

# The Little White House

NEWSLETTER



Roosevelt's Little White House - 706-655-5870 - 401 Little White House Rd. - Warm Springs, Ga. 31830

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## When The Girls Of Summer Ruled The Game

As our nation became entrenched in the Second World War, many thought that baseball was finished. Once again, it was our women who "stepped up to the plate" to save the game.

In 1942, most of America's young men were being drafted into wartime service and baseball parks across the country began to collapse.

Under the direction of Chicago Cubs owner, Phillip Wrigley, the idea of a girls softball league was tossed about, that would help draw people into the parks. In the spring of 1943, the All-American Girls Softball League emerged, and at the end of the first season, the League's name changed to the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) to make it distinctive from the existing softball leagues and because the rules of play were like that of Major League Baseball.

At first, the size of the baseball was similar to that of a softball, but the size eventually was reduced to the size like that in the mens game. The second hurdle was finding talented players. As wartime jobs opened up for women in factories, many women simply did not

want to play a game when the could earn serious money for the first time in their lives.

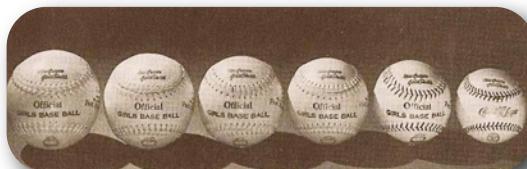
But many baseball teams paid exceptional wages. Players were scouted from all over the US and Canada. Teams



consisted of fifteen players, a manager (coach), a business manager, and a woman chaperone. It was believed that by acquiring notable men sports figures as managers for the girls' teams, there would be greater curiosity and interest by the public. The first managers selected were Johnny Gottselig; Bert Niehoff, former Major League player and minor league manager; Josh Billings, former Major

League player; and Eddie Stumpf, former Milwaukee Brewers catcher.

As tryouts were held, the girls were tested on playing their field position, throwing, catching, running, sliding and hitting. Those who survived the cut were signed to professional league contracts and some players were as young as 15. In many cases they were making more than their parents who had skilled occupations. Salaries ranged from \$45 to \$85 a week plus. Those who were signed had to comply with high moral standards and rules of conduct imposed by the League.



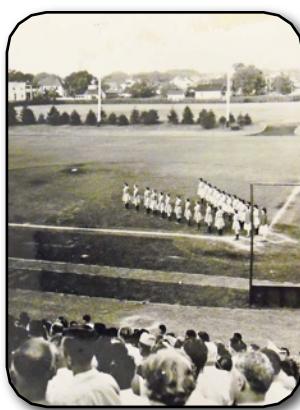
Before play could actually begin, the women had to attend "Charm School". The proper etiquette for every situation was taught, and every aspect of personal hygiene, mannerisms and dress code was presented to all the players. In an effort to make each player as physically attractive as possible, each player received a beauty kit and instructions on how to use it. This, combined with the special uniforms, like figure skating uniforms complete with a hat, knee high socks and a symbolic patch for each team completed the uniform. They were ready to play ball.

League play officially began on May 30, 1943 with South Bend playing in Rockford and Kenosha playing in Racine. A total of 108 games were played in the regular season, which ran from mid-May to the first of September. The team to win the most games during the regular season was declared the pennant winner. The top teams then competed in a series of play-off games to determine the League Champion. At the end of the 1943 season, the Kenosha Comets played a 5-game series against the Racine Belles for the Championship. Racine won and became the first World Champions of the All-American Girls Baseball League.



Going to the ballpark was a popular and Wrigley managed to capitalize on the patriotic mood of the country. America's young men were off fighting for our country, dreaming of the girls they left behind. Playing on the Theme of "All-American Girl," he promoted the image that the players were symbols of "the girl next door" in spikes. At the beginning of each game, the two teams formed a "V" for Victory from home plate down the first and third baselines followed by the playing of the Star Spangled Banner. The players played an even greater part in displaying patriotism by playing exhibition games to support the Red Cross and the armed forces, as well as visiting wounded veterans at Army Hospitals. Talent for the league was abundant, and it was soon evident that the women's high caliber of play was going to be the main drawing card for the fans.

Assessment of the first year of play was encouraging. The teams were well received by fans in the four sponsoring cities. Attendance was tracked at 176,612 fans for the 1943 season.



