



## About the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League

With World War II pulling more young men into the armed forces and minor league baseball teams collapsing, chewing gum mogul and Chicago Cubs owner Philip K. Wrigley was determined not to let Major League Baseball fall.

That was the genesis of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, the league made famous by the 1992 film "A League of Their Own," starring Tom Hanks, Geena Davis, Madonna, Rosie O'Donnell and directed by Penny Marshall.

With its birth in 1943 as a non-profit organization, Wrigley provided financial support and declared four medium-sized cities near the league's Chicago headquarters would have teams. Thus the Kenosha (Wis.) Comets, the Racine (Wis.) Belles, the Rockford (Ill.) Peaches and the South Bend (Ind.) Blue Sox became the league's first teams.

With a network of scouts and Wrigley's sports connections, the league organized try-outs in dozens of cities, which attracted hundreds of women from all over the United States and Canada. Then, 280 women were invited to the final try-outs in May 1943 at Chicago's Wrigley Field. There, 60 players were chosen as the first women to play professional baseball.

Teams would consist of 15 players, a manager, business manager and a woman chaperone. Salaries ranged from \$45 to \$85 a week for the players, some of whom were as young as 15 years old. Also, femininity was a priority as Wrigley required women to attend evening charm school classes, where the players learned etiquette, personal hygiene, mannerisms and dress code.

The players' uniforms consisted of a one-piece, short-skirted flared tunic fashioned after the figure skating, field hockey and tennis costumes of the era. Satin shorts, knee-high baseball socks and a baseball hat completed the uniform. Each city had a different colored uniform, and a distinct patch decorated the front of each team's uniform.

The rules, meanwhile, were a combination of the rules of softball and baseball in an effort to make the games more exciting and competitive. Initially, pitchers threw under-handed, but the AAGPBL also incorporated men's base-running rules and a nine-person lineup.

League play officially began on May 30, 1943 with South Bend playing in Rockford and Kenosha playing in Racine. The teams played a 108-game regular season schedule between mid-May and early September. The teams then competed in a series of playoff games to determine the league champion. To conclude the 1943 season, the Racine Belles beat the Kenosha Comets in a five-game series for the league's first championship.

Encouraged by the strong reception -- attendance for the 1943 season was measured at 176,612 fans -- the AAGPBL laid plans for expansion in 1944. That season, the Milwaukee Chicks and the Minneapolis Millerettes joined the league, and a second spring training was in May in Peru, Ill.

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The Milwaukee Chicks won the league championship in 1944, but the new teams drew significantly less attention from media and from fans compared to their smaller counterparts. After the season, Wrigley sold the league to Chicago advertising executive, Arthur Meyerhoff, who quickly re-organized the league. Under his leadership, each club was given a voice in the rules and direction of the league.

When the 1945 season began, Meyerhoff had begun heavy promotion of the league and the players' eager support of the war effort also garnered positive attention from fans and media. The Milwaukee Chicks kept their name and moved to Grand Rapids, Mich., while the Minneapolis Millerettes went to Fort Wayne, Ind., and became the Daisies. Charm school also was discontinued. By the end of the season, attendance reached 450,313.

By the 1948 season, the league had changed its rules to allow overhand pitching. The Peoria (Ill.) Redwings, the Muskegon (Mich.) Lassies, the Springfield (Ill.) Sallies and the Chicago Colleens had joined the league, though the Springfield and Chicago franchises lasted just one season before becoming training teams. Also, a four-team minor league was established in Chicago as the Chicago Girls Baseball League. The 1948 season marked the AAGPBL's peak, drawing about 910,000 fans.

After the 1950 season, team directors purchased the AAGBBL from Meyerhoff to operate their teams independently. Publicity and scouting soon suffered, however, and the decentralization of the league led its decline.

Revenues fell and by 1952, only six teams remained in the league, including two of the original four franchises. The Racine Belles disbanded after the 1950 season and the Kenosha Comets folded after the 1951 campaign. Eventually, the league shut down after the 1954 season with only five teams remaining in Fort Wayne, South Bend, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo and Rockford.

During its 11 seasons, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League gave more than 600 women the opportunity to play professional baseball. The league produced gifted players like Dorothy "Dottie" Schroeder -- a standout for the South Bend Blue Sox, Kenosha Comets, Fort Wayne Daisies and the Kalamazoo Lassies -- who holds all-time records for most games played (1,249) and most RBIs (431). There was Olive Little, a Rockford Peaches pitcher who won 21 games in the league's first year, pitched the league's first no-hitter and had a lifetime ERA of 2.23. And there was Edie Perlick, the steady left fielder for the Racine Belles who batted .240 over eight seasons, while stealing 481 bases.

Recognized by the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1988, the league represents one of the most unique pieces of our American baseball and sports history.

*(Information courtesy of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. For more information, go to [www.aagpbl.org](http://www.aagpbl.org))*

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