

**Barbara Gregovich, *Women at Play: The Story of Women in Baseball.* Harcourt Brace and Company, San Diego, 1993.**

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Team sports, especially professional team sports, have been traditionally viewed as a macho activity. They provide an outlet for the innate competitive and aggressive traits in men. This patriarchal world view suggests that team sports are too rough and tumble an activity for women and are inconsistent with those notions of femininity and passivity which for so long have burdened women. To the extent that they became involved in team sports, it would be as spectators and aids to menfolk; functions consistent with the caring and nurturing roles that somehow or other have been afforded to women.

Little girls, like little boys, can become besotted with team sports. Playing with fiends, brothers and sisters, and older relatives, girls can catch, field, throw, pitch, hit and kick and imagine that they are emulating the deeds of favourite players and teams, and dream of one day enthraling crowds and rewriting record books with displays of skill and courage. Women, like men, have a predilection for playing team sports, and a will to perform at their best. In Australia, far example, women excel in field hockey, netball, basketball, volleyball and cricket. Professional women's soccer leagues operate in Europe.

Barbara Gregovich's *Women at Play* provides information concerning women's teams, and women who have played baseball professionally in the United States of America. Since the 'Blondes' and 'Brunettes' began touring in 1875 there have been a number of women who have derived their livelihood as professional baseball players. *Women at Play* is lavishly illustrated with contemporary photographs that enhances the quality of, and provides an added dimension to, Gregovich's prose. Gregovich demonstrates the various ways in which baseball has discriminated against women, and argues that the sport cannot be truly regarded as America's national pastime until such discrimination is brought to an end (p. 208).

There have been three different ways in which women have played baseball professionally. First, sexually integrated barnstorming Bloomer girl teams (so called because of their dress); second individual women signed by men's teams; and, in addition, the sexually segregated teams of the All-American Girls' Baseball League (which was brought to prominence by Penny Marshall's 1992 film *A League of Their Own*). Gregovich's approach has been to provide very readable short chapters which examine either famous teams or players.

*Women at Play* is organised into four sections. The early years (1860s to 1920) begins with a reference to Albert G Spalding's dictum that baseball was 'too strenuous for womankind'. It then briefly examines the playing of baseball at women's universities and the emergence of barnstorming Bloomer girl teams. These teams usually included a few males who either constituted the teams battery (pitcher and catcher) or fielded in key infield positions. Often these men wore wigs in an attempt to disguise themselves as women. Information is also provided on the first woman to play in the minors (Lizzie Arlington) and the first professional umpire (Amanda Clemment).

The bold years (1920 to 1942) examine Bloomer girls teams in the 1920s, and their demise due to the 1930s depression. As a result women were forced to play softball. A number of women had a minor league contract or played against major league players in preseason or exhibition games. Such ventures came to an end when baseball's authorities voided such contracts. Jackie Mitchell had the distinction of striking out Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig in succession in a pre-season game.

The third and largest section of the book examines the operation of the All-American Girls Baseball League. The League was formed in 1943 by Philip K Wrigley who sought to entertain mid-west fans during the war years. During its short history the number of teams in the league ranged from four to ten, and at various times, provided employment for over 600 women. At the beginning of its operation players received incomes ranging from between \$45 and \$75 a week, at its height \$125 a

week Except for 1954 the League employed different rules and playing conditions to that of men. Players were required to wear make-up during games, and short skirts which made sliding a veritable nightmare. While a handful of Cubans joined teams, the League was never racially integrated. The League eventually folded in 1954, mainly it seems as a result of television making it easier to watch Major League baseball from the comfort of one's home.

The final section, the modern years, makes for depressing reading. While details are provided concerning Toni Stone who played in the Negro Leagues and had the distinction of taking a hit off Satchel Paige, women's progress in professional baseball seems to have gone backwards. While threatened legal action succeeded in opening up the Little League to girls in 1974, women at the beginning of this century seemed to have more chance of playing professionally than their colleagues at the end of the century.

Gregovich obviously intended *Women at Play* for a popular audience and has not included any bibliographic information, which is the lifeblood of the scholar. Despite this academic lament she is to be congratulated for producing a very lively account of those women and teams which provided another dimension to the phenomenon which is Americanbaseball.

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