



PROJECT MUSE®

Leagues of Their Own Design

David Nemec

NINE: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture, Volume 21, Number 2,
Spring 2013, pp. 107-124 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/nin.2013.0016>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/520255>

TRIPLE PLAY

Personal Reviews, Op-ed Pieces, and
Polemics from Outside the Purview of the Umpires

Leagues of Their Own Design

DAVID NEMEC

In *The Great American Novel* Philip Roth stretched his genius to chart the history of the Patriot League, an imaginary third major league whose existence was subsequently expunged from all record books and even from human memory owing to its nefarious demise. An actual third major league, one for women only, has similarly all but been forgotten. In 1954, for economic reasons, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) folded its tent after a dozen seasons. Several generations of women with baseball in their blood have emerged since. Here we meet three of them who came of playing age in three very different parts of the country. The three seemingly had only one thing in common before I sat down with them: each had played baseball either with or against me. But as we all talked, I discovered they have many more commonalities. Before recounting what they told me about the diverse paths they have taken to play the game at a high level in the wake of the AAGPBL's disappearance, let me introduce them:

JAN BORGIA EDWARDS was born in Cleveland in 1938 and grew up in Bay Village, Ohio, where she was a classmate of mine. She holds a BA in English from Wooster and also MAS in theater arts and counseling. After teaching in Mansfield, Illinois, she and her ex-husband moved to California where she completed a long tenure as a teacher, counselor, and coach. Following a forty-two-year career in education, Jan retired in 2003 while serving as the director of counseling at Vallejo High School. Currently she volunteers by driving high-risk patients to medical appointments and teaches adult classes on "Living Well." During her playing days Jan was often called "Borge," a tribute to her ferocious bat; her career BA was in the .420s and she still swings a mean golf club.

SAL COATS was born in Walnut Creek, California, in 1961 and spent her early years in Piedmont before moving to Sonora during her freshman year in high school. She holds several degrees including an MA in kinesiology/teaching and coaching from California State University–Chico. In 1992–93 Sal was the second baseman for the Oakland Oaks, an otherwise all-men’s baseball team for which I served as player-manager, and she later played professionally in the Ladies League Baseball, the only women’s pro league since the AAGPBL to last a full season, before helping to found a California women’s version of the Men’s Senior Baseball League (MSBL). Following a lengthy string of jobs that allowed her ample time to pursue her first love—baseball—Sal has worked for the past eight years at Genentech, Inc., in South San Francisco.

MELISSA FRYDLO is “The Moll of a Million Monikers.” Among them are Frid, Mel, Mo, Bird Dog, Nurse Nancy, Muff, Missy, Albie, Sadie, Moxie, and a new one she will discuss. Moxie, the nickname on her baseball card, best befits her. Moxie was born in Buffalo, New York, in 1971. After moving to Amherst, New Hampshire, when she was eight, she graduated from Milford High School in nearby Milford. Moxie holds degrees in architectural design and landscape architecture from Cazenovia College and the University of Massachusetts, respectively, and is currently a project engineer for ARCADIS in Springfield, Massachusetts.

JAN: Three women meeting for the first time, we’re all naturally curious about one other. I’m especially curious how Moxie acquired so many nicknames and what Sal was paid to play pro ball.

MOXIE: When you play on as many teams as I have it’s bound to occur. I’ve always felt nicknames were a sign of acceptance and even affection. In vintage baseball, which I now play, everyone has several.

SAL: I pulled down \$1,200 a month; I was a tough bargainer and among the higher paid players.

JAN: Wow! Not bad. I know you both wonder what brought David and me together. We were the pitchers in the 5th and 6th grades for our rival crosstown elementary schools in the annual “Army-Navy Game,” I for the girls and he the boys. But whereas David went on to play throughout junior high, high school, and college, unhappily that was it for me as far as any organized school baseball.

DAVID: What was your first remembered experience playing baseball?

