

Movie Kit



American
Spaces

A League of Their Own



Year of Release: 1992

Rating: PG-13

Length: 2 h 8 min

English level: Easy - Medium

Director: Penny Marshall

Starring: Geena Davis, Tom Hanks, Madonna, Lori Petty

Themes: Women's Empowerment, American Dream, Sports
Diplomacy

Warning/General Advisory

Includes some profane language.

A League of Their Own is a comedy-drama set in 1943 that gives a fictionalized account of the real-life *All-American Girls Professional Baseball League*. During World War II, millions of men from the United States were called into military service. At home, women were needed to fill jobs that had previously been done by men. Baseball players were also called into service. Seeking to fill this void, a chewing gum tycoon from Chicago created a female baseball league.

The film follows one of the newly created teams, the “Rockford Peaches,” and features two competitive sisters Dottie Hinson (played by Geena Davis) and Kit Keller (played by Lori Petty) under the coaching leadership of cynical manager Jimmy Dugan (played by Tom Hanks). The film’s opening scene is set in 1988 with many of the players – now older – attending the opening of the *All-American Girls Professional Baseball League* exhibit at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. A number of the actual players from the league are in this scene.

Historical Context

The *All-American Girls Professional Baseball League* was a women’s professional league which existed from 1943 until 1954. The league was founded by chewing gum manufacturer Philip Wrigley. Its teams were all based in the Midwestern United States. During the 1948 season, the league set its all-time attendance record by drawing nearly one million fans. More than 600 women played in the league during its twelve seasons, with players coming from all across the United States and several provinces of Canada.

The *All-American Girls Professional Baseball League* had to overcome certain stereotypes that were prevalent during this time. Since women ball players were considered by some in society to be less feminine, and even rough or coarse, the League established certain guidelines to change this image. The players were sent to “charm school” for their manners, were taught how to apply make-up that was mandatory during games, were forbidden to curse or use slang

words when in public, and were given uniforms that featured short dresses rather than pants to make them look more feminine during the games. It was not a concern if the women bruised and scratched their legs when sliding into bases during the games. The teams all had chaperones who made sure the women conformed to the rules and who approved of their social engagements. While this is controlling, most of the players agreed to the league's terms because they felt the opportunity to have a job playing baseball was worth the sacrifice.

Before World War II, one in four American women worked outside the home. At the time, they worked in traditionally "female professions." They worked as teachers, nurses, secretaries and seamstresses. During the war, women were needed to fill jobs that had previously been done by men, including in defense plants and in the aircraft industry. Women became factory workers, mechanics, delivery-people, and office workers. Although women were paid less than their male counterparts for the same work, they were making more money than they had before. This led women to achieve a level of financial independence that they found empowering. After the war, most women lost these jobs when the men returned, but American society was changing. By the 1950's, approximately a third of all American women worked outside of their home. Today, 57% of women in the U.S. participate in the labor force, and 70% of women with children under 18 years old participate in the labor force.

The *All-American Girls Professional Baseball League* ended after the 1954 season. Why? With men back from the war, Major League Baseball was soaring in popularity. Professional football was also rapidly gaining more fans. Finally, the owners of the women's professional baseball league did not promote their sport as well as they should have and the teams lost money.

Key Vocabulary/Places

- **Tryout** – Players demonstrating their skills to win a spot on a team
- **Scout** – In the context of the movie and as a noun, a person who is a good judge of talent and recruits players for a sports team. As a verb, to explore carefully in order to obtain information.
- **Line-up** – List of players in a game by order of batting appearance
- **Rumor** – Something that is being said that may or may not be true
- **Charm school** – A school for teaching social graces, grooming and dress
- **Dolly** – A 1940's slang term for a pretty young woman
- **"Bailed you out"** – Helped you out of trouble
- **"You're nuts"** – You're crazy
- **"Let me down"** – You disappointed me

Discussion Questions

- How did World War II create opportunities for women?
- Why did the *All-American Girls Professional Baseball League* have the players go to charm school and wear make-up? What do you think about this requirement?
- *A League of Their Own* is famous for the "there is no crying in baseball" scene where manager Jimmy Dugan yells at one of his players in front of her teammates. What did you think about that scene?
- In the United States today, on average, women are paid about \$.80 to every \$1.00 a man earns. What are the trends in your communities? What factors explain gender pay inequalities? What is being done to narrow the gender pay gap?
- Women's participation in sports is very popular in the United States, such as with women's basketball, soccer, and tennis. Which women's sports are popular in your communities? What has helped girls and women to participate?
- Who are some women role models in your lives? These role models do not have to be people you know personally. What do you admire about these women?