

Alexandria Times

Denise Dunbar

Publisher & Executive Editor
ddunbar@alextimes.com

Leslie Golden

Editor
lgolden@alextimes.com

Margaret Stevens

Sales Director
mstevens@alextimes.com

Brianne McConnell

Reporter
bmcconnell@alextimes.com

Amy Will

Reporter
awill@alextimes.com

ADVERTISING

Margaret Stevens
mstevens@alextimes.com

Marty DeVine
mdevine@alextimes.com

Patrice V. Culligan
pculligan@alextimes.com

Tina Franco

Office Administrator
tfranco@alextimes.com

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Jessica Kim

graphics@alextimes.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Kerry Boyd Anderson

Olivia Anderson

Kim Davis

Andrew Dunbar

Hannah Docter-Loeb

Mark Eaton

Kim Jackson

Kim Gilliam

Mae Hunt

Louise Krafft

Jim McGrath

Kaitlin Murphy

Gwen Peace

Dr. Vivek Sinha

ALEXTIMES LLC

Denise Dunbar
Managing Partner

The Ariail family
Suzanne Brock
William Dunbar

HOW TO REACH US

1199 N Fairfax St. Suite 401
Alexandria, VA 22314
703-739-0001 (main)
www.alextimes.com

'A League of Their Own' in Alexandria

BY ANDREW MCELWAIN

For nearly a century, thousands of people of every age, ability and background have participated in "America's pastime" at Alexandria's Eugene Simpson Stadium. In 1926, the city transformed the site of a publicly funded poorhouse, known as the Alexandria Almshouse, into a sports field. Countless games of baseball have been played there ever since. But one game in particular, a match between the Racine Belles and the Fort Wayne Daisies in the spring of 1951 stands out from the rest.

The Belles and the Daisies were both members of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League that later inspired the movie and TV series "A League of Their Own." It remains the first and only professional baseball league for women in the United States.

The league was founded in 1943 by several baseball team executives, including chewing gum magnate and Chicago Cubs owner Philip K. Wrigley, who were trying to solve a problem that many other businesses were facing at that time: a lack of manpower. Just as factories were facing huge labor shortages due to the large number of men drafted to fight in World War II, minor league

baseball teams were struggling to fill out their rosters.

There were even fears that Major League Baseball teams might not be able to field enough players. The eventual solution for both industries was the same. Factory owners hired women to work on their assembly lines and the team owners hired women to play in their stadiums. Unlike their male counterparts, women in the league were required to attend charm school and to wear makeup and skirts on the field.

At its peak, 10 teams competed in the AAGPBL, though that number fluctuated over its existence. All of the teams were located in the Midwest and several of them changed cities during their tenure, including the two that visited Alexandria.

The Belles were one of the league's original teams founded in 1943 in Racine, Wisconsin, but ended up moving to Michigan in 1951 to play their last three seasons. The Fort Wayne Daisies started out life as the Minneapolis Millerettes in 1944 but moved to Indiana the following year where they stayed until the league dissolved.

The league folded in 1954, as declining attendance, poor finances and the advent of televised MLB games proved



PHOTO/UNIVERSAL NEWSREEL COLLECTION/NATION ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

Patricia Scott of the Fort Wayne Daisies at Alexandria Municipal Stadium, now Eugene Simpson Stadium.

too much to overcome. Even though it only lasted a decade, the AAGPBL was a big first step toward a more inclusive sports landscape. While there are no professional women's baseball leagues today, leagues in other sports like basketball and soccer continue the legacy of those pioneering women.

So why did these two teams play in Alexandria? Just like major league teams today, the teams of the AAGPBL sought warmer climates for their spring training before the regular season started. While Northern Virginia is not as tropical as some of their other spring training locations like

Opa-locka, Florida or Havana, Cuba, it was probably downright balmy compared to their home cities.

Traveling to central hubs like Alexandria also served as a way to get publicity for the league and recruit players. Though the score of the spring training game remains hidden in history, some of the action was captured in a Universal Newsreel and provides a glimpse into the history of Simpson Park and women's baseball in Alexandria.

Out of the Attic is provided by The Office of Historic Alexandria.