JAN: Pickup hardball games on my street in Bay at six. I then started playing in pickup sandlot games with boys like you, David. Right away, I was usually captain or else chosen first in games. The games themselves and the favored position I held in them were equally compelling. But my

first real awareness that I had an unusually strong passion for baseball came at around seven when I realized I was the only girl playing in neighborhood games and that a lot of the boys didn't care nearly as much about the game as I did.

SAL: For me it came in the early 1970s growing up in Oakland with the run of the "Swingin' A's" and learning they had a captain named Sal—talk about hooked! My dad, whose father had barnstormed against Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig in 1927, would come home from work and we'd play catch and he'd throw batting practice to me (with tennis balls). In Piedmont girls' sports were zilch so I'd hang out with the boys at the school playground where we'd play strikeout. Playing with boys, most of them older than me, I discovered I could keep up with them. I knew the rules of the game, the stats of the Oakland A's players, and constantly strived to improve my skills.

MOXIE: My brother Jamie and I would throw a baseball ball back and forth to each other as fast as we could. We were right on target. Straight to the chest. Almost as soon as I started throwing with my brother I felt just about all I wanted to do was play catch with him. We also played a lot of Wiffle ball by ourselves or with neighborhood boys. Not only did we make up rules to various bat and ball games but we had different shaped fields between our neighbor's property and our own. So, in short, I was drawn from early childhood to male competitiveness.

DAVID: When did you realize how good you were at the game, especially for a female?

SAL: I never thought about it, playing baseball with the boys all of the time, just that I was good enough for them to keep asking me back. But when I moved to Sonora and tried out for the girls' softball team (a first for me), I was immediately one of the top players.

MOXIE: My judges were always my teammates. After I moved to Amherst, New Hampshire, a borderline rural, very historical environment, being shy it was hard for me to make friends. Fortunately, the town had a recreation department and my parents signed me up. Nothing has changed. I still feel most compatible with my teammates, all of them male at the moment.

JAN: I didn't realize how far I was above my peers until I was recruited for the semipro fastpitch Bay Steel team after my sophomore year in high school and was put at first base, my favorite position by then. My girlfriends seemed oblivious to my athletic skill except to always choose me first in gym classes—the boys actually acknowledged my sports ability much more.

DAVID: What attitude did your parents, peers, and teachers take toward your enthusiasm for baseball?

SAL: My mom, I won't say that she was adamantly opposed to me playing sports, but she certainly wasn't supportive. My brother wasn't athletically inclined and didn't care what I did. Most of my teachers were supportive until it became a distraction (when the A's were in the World Series, I had a little tv in my desk that I would watch the games on). Sometimes my girlfriends and I would play catch at recess (I only had tomboy friends). My dad's attitude was super positive.

JAN: Strangely, I remember nothing about their attitude, perhaps because I was involved in so many other school, church, and musical activities.

MOXIE: My mom and my dad, Jerry, have always been my greatest fans and chief supporters. My high school softball coach, Mr. Kelly, who just passed away, was extremely supportive but tough to please and enigmatic. My current job supervisor gets a kick out of me too. At every opportunity he tells everyone—clients, co-workers—about my playing.

DAVID: Your earliest influences on your developing enthusiasm for the game?

JAN: My father was an excellent softball pitcher in a Bay Village league and I was the bat girl. He and I played catch often, and he later came to my games. My mother, in contrast, took no interest in my sports activities. The first person to really take note of my ability was a young man whose name I think will blow everyone's mind when we discuss who our best coaches were.

SAL: My dad all the way. He would play with me whatever the sports season was at the time. There was only one other girl on our block and she wasn't interested in sports, so I played with the boys in the neighborhood. There wasn't anyone else in particular that taught me; just old-fashioned repetition and practice. Plus, if I wanted to continue to be asked to play by the boys, I had to keep improving.

