

Dirt on Their Skirts

• Reader's Theater •

Grades
2–5

by | Toni Buzzeo

Authors' Note from *Dirt on Their Skirts* by Deborah Hopkinson and Lyndall Callan

Although Margaret and her family are fictitious characters, the details of the game are factual. The game took place on September 16, 1946, and has been re-created here through newspaper articles and interviews with Sophie Kurys, Betty Trezza, Joanne Winter, and Sue Macy. We thank these women for sharing their memories and their knowledge. We also appreciate the help of Bill Burdick and Tim Wiles of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, and Christopher Paulson of the Racine Heritage Museum. A special thanks to Stuart Rand of The Art of the Game, for the title.

During World War II (1939–1945), when American men went to battle, women filled their jobs at home. They worked in offices and factories building battleships and bomber—and they played baseball.

A women's baseball league was the idea of Philip Wrigley, the owner of the Chicago Cubs. He was worried that interest in baseball would not last through the war with so many outstanding male players fighting overseas. In 1943, he started a professional women's baseball league. Among the eight teams in the Midwest were the Racine Belles from Wisconsin and the Rockford Peaches from Illinois. In a grueling four-month season the women played one hundred and twenty games, one every night, with doubleheaders on Saturday and Sunday. At the end of each season the two best teams of the league competed for the championship.

When the war ended, the men came home and took back their former jobs in the factories, offices, and ballparks. Attendance at women's baseball games dropped and the league eventually folded in 1954. The accomplishments of these female athletes were largely forgotten.

In 1988, the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, acknowledged these amazing athletes in an exhibit. One hundred and forty-seven former players attended the opening of the "Women in Baseball" exhibit, along with hundreds of their friends, families, and fans. The names of six hundred and fifty women players in the league are listed in a glass case. As names of more players are discovered, they will be added to the roster.

The official name of the league changed many times. During the 1980s, former players renamed it the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL). For reasons of simplicity and respect, we have chosen to use this name.

