Alison Dees

“You Throw Like a Girl”:
Shutting Out the Stereotypes of Female Baseball Players

You are standing on the mound. You hear the crowd in the background. The dirt moves under your feet as you center yourself. You turn around and mentally prepare yourself for the game. You stand square to home plate. You step back with your left foot and turn your right parallel to the mound. You bring your left leg up making yourself perpendicular to the plate. You push off with your right foot and release the ball. “Strike”, the umpire yells. You pitch the second ball. “Strike”. You pitch the third ball. “You’re out” cries the umpire. You have successfully gotten a batter out of the game. As the crowd cheers, the batter walks away in disbelief because a girl has struck him out of the game.

In today’s society, women have overcome many different obstacles. We have earned the right to vote, we have taken on professional careers, and have shown how powerful we can be. However, when a thirteen year old female pitcher, Mo’ne Davis, pitched in the Little League World Series, the world was on edge. Davis is the pitcher for the Taney Dragons, an inner city baseball team from Philadelphia. Over the summer, Mo’ne became the first girl in Little League World Series to pitch a shutout, meaning she gave up no runs, struck out 8 players, allowed no walks and only had two hits (Gay). Since then, she has been coined the “girl who can outpitch the boys” (Mandell). “Mixing a fastball that topped out around 70 mph with an effective slider,” Davis has impressed countless sports fans and athletes (Berg). “Major League Baseball players tweeted out support and tuned in to games” to watch Davis cream her competition (Mandell). Marcus Stroman, pitcher for the Toronto Blue Jays, tweeted saying Davis “is an absolute stud. Awesome mechanics and great feel for pitching” (Mandell). She has been featured in Sports
Illustrated, Teen Vogue, and the newest Chevy commercials. She was even given the opportunity to throw out the first pitch in the fourth World Series Game. However, a Time Magazine article by columnist Sean Gregory reports that if Davis’ baseball career “follows that of most girls who love the sport, it will be over by high school”.

Unlike other sports teams, baseball does not have teams dedicated to all girls. Many critics argue girls can just make the switch over to softball once they reach high school. Although softball has “bats and bases and other similarities to baseball . . . it’s still a fundamentally different game” (Gregory). Baseball fields are traditional bigger than softball fields. Baseball fields are sixty feet from home plate to the pitcher’s mound, the bases are ninety feet apart and home plate is around 380 feet from the back fence. Softball field are forty feet from home plate to the pitcher’s mound, the bases are sixty feet apart and home plate is 200 feet from the back fence (Nason). Making the switch from baseball to softball is hard. Sara Tobias, a freshman at Carroll High School in New York City, has spent years mastering baseball’s skill sets. Switching to softball would only mess her up because pitching a twelve inch softball underhanded is completely different than pitching a nice inch baseball overhanded. Tobias also “just prefers baseball’s longer bases, bigger fields and smaller balls” (Gregory).

Tobias is not the only girl who has a love for the sport. Justine Sigeal, “founder of Baseball For All, a non-profit that provides opportunities for girls and women to play” baseball, reported that around 100,000 girls play youth baseball (Gregory). Yet, the National Federation of State High School Associations reports that there were only 1,259 girls that played high school ball in the 2012-2013 school year. The other 99,000 girls surely did not lose their drive of the game. Sigeal claims the drop is due to the fact “girls are not encouraged to play baseball” (Gregory). Many girls are bullied off their teams by other players, while others are influenced to
quite by their coaches or other parents. These naysayers claim girls cannot “smack a 450-foot home run or throw 90 miles-per-hour” like a boy (Gregory). However, the game is the perfect place for both girls and boys to compete. Baseball has less physical contact than other sports. In this sport, there is no chance for roughhousing. Things may get messy when a basemen is trying to get a batter out, but it is not as demanding as tackling in a football game (Nason).