MOXIE: My entire family. My father and brother were huge fans of all sports. I didn't have their same passion, but I always wanted to tag along to take part in all the excitement. My brother is an ace at memorizing baseball statistics and forming views about the sports industry. I got none of that. Instead I decided to become involved in the way that interests me most—by actively participating in what everyone was talking about. My dad coached me in soccer and baseball throughout my formative years. I didn't want special treatment because I was the coach's daughter, and I never let him spoil me.

DAVID: Were you considered a tomboy or a jock?

SAL: Definitely a tomboy and also a jock. I took it as a compliment, as long as it wasn't "dumb jock!"

MOXIE: Tomboy . . . right! When I was young I felt the term had a stigma. Now, I don't mind it at all. When people think of me I know other things may come first to mind besides tomboy or jock. I have multiple interests and backgrounds. So far, I'm pleased how everything has turned out. I wouldn't want to be anything or anyone else—except maybe a Fulbright Scholar.

JAN: Jock was never used around me, but I was surely a tomboy.

DAVID: The position you first played?

JAN: Pitcher, but when the competition advanced to fastpitch I sensed my arm wasn't strong enough for it and switched to first base.

MOXIE: I played shortstop and caught in high school softball. When I played Division III softball at Cazenovia College, I was strictly a catcher. I still love the position and have caught on occasion in vintage games.

SAL: I preferred third base like captain Sal Bando but learned to play all positions. I wanted to be on the left side of the infield. My second year in college, I was moved from third to second, a move that I initially fought. My impression at that time was second was for the weaker armed, less skilled players; I soon learned that second is more difficult than third or even short because the play is never in front of you.

DAVID: Your favorite position at a competitive level?

JAN: I loved the game's perspective from first base, and I loved being in on almost every play. I played with a big "mutha" of a first baseman's mitt. My scoops and reaches and throws were all good. I had a great sense of the runners and what the outfield would be doing. I caught in my later years only because first base was taken and I was the only one on the team who could throw out runners and guide our pitchers.

SAL: As I've said, I can play everywhere. Probably because as a student of the game I learned what was required of each position and showed the confidence to be able to perform there, but my favorite position by college became second base.

MOXIE: When I was young third, short, and center were my positions, then catcher. I'm now playing second in vintage baseball for the 1886 Whately Pioneers. I think partly because no one knows I've got (or once had) an arm. I like second now because I have a great shortstop. I'm becoming more accustomed to playing with him. Turning the double play or opening up to make the throw to first is still a challenge, but I hope someday to perfect both through muscle memory.

DAVID: Did you play Little League Baseball or Softball?

MOXIE: I played all the way through Little League Baseball starting at age seven.

JAN: Both were unavailable to me.

SAL: I too never had Little League opportunities.

DAVID: Did your high school and/or college field a girls' softball team? If so, would you have preferred to play for or at least gotten the chance to try out for the varsity baseball team?

SAL: When I transferred to Sonora High School, it was my first real opportunity to participate in organized sports for girls and also the first year that the school fielded a girls' softball team. On the first day of spring tryouts, I went to the baseball field, where I was instantly told to go play softball.

JAN: For me there were no school teams or even girls' intramural teams after grade school and it was a huge black hole in my life. For several reasons, after my Bay Steel experience I had to put baseball on hold until my late twenties, but I'd love to have tried out for both my boys' high school and college teams.

MOXIE: I played softball for the first time in high school—previously it was always baseball. I was the starting varsity catcher as a freshman. The school was Class 1. Therefore it was the most competitive high school division. My pitcher was very wild and fast—fun to catch. I didn't try out for the baseball team. High school ball is a decent level of play. I would have been benching on the boys' team at best. I wish there'd been a girl's baseball team.

DAVID: Your first organized team? The first in which you either played with or against males?

SAL: During the summer in junior high there was an organized league for boys that I'd show up for and hang out relentlessly until they let me play. I was an unofficial team member; I made my own uniform, just to feel part of it.

MOXIE: I never played tee ball. My first organized baseball team was pre-Little League. I was the only girl in the league.

JAN: Bay Steel at age sixteen. I was never on a team that played with or against men, but would have welcomed the opportunity.