# Expansion

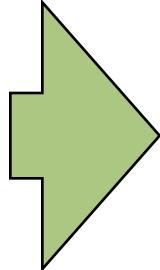
As a result of the success of the League in its first year, two additional teams were established to play in ball parks in Minneapolis and Milwaukee for the 1944 season. Former Major League Hall of Famer, Max Carey, became the manager for the newly formed Milwaukee Chicks, and Bubber Jonnard, was chosen to manage the Minneapolis Millerettes.



1944 Spring Training with Max Carey teaching some pointers

## 1944 Teams

Kenosha Comets  
Milwaukee Chicks  
Minneapolis Millerettes  
Racine Belles  
Rockford Peaches  
South Bend Blue Sox



## 1950 Teams

All Star Team  
Chicago Colleens  
Fort Wayne Daisies  
Grand Rapids Chicks  
Kalamazoo Lassies  
Kenosha Comets  
Muskegon Lassies  
Peoria Redwings  
Racine Belles  
Rockford Peaches  
South Bend Blue Sox  
Springfield Sallies



Newspaper clippings and cartoons had fun with 'the Girls of Summer'.



By 1945, the league was in fine condition. The was was progressing in our favor and the future of the league looked bright. Families were turning out in large numbers at all the ballparks. The Milwaukee Chicks were picked up by Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the Minneapolis Millerettes went to Fort Wayne, Indiana. The emphasis changed and Charm School was discontinued. The girls began to play exhibition games at 13 army camps and veteran hospitals during the last five days of spring training. The players went into the hospitals and spoke to the wounded soldiers before and after the games. Players in the League eagerly supported the War effort. Several of the players had husbands and brothers overseas and many had relatives in the service. This war effort brought a lot of positive publicity national press to the League. The war ended but the All-American Girls Professional Ball League was in full swing. By the end of the season, attendance reached 450,313.

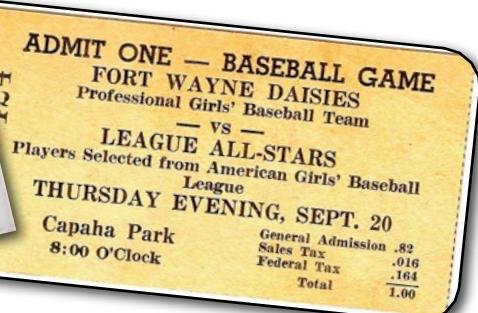


# Post War Years

In the first three years after World War II, teams often attracted between two and three thousand fans to a single game. One League highlight occurred when an estimated 10,000 people saw a 1946 Fourth of July double-header in South Bend, Indiana. The AAGPBL peaked in attendance during the 1948 season, when ten teams attracted 910,000 paid fans.



Grand Rapid Chicks



Attendance declined in the following years. One of the reasons for decreasing attendance was the decentralization of the League as well as mens baseball making a comeback. With no centralized control of publicity, promotion, player procurement, and equalization of player talent, the League began to break down.

The shrinking of the local fan base resulted in part from the rise of other forms of recreation and entertainment and the advent of televised major league games in the early 1950s.

In addition, by this time the All-American game was purely baseball and talented women baseball players were not easy to find. Talented softball players needed training and experience for success in the All-American baseball game with its longer infield distances, smaller ball, and overhand pitching. As revenues fell, individual teams were no longer able to support rookie training teams like the Colleens and Sallies, and funds were limited to advertise nationally as a way of recruiting scattered baseball.

By 1952, only six teams remained in the league after Kenosha and Peoria were disbanded. In 1953, the Battle Creek team was relocated to Muskegon, and by the end of the season, it too, folded. The 1954 season ended with only five teams remaining: Fort Wayne, South Bend, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Rockford.

Information provided from the All American Girls Professional Baseball League website. [www.aagpbl.org](http://www.aagpbl.org)

**The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League gave over 600 women athletes the opportunity to play professional baseball and to play it at a level never before attained. The League operated from 1943 to 1954 and represents one of the most unique aspects of our nation's baseball history.**



Columbus, Ga 1950 parade



Renae Youngberg Grand Rapid Chick



Doris Sams



These Kenosha Comets are enjoying a spin on the Tilt-A-Whirl.



Catchers Mickey Chapman and Julia Gutz



1943 Rockford Peaches The picture left to right Mildred Warwick, who played 3rd base Gladys Davis, Irene Ruhnke, Mildred Deegan, and Dottie Kamenshek



Lenora "Smokey" Mandella