



Photos by Dave Kennedy/The Journal News

▲ Sue Winthrop of White Plains, a co-founder of the New York Women's Baseball Association, served as both a pitcher and a groundskeeper yesterday. She tossed a complete game.

► Vicky Cheng, a member of the Cyclones, throws out a member of the Giants at first to end the bottom of the fifth inning. The Cyclones beat the Giants 19-12.



A league for those who say softball isn't enough

VALHALLA — If and when Nancy Haggerty ever gets the mud off herself, she may discover nothing but bruises and sore muscles underneath. But she won't be able to wipe the smile off her face.

Haggerty, of Somers, was the catcher for the Manhattan Giants in the opening-day game of the New York Women's Baseball Association yesterday at Westchester Community College. She blocked countless pitches in the dirt, dived for foul pops, stole bases sliding.

"I wanted to play baseball since I was 2 years old," she said. "One of my first words was 'Ankees.' Most people say 'Mom, Dad.' Mine was 'Ankees.' It is the thing that basically makes me the happiest, when I'm playing baseball."

Like most women and girls, though, she has found the opportunity to play baseball is limited. Some girls can play Little League with the boys before being funneled toward softball in high school and college. They are told in high school that if they want to play college softball, they will have to go that route the whole way.

Some get to play with the men later, as Haggerty occasionally has for three or four years with the over-30 Cortlandt Aleys.

But the girls/women rarely get to play in a league of their own.

Until now.

"The convention at this point in time is



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one that supports softball for the women once they hit, basically, puberty," Sue Winthrop of White Plains said. "They separate the girls from the boys. The boys continue to play baseball and the girls play softball. And not all of us like that."

Winthrop is a co-founder and treasurer of the new league, which began last year and yesterday opened its first full season. She is also the Westchester team's head coach and a pitcher who toughed out, oh, probably 200 pitches on her 48-year-old right arm in the Cyclones' 19-12 win. Not only that, but before the game she was out there with a rake getting the field playable, because she wasn't going to have opening day washed out for a second time.

Normally, Winthrop and Haggerty and others play for the Westchester Yankees. Because of a miscommunication, some of the Yankees didn't make it to the game, which was supposed to be a doubleheader. The Cyclones, out of Queens and Long Island, and the Giants, out of Manhattan, split up the Westchester players, and away they went.



There apparently is nothing hard and fast about the league except for the hardballs and the fastballs. Winthrop will add players as needed, even add teams. She would like, eventually, to have two teams in Westchester, one in Rockland and two on Long Island. Next week the league's schedule takes them to Central Park.

(Newcomers will be welcomed with open arms: Call 212-539-8800 or go to nywomensbaseball.com.)

Don't get the idea that this league is for hard-core baseball players. It's not. Some hit ropes all over the lot. Some ducked so as not to be hit by fly balls. The NYWBA is for beginners as well, for anyone age 14 and up.

Sue Lent of Peekskill plays modified and slow-pitch softball, but had never played an organized baseball game be-

fore yesterday.

"It's something different," she said. "I never played it before and I wanted to give it a try. I like it. It's a lot faster. I have to concentrate more. And I think I tend to hit better."

"I play outfield, and it's a lot faster out there for me. It's a lot more judgment because the balls go faster and further and higher. It's a lot different, but I like it."

The not-for-profit organization also does a series of clinics for groups such as the YWCA and the Girl Scouts.

Winthrop, a devoted Yankees fan who says she's "been playing this game longer than most of these girls have been alive," grew up in a time when girls couldn't even play Little League. She was Brooklyn-born and Edgemont-raised, but she'd go to pitch to the older boys on the high school baseball team in practice after school. Her dad was a windmill pitcher who played at the Polo Grounds, and Sue would go with him; then she'd go to his Sunday morning Green Acres Field games in Scarsdale.

She graduated from Edgemont High early, but in her freshman year at Utica College, there was no softball team, so she transferred to Albany State. She was pitching her first game, and in the first inning she lined a single. The right fielder bobbled the ball, and Winthrop went to second. She wrecked the ulnar nerve

in her elbow sliding into second, and her career was over.

"Half an inning," she said. "I was 1 for 1. And I was safe."

Two years later she needed surgery and instead of softball or baseball, Winthrop took up the clarinet and the saxophone, which she plays in the Hudson Valley Wind Symphony and in a big band that she also conducts, Hot Lavender Swing. For 10 years, she didn't play ball.

But yesterday she was pitching and pitching and pitching on the mound, and pitching her new league off it.

Opening day was delayed a week, then another hour because of the muddy field, and it was a lengthy affair due to the dropped balls and the inexperience of some of the new players. But time wasn't an issue.

In fact, Haggerty said, time is what makes baseball the best game. There's no clock, she said.

"So there's always hope. And I think, in that way, baseball is what everybody wants life to be. It conceivably could be endless. It just goes on. That's what I love mostly about it."

If ever there was a muddy, hobbling, sweaty, smiling commercial for baseball, she was it.

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