A senior at Durant High School in Plant City, Florida has proven girls keep up with the high school baseball boys. Weighing in at 125 pounds and standing proudly at 5’4”, Chelsea Baker has mastered the knuckleball. She can throw a “slow ball flutter” which is just enough to get someone out (Gregory). Baker pitched and won three games during her junior year. She was even invited to batting practice with the Tampa Bay Rays, a professional baseball team in Tampa, Florida. Baker has impressed many of the athletes with how well she can pitch. Baker’s success proves girls can keep up physically with boys. Yet, there is still something missing.

Sarah Hudek, a varsity pitcher for George Ranch High School in Richmond, Texas, explains the difficulty of being the only girl on her team. She stated, “as much as [the boys] try to make you feel like one of the guys, you can’t really be” (Gregory). Hudek feels like she is not really a part of the team because she is missing out on bonding in the locker room. Timothy Jon Curry, a professor at The Ohio State University, found men need locker room bonding because “men associate different meanings with friendship than women” (Curry 120). Curry suggests “that men need a reason to become close to one another” in order to become comfortable in sharing their feelings (120). Changing in the same area as each other gives boys that reason to share. Although their shared feelings many result in a “sexist joking relationship”, they still become like brothers (Curry 120). Boys start to see how much they need to depend on each other
in order to be successful. These fraternal bonds bleed into their personal life. One joke about someone’s mother in the locker room can result in everyone on the team grabbing dinner after practice. When a girl is not present during these key moments of bonding, she will start to feel unaccepted (Nason).

Kelsie Whitemore, a center fielder and pitcher for Temecula Valley High School varsity team in California, says “it’s kind of frustrating . . . there are teams for different genders in every other sports, but not for baseball” (Curry). The idea of having an all-girls league is not a new concept. During World War II, there was the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. With the war ranging on in Europe, many minor league baseball teams were disbanded. The young men who would traditional be drafted into the league were being drafted to the war. With a board of trustees and “the financial support of Mr. Wrigley, the All-American Girls Softball League emerged in the spring of 1943” (Lesko). The league earned its official name, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, in 1988 when it was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Through the leagues existence, there were many debates about what kind of game would be played. With this game, “the rules, strategy and general play were the same” (Lesko). The bases paths, ball size, and pitching distance varied throughout the years, but in the final season, the league basically had every baseball rule and regulation. The ball was nine inches in circumference and the girls pitched overhanded. The only difference was that the base paths were five feet shorter. (Lesko).

In spite of this, the league only lasted eleven seasons. The league started to crumble due to lack of talent. In the beginning of the league, Philip Wrigley would pull the top softball players from the United States and Canada to play. However, in the early 1950s, “not all good
softball players had the strength or skill to adapt easily to the league’s evolution to longer base paths and overhand pitching” (Lesko). This made finding players for the AAGPBL increasingly difficult.

However, the primary factor in the ending of the league was due to “a severe reduction in its publicity and promotion budget” (Lesko). The independent team owners, “who took control of the league at the end of the 1950 season”, cut the budgets of the publicity and promotional departments (Lesko). The owners did not give the time or the funds the league needed to grow. If they had given the financial support needed to keep up the league’s popularity, the league could have dominated the sports world and given hope to the girls that play youth ball today.

Since the last official season of AAGPBL, there has been other attempts to have all girls’ baseball teams, but they have all failed. The most recent attempt was in 1997 with the Ladies League Baseball. The league expanded to include fifty-six games and consisted of four teams. The San Jose Spitfire, Long Beach Aces, Phonies Peppers, and the Los Angeles Legends played only sixteen games that season. Due to “low attendance, escalating insurance costs, and high stadium rents”, the season was canceled halfway through (Lesko).

