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PHOTO ESSAY

All-American Girls

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In the fall of 2005, the Winthrop University Archives in Rock Hill, South Carolina, acquired the papers of Elizabeth “Lib” Mahon, a 1942 graduate of the college and one of only two South Carolinians to play in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL). Among the memorabilia, clippings, and papers belonging to this remarkable woman were hundreds of never-before-published personal snapshots of teammates on and off the field.

Mahon (1919–2001), an outstanding high school and college athlete, traveled from Greenville, South Carolina, to LaSalle-Peru, Illinois, in the spring of 1944 to try out for the league. After ten days of intense competition, she was assigned to the Minneapolis Millerettes. A few weeks later she was traded to the Kenosha Comets. In 1945 Mahon joined the South Bend Blue Sox, where she would remain until her retirement at the end of the 1952 season.

Playing primarily in the outfield, Mahon was especially noted for her hitting ability. She twice led the AAGPBL in RBIs with 72 in 1946 and 60 in 1949—the two years she was selected for the All-Star team—and her 400 career RBIs ranks her among the top five run producers in league history. In her nine years of professional baseball, Mahon compiled an excellent offensive record: a lifetime .248 hitter, she had 721 hits, 364 stolen bases, and 358 walks with only 150 strikeouts. She also scored 432 runs and maintained a respectable .961 fielding average. The highlight of her career was the 1951 season, when she helped the Blue Sox win their first league championship.

The 600-plus members of the All-American Girls broke down barriers, not only in sports, but in society in general. These photographs serve as a visual testimonial to these pioneering women. Most importantly, they show women playing with, and enjoying the company of, other women.

Women, at the time, were usually defined by their relationship to men, often restricted to roles as wives, mothers, or sisters. For women to live and work together as a team was highly unusual. Independent women, especially

single ones, were suspect. This is why league officials and team owners hired chaperones to travel with the teams and also why they insisted that all players comport themselves at all times as “ladies.” In the early years, players were even given lessons in etiquette and the art of applying makeup. League rules prohibited “boyish bobs” and smoking or drinking in public and required the women to appear in “feminine attire” when not in uniform. Players who broke these rules were fined, and repeat offenders were suspended.

But these were strong women, individuals who challenged the conventions of the time to play the game they loved. No rules or petty requirements would stand in their way or prevent them from having fun with other women. In their own way, by doing what they wanted to do, they helped advance the cause of women everywhere.

NOTE

All photographs are courtesy of the Winthrop University Archives and Special Collections, Elizabeth Mahon Papers.



In the off-season many of the women would stay in the communities in which they played. Pictured here is a South Bend women's basketball team with Blue Sox players Marie Kruckel (*third from left*), Lib Mahon (*fifth from left*), and Jean Faut (*second from right*).



Lib Mahon holding South Bend teammate Betsy "Sock 'Um" Jochum.



The Girls of Summer (*left to right*):
South Bend players Bonnie Baker,
Betsy Jochum, Lib Mahon, and
Phyllis "Sugar" Koehn.



Lib Mahon played outfield for the
South Bend Blue Sox from 1945
until the end of the 1952 season.



South Bend players (*left to right*) Dottie Naum and Marge Stefani enjoy an off-day outing with team chaperon, Lucille Moore.



Teammates Lib Mahon, Lillian Luckey, Jean Faut (*left to right*), and Marie Kruckel (*reclining*) relaxing at a lake in Dowagiac, Michigan.



Lib Mahon with Nancy DeShone, the “Moonlight Graham” of the All-American Girls. DeShone played in only one game in 1948, going 0 for 2.



The league used busses to travel from city to city. Pictured here is the South Bend Blue Sox team bus rented from White Star Lines out of Peoria, Illinois.



The women clearly enjoyed the company of each other both on and off the field. Marge Stefani, Betsy Jochum, and an unidentified friend (*left to right*) canoe at the lake in Dowagiac, Michigan.



Playing conditions were not exactly on a par with Major League teams. Lib Mahon played for the Kenosha Comets in her rookie season in 1944. She is seated at the far right in the dugout.