women's baseball was real baseball and not in any way an easier form of major league that men played (Stenbuck, 1946; Suehsdorf, 1949). Women played the game of baseball well, taking risks and getting injured while still pushing to stay in the game (Stenbuck, 1946; Suehsdorf, 1949). In this aspect, women were able to successfully blur the lines of gender roles. This reflects a change in gender roles because men have allowed women to take part in sporting activities previously designated for only men. Though at the same time, the players were still women and that must be clearly outlined in their attire during the games in order for their

participation to be accepted. So, the change was contradictory. This achievement of blurring the once distinct lines of gender roles was hidden by the femininity that organizers worked to present on the field (Graves, Scroggs, Collins, 2008). So, in a sense women were challenging gender apartheid. However, in another sense they were not, because they were forced to continue to conform to femininity through the ways in which their bodies were exploited through their attire. Therefore, for the most part, women's athletic ability was failed to be realized by its audience while their femininity was the first thing to be noticed.

When the female apologetic was not being focused on, the jobs and the lives of the women were being talked about. In both articles published by *The Sun* and *Los Angeles Times*, the writers worked to highlight women in their accepted female occupations and traditional roles in the family (Stenbuck, 1946; Suehsdorf, 1949). On the front cover of *Sluggish in Skirts*, Suehsdorf mentioned that a star player stopped playing to have a baby and a shortstop got married resulting in a name change (1949). Later in the article, Suehsdorf also demonstrated that femininity is not only displayed on the field but also off when women like Charlene Barnett are asked to model (1949). In the article, *Home Runs... And Lipsticks*, Stenbuck discussed players of the league along with their occupation or degrees they have gotten over the years (1946). In doing this, both articles subtly demonstrate that the women are not just baseball players but they are also working women who get married and have kids. The writers work to show that these women live a double life where in one part they are baseball players but for the other part they are family oriented and have traditionally accepted female occupations like school teaching. This is the contradictory ideal of female athletes at the time. Women are allowed to be athletes as long as they possess femininity too.

Women, essentially, cannot just be ball players, they must also have another aspect in their life that reasserts them with traditional notions of femininity. If women did lack the femininity society sought to reproduce, women playing a masculine sport would not be accepted but rather looked down upon as it has previously been (Clevenger, 2017). Here again, women have challenged gender roles. But it is failed to be realized because as soon as women leave the part of their life where they are baseball players and defy the gender relations in sport, they go back to embody aspects of traditional femininity, such as having a family and getting married, beyond the game field. Traditional notions of femininity have been important to society and are so important that they also make an appearance in several aspects of sporting culture.

All three of the published newspaper articles help to better understand the historical significance of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League by demonstrating the dialectical relationship between the league and the society. Because of society's strong ideals on women and the femininity that was necessary for them to embody, the All-American Girl's Professional Baseball League was created and organized to reproduce the same ideals. Though league allowed for women to challenge the gender apartheid in sports and gender roles within society, the advancements that they made were essentially undermined by the subtle traditional notions of femininity that the league was created around and also known for.

Conclusion

The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League only emerged because millions of men were drafted to war. It was this change in society that allowed for women to enter both the work and sporting culture. If the social relations within society did not change, the women's baseball league would not be a part of history today. Just as society shaped sports, sports shaped

society allowing for women to challenge the gender apartheid and gender roles that were heavily advocated for by men. After the war ended was downfall of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (Kenow, 2010). Refeminizing America was the main goal after the war (Clevenger, 2017); bringing back the traditional notions of femininity into society. But it was women's experience of empowerment during the years of World War II that would later lead to the Women's Liberation Movement which advocated for "equality, opportunity and civil rights" (Clevenger, 2017). This movement would then lead to the passing of Title IX in 1972 allowing women access to sport and competition within sort (Clevenger, 2017).

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Appendix A

SLUGGERS IN SKIRTS: GIRLS OF THE ...

Adie Suehsdorf

Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File); Jul 31, 1949;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times

pg. F4

SLUGGERS IN SKIRTS**by Adie Suehsdorf***Photographs by Hy Peskin*

Girls of the All-American circuit hit, run and field like major-leaguers — and they're much prettier . . .

YOU won't believe this, but the Fort Wayne Daisies baseball team had a fair chance for the pennant last year until its star pitcher dropped out in mid-season to have a baby. Yes, sir, the pitcher had won 13 and lost eight, struck out 101, and compiled an earned run average of 2.01 by July. And then the baby came.

At Rockford, Ill., the Peaches' shortstop last year was Harrell. This season it's Doyle. Two different players? Not at all. Shortstop simply got married.

