

“Yes,” Virginia. “Little Girls Were Allowed to Play Baseball Before 1974:” The Story of Margaret Gisolo

Gai Ingham Berlage
Iona College, New Rochelle, NY.
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In 1974 when allowing girls to play Little League Baseball became a national issue, the media made no mention of the fact that Margaret Gisolo had played American Legion Junior Baseball in 1928. Girls playing baseball with boys was seen as a new issue that arose out the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1960s. This paper examines the life and times of Margaret Gisolo who played baseball for the Blanford, Indiana Cubs, an all-boys team. Margaret Gisolo was the first and only girl to play American Legion Junior Baseball before the 1970s. In 1929, one year after Margaret played, the American Legion banned girls from the program. The year that Margaret played with the Blanford Cubs, the team won the county and state titles. They lost in the first round of the interstate regional competition. Margaret was hailed nationwide as a star.

In rural areas, men’s and women’s roles were more similar than in urban areas. Almost every rural community had a hometown baseball team and baseball was the major form of entertainment. Every boy along with a few “tomboy” girls grew up playing baseball. Softball was pretty much an unrecognized sport until the 1930s.

This paper examines the social and historical factors that made it possible for Margaret Gisolo to play baseball in 1928. It discusses how and why by the 1930s baseball was being to be seen only as a masculine pastime. Baseball, Americanism, and manhood were becoming merged in the American mind.

Although softball was invented in 1897, it was not until 1933 that the Amateur Softball Association made the term softball official. Softball didn’t become popular until the 1930s. Starting in

the 1930s softball became identified as a women's sport and by the 1950s the two were so entwined that cognitive dissonance occurred if one mentioned that girls played baseball in an earlier era. The assumption was that one meant softball. By the 1950s the history of women playing baseball was forgotten. Baseball was now defined as a masculine sport and a male domain. Today Margaret Gisolo is seen as an historical anomaly.