DAVID: The first great thrill you experienced on the ball field?

JAN: When I pitched a no-hitter in the sixth grade "Army-Navy Game" to spearhead my Forestview team in trouncing your Glenview dubs, David.

MOXIE: My first unassisted double play. A double play from third

around-the-horn is also fantastic. But the hidden ball trick . . . our vintage Whately club was playing in Forest Park Stadium. Bulldog (Jim Bouton) likes to keep a flow to his pitching and typically disdains attempted hidden ball tricks, but this time he decided to take the box. I was in my ready position and had the ball in my hand on my knee at second. Bulldog fooled around in the box. Nails, the catcher, was in his crouched position . . . and the runner took his lead. I tagged him in the chest. I tell you, a hidden ball trick gets your adrenaline going way more than any double play.

SAL: Mine came in a fastpitch league game against my former team when I turned an unassisted triple play while playing shortstop.

JAN: My greatest overall thrill, though, was slamming a walkoff double to drive in two runs to win an “A” League fastpitch game at age forty-five. It was my last hurrah as it turned out.

SAL: My greatest is a tie between playing on opening day of the professional Ladies League Baseball in 1997 and winning a championship ring in Arizona with the Oakland Oaks in 1993.

MOXIE: This may seem weird, but after injuring my knee this spring, I was relegated to keeping score and rooting for my Whately team. One day I was asked to fill in for the umpire who had to leave early. I’d never seen a woman ump a men’s game before and felt both thrilled and honored. I really saw the game from a new perspective. Players tried buttering me up, pouring on the charm. On the flip side, even my own teammates weren’t afraid of getting in my face. I told one, who received what he thought were two bad calls from me, “Remember, the umpire will make eight bad calls a game. I only made six.”

DAVID: Your proudest achievement to date on the ball field?

SAL: Serving as the starting second baseman for the Oaks when we won an “over 40” Men’s Senior Baseball League World Series in Arizona in 1993.

MOXIE: Being able to say I’ve always exhibited true sportsmanship and have never once talked back to the umpire.

JAN: Still being able to play “A” League ball in my midforties. At the time I was playing for a roofing company. The team was sponsored, but we played mostly on our own dimes. They bought shirts, jackets, bats and caps only. May I also share my most mortifying on-field achievement? In an “A” League night game a pop fly hit to me came down in the lights. I lost sight of it and tried to barehand it. The ball split the webbing between my fingers. Blood spurted everywhere and it looked like I was throwing a ripe tomato to third base. It turned out I had a warped contact lens, only evident when a ball was hit in the air into the lights.

SAL: I've erased all such moments from memory.

MOXIE: I remember in high school chasing down a wild pitch and getting my face mask stuck in the backstop while runners circled the bases. Mr. Kelly, my coach, was frantically hollering, "Missy!" My old teammates still remember that moment and we have a good laugh, but it wasn't funny at the time.

DAVID: The most bizarre play in a game in which you participated?

SAL: It's baseball; you see something new or bizarre every time you go to the park.

JAN: While catching—a position I hated—in an "A" League tournament I was mowed down at the plate by a woman six inches taller and 60 pounds heavier than me. I tagged her, then passed out. When I came to it was eerie to see the ball still in my hand.

MOXIE: My vintage teammates just started laughing and throwing the ball around carelessly in a game while trailing badly. Our player coach went so ballistic he switched everyone's position on the spot and that was the day I permanently became a second baseman.

JAN: I'll add that having to move to catcher when I joined my last "A" League team because my beloved first base post was occupied by a woman who'd held the job for ten years was my last great disappointment. The damage to my body—hip replacement and lower back problems—eventually superseded the fun.

