

Lois Browne, *Girls of Summer. The Real Story of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League*. **Harper Collins, Toronto, 1992.**
Index, illus. pp. 213.

For nearly forty years popular memories of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBBL) seemed not to exist. This changed when Penny Marshall's popular comic film, 'A League of their Own' (1992), stirred the North American consciousness and created a popular nostalgia for the wartime league and its women athletes. Lois Browne's, *The Real Story of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League*, is thus timely in its treatment of this topic. Browne, a researcher and writer for the popular Canadian public affairs television program, 'W5', wrote this book after covering a reunion of AAGPBBL players for her show.

Claiming to be an accounting of the ‘real story’ behind the League from its beginning until its demise (1943 to 1954), this popular work looks at its subject from a variety of angles. Interviews with former players, archival sources, and standard works on the topic (such as the often-cited Fidler thesis) are used by the author to weave together the chronologically-arranged stories of the players, the management, and the game played by the ‘girls’ of the League. No scholarly feminist tome, this story is quite in line with the approach and style of much written in the existing (male) baseball literature - than in itself will be of concern to analytically-inclined readers.

Even so, the book offers much information and food for thought. Extracts from player interviews are woven through the narrative with ease. Browne is at her best when she focuses on the League itself - describing its organisation, structure, rules and regimens, salary rates, attendance figures, and game statistics are well covered and the book includes three brief appendices identifying such items as team names and league champions. The duties of chaperones, too, and the role that these maternal governors played in carrying out the orders of the male managers, while attempting to control the drinking, betting, and other high jinx of the spirited players, are described. Readers will find Browne’s account of the problems that plagued women treading on a decidedly male preserve in wartime America. There are tantalising tidbits of lesbian innuendo, pressures to conform to the Helena Rubenstein model of womanhood, and the like. However, they will find little analysis, for example, readers north of the 49th parallel may find the highlighting of Canadian players in the League refreshing, but they will get little sense of the important differences existing at that time between the Canadian and American female sports systems.

The twenty black and white photographs chosen by Browne are visually appealing and well presented. They add much to the book. Interspersed between now-familiar professional publicity shots of team members in pristine team uniforms are a few shots taken by the women

themselves. These rare shots are gems. They leave more probing readers yearning for more candid glimpses of League women, and the intimate world they had created for themselves. A picture of a handful of Rockford Peaches casually sitting in a locker-room in various stages of post-game undress, sharing a laugh and a Coke, reveals the unabashed physicality of these athletes. Legs lazily spread wide apart, an arm slung over a chair back, these 'gals' appear to be the antithesis of the Helena Rubenstein Charm School image dreamed up by League management. An alternate reading of the visual text might suggest to some readers strong homoerotic overtones. Another picture, of a player sitting on a well-worn wooden bench in a steamy and cramped locker-room, with articles of clothing hanging down from the rafters all around her as she bends over to pull up her sock, is wonderfully evocative of the sparse conditions these women worked in.

This book, with its timely topic and stories gleaned from the experiences of women players, is written in such a way that it will likely be found on the shelves of many baseball historians. Baseball fans will be intrigued by this lesser-known side of their sport's history. Whether they will learn much about alternate 'realities' of the sporting experience of females as currently being uncovered and celebrated by feminist scholars is debatable.

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