Unfortunately, girls’ baseball team have little support. People claim that baseball is “a male game, and always will be” (Stewart). In a 1973 lawsuit, the Magill family sued the Avonworth Baseball Conference of Western Pennsylvania when their ten-year old daughter was denied the right to play. They charged the conference with violating their daughter’s “Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection” (Ring 121). However, Avonworth Baseball Conference argued that they did not allow her to play because “girls would get hurt playing baseball” (Ring 121). Not to mention the courts needed to protect “the feelings of the hypothetical boys who might feel so indignant about playing baseball with girls that they would quit” (Ring 121). The
Pennsylvania court ruled against the Magills on the bases that “baseball is a contact sport and that for their own safety girls shouldn’t play with boys” (Rings 121). The following year, the same type of lawsuit was fined in New Jersey by the Pepe family. During the course of the trials, Dr. Creighton J. Hale “argued against girls playing ball because female bones were not as strong as male bones” (Rings 123). Many other testimonies included the arguments that girls might hear an obscene word while playing or might contract breast cancer if hit in the chest with a baseball. The legal battle was a long, extreme process, but the Supreme Court of New Jersey ruled in favor of the Pepes. However, due to the nature of the ruling “most New Jersey teams chose not to play at all rather than to allow girls to play on their teams” (Ring 124).

Unlike the 1970s, girls do not have to jump through large hoops to partake in Little League. However, the same ideas of a women not being able to “throw long enough, run fast enough, hit hard enough to play” baseball still stands (Stewart). This issue then switches from girls playing baseball to girls being discriminated against. Females have always been seen as the weaker sex, but that is starting to change.

Lauren Greenfield, the director of The Queen of Versailles, wanted to fight back this oppression of women. She felt like this oppression starts with the phrase “like a girl”. When someone uses this phrase, they are using it in a negative connotation. Being “like a girl” means you are weak, stupid, and powerless. This phrase is traditional used to insult the performance of a boy. To show the impact of this phrase, Greenfield partnered with Always, the pad and tampon company, to produce “an ad campaign that has sparked a national conversation on female empowerment and self-esteem” (Kahn).

Greenfield created a short video where she asked males and females passed the age of puberty to perform various actions “like a girl”. When asked to “fight like a girl”, the people
being interviewed performed all of the various stereotypical actions. Many of them threw their hands up and turned their faces away from the fight while making panting weak sounds. Every action the interviewees were asked to perform “like a girl” matched the stereotypical response of how girls execute tasks. Then, Greenfield asked girls under the age of ten to perform the same tasks “like a girl”. There was a dramatic shift. When asked to “run like a girl”, these adolescent girls executed their task to their fullest capacity (Greenfield). They performed their task with strength, power, and confidence. Greenfield discovered that there was a dramatic shift in the connotation of the phrase “like a girl” in people after they experienced puberty. During this age of hormonal changes, girls naturally start to feel awkward with their body. This is when self-esteem issues flourish. Girls start to “listen to the media, school and friends” and they start to believe that they truly are inferior (Cheatham). These lies are carry onto the baseball field. Girls stop playing baseball after Little League because they are convinced baseball is a boys sport.

Due to the success of Greenfield’s campaign, organizations like Baseball For All have gained tremendous support. This organization “fosters, encourages, and provides opportunities for girls to participate in baseball” (Siegal). Through equal opportunity education, Baseball For All has helped girls “who are told they are not allowed to try out for a school team” (Siegal). They have connected female baseball players together to help created a peer support group and have given girls a chance to play. They have inspired girls to “pursue leadership position in baseball, including umpires, coaches and other nontraditional baseball roles”. Baseball For All has had several success stories including Chelsea Baker, the high school pitcher from Florida mentioned earlier.

With the help of the #LikeAGirl campaign and organizations like Baseball For All, female baseball players will hopefully have a bright future. Instead of article predicted when
pitchers like Mo’ne Davis career will end, we will have stories featuring mixed gender college baseball teams. In fact, there are already stories like this being covered. Back in February of this year, Sarah Hudek, varsity pitcher mentioned earlier for the hardships of being the only girl on the George Ranch High School baseball team, made history by officially accepting “a baseball scholarship to play at Bossier Parish Community College in Louisiana” (Maine). Hudek is not only the “first women ever to play on the school’s baseball team”, she has become the first girl to play at the college level (Maine). With this defeat, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League could be well on its way to become reinstated. Supporting girls in baseball is surely to be a shutout.
Works Cited


Cheatham, Crystal. "Mo'ne Davis, Throw #LikeAGirl." The Huffington Post.


