



“Let the Girls Play!” – The Emergence of Women in Baseball

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Albert Goodwill Spalding was a man of ambition. Born during the Industrial Revolution, Spalding was an entrepreneur, an innovator, and a professional athlete. A combination of these interests would lead to one of the most renowned sports lives ever lived. Between 1871 and 1878, Spalding played major league baseball for the Boston Red Stockings and Chicago White Stockings, where he played as both a pitcher and position player. As a batter Spalding posted a career .313 batting average with over 600 hits, and as a pitcher he recorded a 252-65 record, a 2.14 ERA, and near 250 strikeouts. He was also the first popular professional player to use the fielding glove. After his retirement in 1878, Spalding would go on to co-found the A.G Spalding sporting goods company, participate in the first world baseball tour, and organize the National League in Professional baseball alongside William Hubert. However, Spalding wanted more. He was determined to make baseball America's national pastime. To do so, he constructed a fable that presented baseball as a sport meant for the true American. He called for a commission, now known as the Mills Commission, that would investigate the origins of baseball, and this commission would attribute baseball's origins to Abner Doubleday, a career army man and Union General during the Civil War. In more modern times, baseball historians have declared there is no such evidence that would suggest Abner Doubleday had any connection to the original conception of baseball, but still Spalding's goal had been achieved. The lore spread like wildfire, and baseball would in fact become America's pastime. Yet, with Spalding's intentions of America embracing the game of baseball wholeheartedly accomplished, he never believed the game should embrace all Americans. In fact, in his book "America's National Game" Spalding wrote, "A woman may take part in the grandstand, with applause for the brilliant play, with

waving kerchief to the hero, but she couldn't actually play: Base Ball is too strenuous for womankind." In Spalding's mind, there was no place for women in the game, an idea that still persists in the highest circles of the baseball community. To this day, women are still struggling to gain acceptance in the sport.

Marti Sementelli woke on a warm spring California morning in 2011 thinking only of baseball. She was nervous. It was not a sensation she experienced often, but the day was unlike any day she or anyone else had ever experienced.

The San Marcos High School Royal had been on her mind the entire week. The game against the Royal was not the first big game Marti had pitched in as a High School varsity baseball player. As a sophomore, she pitched 21 1/3 innings, posting a 2-1 win record with thirteen strikeouts and only four walks, but Ghazaleh Sailors would be the opposing pitcher. The matchup would be the first time two women would oppose each other as starting pitchers in a varsity baseball game.

She arrived at the Lake Balboa Birmingham field early. Though it was still morning

Warm ups, In and Out, the customary pregame bullpen, all passed in a blur, and before she knew it, it was game time. The Birmingham field bleachers were filled. The national anthem sounded, and first pitch drew ever nearer. As the anthem ended, the beating in Marti's heart increased. She was focused, but even through the focus, a nervous tug still pulled at her heart; however, no one in the stands or on the field would have known it. She took the mound with confidence stretching every inch of her frame as high as she could skyward.

Standing at only 5'2 and weighing only 115 pounds, Marti was not an imposing figure even when she wanted to be. That is until one has seen her from the batter's box.

Marti toted the rubber in the first inning. Across the field, in the opposing dugout, her

After 3 1/3 innings, Sailors would be relieved after giving up three hits and three runs, while Marti would go on to pitch six innings giving up only 5 hits and one run in route to her team's 6-1 victory. The win, though important to Marti and her team, in retrospect mattered very little. For both women the game meant so much more. During the game Sailors and Marti had been enemies, but before and after the game, they could not have been closer allies. Together, they had made a statement--a statement that would garner national attention though it was a simple action they had been doing time and time again their entire lives. Both women had competed against men in the game of baseball and found success. However, whenever an established party seeks to create change in the field of a traditional establishment, hardship is sure to follow.

Marti and Sailors both graduated from their respective high schools in 2011, and both would receive scholarships to play baseball at the collegiate level. When NAIA affiliate Montreat College in North Carolina offered Marti even a minimal scholarship, Head Coach Michael Bender claimed that boosters and even some players were upset by the offer. Some players threatened to transfer, and alumni and boosters alike questioned Bender's reasoning behind offering a girl a scholarship to play for the team, though Bender's offer was not nearly enough to cover the \$33,000 tuition fee to attend the school, and she would only pitch for the JV team, which Bender claims is worse competition than what she faced in high school. Likewise, Sailor faced similar hardship, receiving death threats via social media and email after accepting an offer to play baseball at the University of Maine-Presque Isle.

In a game that holds tradition very dearly, hostility towards change is one of baseball's oldest covenants that has been kept. This game that is known as America's pastime may also tell

us a lot about the country's present, and more importantly, about its future. Ghazaleh Sailors and Marti Sementelli represent the future of equality in America.