SAL: My greatest disappointment came in July 1997 playing for the San Jose Spitfires in the Ladies League Baseball. We were seven games into our inaugural season. I was just getting used to the slower pitching after playing MSBL when I tore my ACL during a game and was out for the remainder of the regular season. I was devastated; here I finally got a chance to not only play baseball with other gals but got paid to do it! I rehabbed on the longshot that if we made the playoffs I'd be able to play. I literally busted my ass and defied the naysayers that said I couldn't do it in that short period of time; well, don't tell me what *can't* be done! We made the playoffs and the team doctor was floored when I was in the starting lineup for the postseason opener. My greatest regret, on the other hand, was that my dad never got the chance to see me play MSBL in Arizona or in the pro league.

MOXIE: Witnessing cheating during a game or players who don't possess good sportsmanship is most disappointing to me. My regret? Quitting. I left my Babe Ruth team during the season without telling the coach because I didn't want to be stopped. I tried quitting U Mass, but the coaches wouldn't let me. They said bench warmers are the ones that push

the starters to play well and keep their positions. A week and a half later I was in California with the team. In one game I was a pinch runner and came home. Still, I never bumped any of the starters, largely because we were strong enough to win the Atlantic 10 championship that year.

DAVID: Your greatest strength as a player?

JAN: Being a team player. I loved my teammates and the mutual encouragement. I was also very good at anticipating where a batted ball was likely to go. My greatest weakness was that I was SLOOOOOOOW. I'd have to hit a triple to get safely to second.

SAL: Mental toughness, knowledge of the game, and defense. If only I could have hit a curve ball!

MOXIE: DEFENSE. But my hitting is another story, though I'm continually trying to improve. This March I practiced with a championship team at Wilbraham Munson Academy. I work in Wilbraham so stuck around after work to play at 7:00 p.m. in their facility. We'd hit off the batting machine at ninety miles per hour with wood bats. I tell you, the stinging in my hands was excruciating. The player who brought me in was a great motivator. He'd yell, "Don't be afraid, Moxie, get back in there!"

DAVID: Do you take the game home with you after a loss?

MOXIE: When you win the mood it sets carries with you all week. Likewise losing. Sometimes, after a successful game, I'll write down the plays just for visual purposes to remember how much I achieved.

SAL: If we got our asses kicked because the other team was just better, I'd get over it pretty quickly. If a teammate did something stupid that caused us to lose (like a cartwheel at home plate to cost us the winning run), it takes longer. Actually, I'm not sure if I'm over that one yet. However, if I somehow caused our loss, I'll replay it over and over in my head, sometimes for years.

JAN: I didn't take many games home because I left so much on the field. Moreover, no one at home—my kids or my ex-husband—cared about my games.

DAVID: Ever select a job on the basis of whether it gave you the time to play ball?

JAN: While teaching adult school in California, I picked the classes I wanted to teach based totally on practice and game times.

SAL: When I worked for Big B Lumber, I demanded Sundays off to play MSBL. When the women's pro league formed, I took a leave of absence so I could focus solely on enjoying the experience of playing in it.

MOXIE: My hours have fluctuated over the years depending on my job. But I've always engineered things to make time to play sports.

DAVID: Has the game ever taken precedence over your social life? If so, was your participation ever grudgingly chosen?

JAN: Yes, and never grudgingly.

SAL: Of course it has, which is why I have no social life.

MOXIE: My teammates play a large role in my social life. With that you can deduce that I have a very (short-term) goal-oriented social life. My boyfriends have had issues of varying degrees with my baseball participation. What they don't appreciate is that nothing but good can come from baseball. Self-assurance, skill development, team building—who'd give up that because it stood in the way of a social life?

DAVID: Do you feel you've been able to push your baseball skills to the edge given the opportunities available to you?

JAN: Lack of opportunity in my younger years impeded me. I never had a chance to learn how well I could have competed in my late teens and twenties, normally an athlete's prime years.

SAL: Having the opportunities to play with and against men was a huge push to improve and showcase my skills and help open the doors for other women to play.

MOXIE: Professionals in my field are encouraged to conduct activities to push the limits to improve their job performance. Teamwork is a common element in both the workplace and on the ball field. Both my career and ball playing have improved because I am constantly working in groups. I appreciate the value of camaraderie.

