

Starting A League Of Their Own

Association bringing the sport of baseball to women and girls in New York

By SHANE MILLER

More than ever, women are playing sports traditionally seen as dominated by men, and making a name for themselves in their own right. With the recent success of the WNBA, the soaring popularity of women's tennis, and more attention being focused on golfers in the LPGA, women's sports is fast becoming a viable competitor to men's controlling hold in the professional arena.

Other than perhaps football, never has a sport been so traditionally seen exclusively as a man's game as baseball. While women have always played softball, the dynamics of the game changed to fit the format, and some of the strategy and challenge of baseball was lost. But all that may be changing as women's baseball is fast becoming a part of the international (one of the biggest leagues is in Toronto) and local sports scene.

Susan Winthrop and Stephanie Kung, both veteran coaches of the New York University Girl's Softball program, have started a women's baseball league in New York City. Also on the Board of Directors are Monique Pyle and Diane DeLucia-Mascara. Their organization, called the New York Women's Baseball Association, is designed to give women of all skill levels the opportunity to play competitive baseball.

The organization also teams up with other groups throughout the city to try and bring baseball to girls of all ages. They have held functions with Powerplay and the Girls Scouts, as well as the Harlem RBI, an organization that brings the sport of baseball to inner-city youth.

The association's league started last summer, but this will be the first full year of baseball, with the season running from June until Labor Day. They hope to have four to six teams, and to form an All-Star team to play women from other leagues throughout the country. The highlight of last season was the opportunity to play another women's team in Washington, D.C.

But why start a women's baseball league when there are already so many established women's softball leagues already in existence?



Susan Winthrop (left) and Stephanie Kung are members of the Board of Directors for the New York Women's Baseball Association. The organization works with other groups to bring the sport of baseball to girls throughout the area. They have also started a competitive league for women of all skill levels, which will have its first full season this year beginning in June and continuing until Labor Day.

"Why not?" said Winthrop. "But mostly because baseball is more of a challenge, there is more strategy and it is more exciting."

Both Kung and Winthrop were quick to point out that they are looking for women of all skill levels, and that people should not be intimidated to join the league because they think they won't be able to compete.

"A lot of our players are college kids home for the summer, or people who played softball in the past and want something that's more of a challenge," Kung said. "But we also have players who have never even touched a baseball before who just want to come out and try to play. It's really exciting to see how far they come over the course of the season, so that by the end they are playing at a very competitive level."

There are already a number of women's

baseball leagues throughout the United States and Canada, with new ones forming constantly. Winthrop is realistic about the future of women's baseball, but is also optimistic about the popularity and the growth potential.

"The immediate goal is just that girls have an option to play baseball and not just be forced into softball. But ideally it would be great to have a well established professional women's baseball league within five to ten years," she said.

She pointed out that while a number of girls try to play competitively in boy's leagues when they are younger, the pressure to switch to softball becomes too overwhelming.

The New York Women's Baseball Association currently has fields arranged for games in a number of locations, including Westchester and Nassau counties, but is still looking for a place to play in Queens. They are also seeking coaches and are still accepting players for the upcoming season. The cost to join is \$150 for the season (\$135 if you sign up before April 1st), or \$75 for students. There is also a pitching/catching clinic scheduled for April 12.

You can contact the association to register for the upcoming season by calling (212) 539-8800 or e-mailing them at nywb@nywomensbaseball.com. You can also find out more information on their web site, www.nywomensbaseball.com.