Problems for Managers

OVER in Peoria, the Redwings' shortstop also got married, and promptly decided to retire from baseball. After leading the league in runs batted in, too.

And where can such things happen? Where do matrimony and motherhood make managers wish they had nothing more than sore arms and Charley horses to worry about? They happen in the All-American Girls Baseball League. This thriving Midwestern organization of eight teams proved to more than 900,000 fans in 1948 that you should never underestimate the power of a woman.

Before you decide that this is softball,



WHP had to jump for his life on this play

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Appendix B

BASEBALL GIRLS GIVE TELEVISION NEATEST CURVES: WBKB HAS GAMES ON THU
Wolters, Larry
Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); May 24, 1947; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune
pg. 17

BASEBALL GIRLS GIVE TELEVISION NEATEST CURVES

WBKB Has Games on Thursday Nights

BY LARRY WOLTERS

The shape of things to come in television seems to be pretty feminine. You may get a glimpse of it any Thursday evening thru the eyes of station WBKB when it telecasts the games of the National Girls' Baseball league from Parichy stadium on the west side.

The cameras, hoisted onto a special stand overlooking the park, give televiewers excellent closeups of pretty girls in natty blouses and shorts and two toned knee length socks. The fact that the diamond is so much smaller than that of a major league park and that the cameras are located near-by makes it possible to get clearer pictures and to cover the whole field.

Use a 12 Inch Ball

The pictures show the wheeling, underhand pitching of the girls and the dizzy speed they achieve with this type of a throw. They use a 12 inch ball. Its size and nearness make it possible to follow it all the time.

Thursday evening the televiewers saw pretty Nelda Bird of Los Angeles pitch her first game—a game her team, the Cardinals, won largely because of her skill. Laura Holder of Chicago was the catcher. The other team's [Chicks] battery was Helen Congleton of Louisville and Ruby Knezovich, Regina, Canada. Shirley Dressander of Maywood relieved Miss Congleton in the seventh.

Play 90 Game Schedule

The six team Chicago league plays a 90 game schedule, winding up on Labor day. Eighty per cent of the players come from outside of Chicago. Twenty-one states are represented.

Harold [Red] Grange is the commissioner of this feminine league.

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Appendix C

HOME RUNS... AND LIPSTICK
STENBUCK, JACK
The Sun (1837-1991); Jan 9, 1945; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Sun
pg. 772

Home Runs... And Lipstick

By JACK STENBUCK

FOR nine months of the year Shirley Jameson, who obtained her B.Sc. at Illinois University and has a master's degree coming up from Northwestern, is a schoolma'am in Kenosha, Wis. Mary Baker parades a stunning figure as a professional model in Winnipeg, Canada. And Audrey Wagner crams at Michigan University for a medical career.

But when summer rolls around the three girls become—of all things—professional baseball players.

This year, in eight medium-sized mid-West cities, 1,000,000 fans will yell themselves hoarse as this trio, along with 141 stenographers, secretaries, telephone operators, campus queens and shop girls battle it out for the championship of the professional All-American Girls Baseball League, a circuit which, patterned on the big leagues, has been mixing glamor with base hits since 1943.

Chaperon For Each Team

To provide the glamor the league has rolled up its diamond darlings in thigh-length pastel dresses of soft pleats, and hired a chaperon to watch over each team.

To teach these girls the finer points of America's national game—the organization hires veterans of the major leagues as team managers—men like Max Carey, famous Pirate and erstwhile manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers; Marty McManus, formerly with the Boston Red Sox, and Bill Wambagans, one-time Cleveland Indian who made the only World Series unassisted triple play.

This season, after winning the championship for Milwaukee, Carey has been elevated to the presidency of the league. Under his direction and with the help of Wambagans, who doubles in the winter as chief scout, 33 baseball-wise scouts scour the United States and Canada for new talent.

Prospects are classified not only for playing ability, but for team spirit and good behavior. More than one candidate with a Joe DiMaggio wallop failed to make the grade because she didn't know her Emily Post. In this league, every ballplayer must be a lady.

While on the road, the players are chaperoned. They aren't permitted to smoke in public, but are allowed two glasses of beer with their meals. They can't wear shorts. A fan who gives one of the sweeties the wink as she slides into third, then tries to date her, can only get to first base by presenting himself to the chaperon for an okay. Proposals from admiring fans come a dozen a day, but so far, though some of the girls have married, not a single serious grandstand romance has blossomed. The boys back home have the inside track.