As I sat in the Jacksonville University Baseball dugout seething with anger and frustration, one word crossed my mind about my teammates: pussies. We were losing 5-1 in the bottom of the eighth to Florida A&M University, a team that lacks talent on both the pitching mound and at the plate, yet, they have beaten our team four out of the last five times we had competed against them. With not one pitcher that threw over 84 miles per hour, they managed to hold our offense, which had been scoring runs consistently over the course of the first thirteen games of the season, to only six hits. Our pitchers, all of whom threw in the upper 80's and low 90's, had managed to surrender twelve hits, due to a lack of command of off speed pitches. Shoulders were slumped. Timid and passive looks stole onto faces, as batter after batter returned to the dugout after unsuccessful at-bats. In my mind, defeat was inevitable because the team had already given up. Again, the word came back to me: "Pussies." A red flag immediately triggered in my mind, and I tried to box the thought away in the deepest space of forgetfulness. I had again ascribed weakness or lack of will power to a word meant to represent the female anatomy.

As I trudged into the outfield for what was sure to be another long inning of defending, still fuming at my team's lack of desire and determination not to be defeated by a team far less talented than us, I found myself thinking about the phrase: "we're playing like girls." I continued to monitor my thoughts. Almost instinctually, every time my guard dropped or my anger overwhelmed me, I did not want to be defeated.

As the ninth inning came to a close and the game was completed, I had to ask myself why slanders of women's nature were my primary default when it comes to sports. I consider myself gender conscious, and I would never say something of that nature to a woman or about a woman intentionally, but in the realm of a sporting event, in my mind, it somehow became acceptable. It was normal.

Our language has always viewed masculinity as strength and femininity as weakness. From youth, this tradition was seared into my mind as if with a hot iron. In athletics, children are raised to see the strength of women as inferior to that of a man, and it shows in our everyday colloquialisms.

Sexism is not only engrained at baseball's core but at the heart of every sport. A study of sexist language in sports conducted by Bowling Green State University's Janet B. Parks and Mary Ann Robertson identified a subtle tendency of universities to use differentiating language when referring to men versus women's sports when they write:

Given that both language and sport can perpetuate male privilege, it is not surprising that the language of sport also favors men. Examples of sexist language in sport include gender marking (e.g., using "Lady" or "ettes" as part of the women's team name), referring to female athletes as "girls," focusing media coverage on women's physical attractiveness or marital status rather than on their athletic prowess, and assuming that the "real" event is the men's event and the women's event is "other. (481)

This seemingly minute tendency to differentiate between women and men in the realm of sports is prevalent in college sports and professional sports nationwide. It shows that a difference does exist, and it is a difference that has enough impact to affect the women who play the sport.

Sports terminology insists on portraying women as weaker and inferior athletes to men though women have proved this idea to be false time and time again. one of the most famous schemes in baseball movie history comes from the movie *The Sandlot* in which Porter, one of the Sandlot crew, insults Phillips, a member of the snooty All-Star team, after they get into an argument about whose team is better

show the world a women's strength. Yet, this strength is still often seen as anomalous, a moment when David slew Goliath. However, these feats of strength are becoming commonplace for women, particularly in the realm of baseball.

Sarah Hudek was raised and immersed in much of baseball's rich history. Her father, John Hudek, played Major League Baseball from 1994-1999, pitching for five different teams, including the Astros, the Reds, the Braves, the Mets, and the Blue Jays. From 1994-1997, Houston would be Sarah's home while her father pitched for the Astros in the "The Eighth Wonder of the World", the Astros's Astrodome, an 18 story high enclosed AstroTurf dome. The Astrodome was the first of its kind in Major League Baseball, and in 1994 her father would pitch his way to an All-Star Game appearance on his way to toss

to the Northern Lights, which northern Canada is so well known for. The Roger Centre was the first Major League Baseball domed stadium to incorporate a retractable roof. It is also the first stadium to have a 348 roomed hotel connected to it. Seventy of these rooms overlook the baseball field.

The Rogers Centre would be the last of the Hudek's stops along their five year tour of historical major league fields before returning to Texas. However, the many years spent at the ballpark, picking the minds of her father and the great baseball minds of his major league friends, left an indelible impression on Sarah. She tried playing softball, but her heart lay with the boys of summer on the baseball diamond. With her father's tutelage Sarah would begin her baseball career as a pitcher, where she would not only succeed against women but dominate against men as well. In 2014, the 5'10 left hander who could throw 82mph with a changeup, a curveball, and a cutter was named USA Baseball's Sportswoman of the Year after posting a 1-1 record and a 0.53 ERA in 17 innings at the Women's World Baseball Classic, leading team USA to a silver finish. She would also lead her high school team George Ranch to a 4A playoff appearance.

There's a saying in baseball which states that there is a school for everyone who wants to play the game, but for the longest time, that statement only held relatively true for men. However, on Wednesday February 14th of 2015, Sarah Hudek of George Ranch High School in Richmond Texas, signed a grant-in-aid scholarship to play baseball at Bossier City Community College in Bossier City Louisiana. When asked about the signing Head Coach Aaron Vorachek told reporters, "This is not a gimmick and I could care less about media attention... I'm signing

her to help us win ballgames.”

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