DAVID: The highest level of competition you've faced in your career?

MOXIE: 1886 vintage baseball and Division I softball tie for the honor.

SAL: I've played at the highest levels in both baseball and softball. In softball, Chico State won a National Championship my freshman year; I played at the ASA major level during the summers and was on the gold medal team at the National Sports Festival. At that time there was no Olympic team or pro softball. In baseball I played on a MSBL World Series champion my second year; the San Jose Spitfire won the championship our first year. After the pro league folded, a teammate started a women's baseball league, (similar to the MSBL) where I coached the Oaks to two championships in four years. Teammates have said I'm the "David Justice of women's softball/baseball." Wherever I go the team wins!

JAN: My Bay Steel experience in high school was both my most challenging and most gratifying. I was the youngest team member and playing a key position—first base. The competition was tough; my "A" League competition in California was tougher, but I was much more mature.

DAVID: If you've played both softball and baseball, which do you prefer?

SAL: Fastpitch softball is great, but it's *not* baseball! Because fastpitch is such a quick-paced game and defense is key, this is where I learned to think ahead, know what I was going to do before the ball was hit. That really helped me with the transition to men's baseball. Given a choice, I'm playing baseball.

MOXIE: Baseball. I left softball over five years ago even though I can compete a whole lot better on a smaller diamond.

JAN: My competitive juices would have been more elevated if I'd had an opportunity to play baseball. They still get significantly stirred just watching a MLB game. Not nearly as much even when watching a good women's softball game.

DAVID: The most important game you've ever played in?

JAN: The playoff game in which I was clobbered at home plate by a moose of a woman and realized my organized softball days were over. We won the game incidentally.

SAL: The semifinal game in the 1993 MSBL World Series against Saskatchewan. Our taut 2–1 win enabled us to move on to the championship game against Philadelphia.

MOXIE: The Putney Diner (Brattleboro, Vermont) was a perennial softball league champion. We would sometimes win tournaments. Those games were all important.

DAVID: Have you coached?

JAN: I coached a middle school softball team for three years and was invited to coach at Vallejo High School, but as a single parent I needed to be home once the regular school day ended.

MOXIE: No, but I'm going on my fourth year of teaching kids ranging from ages four and one-half to thirteen at Williston Academy for the Nonotuck Hockey League Learn to Skate program.

SAL: I've coached softball at the high school level up to college. I also coached a women's team in the California Women's Baseball League, a recreational league patterned after the MSBL.

DAVID: Jan, only you have children that played sports. Did they follow in your footsteps?

JAN: Neither of my two children played contact sports. My daughter was a swimmer and gymnast; my son also swam and was a superb water skier. Growing up, they each had my undying support—including driving them to practices and games, timing them in practice and cheering them on. However, it wasn't mutual. I never really knew how my kids or my ex-husband felt about my playing. They never came to my games.

DAVID: Your most serious playing-related injury?

MOXIE: Right now I'm rehabbing my knee. This is my first time being benched for this long in thirty years. I simply wore out my knee on Whately's "Opening Day" this year, which was a long, long doubleheader.

JAN: Hip replacement resulting from injuries directly related to catching. Nagging lower back injuries that don't interfere with my golf game.

SAL: I've been relatively lucky. The worst was when I tore my ACL during the pro league and missed basically the entire season. The ACL is healed and I was able to continue playing. In my postplaying career, I've had elbow problems due to years of use and abuse, but playing golf actually triggered my recent surgery for them.

DAVID: The player you most admire, male or female, whom you've played with or against?

MOXIE: Pres Peiraccini, a hyper sixty-year-old man who's constantly trying to perfect his game. He has a phenomenal swing that just keeps getting better. Part of his charm is his self-criticism. He's not cocky, but definitely quirky and unbelievably psyched when he does well. On the average he manages four teams per year. Peiraccini is the face of western Massachusetts vintage baseball.

SAL: Alex Sickinger, the catcher for the San Jose Spitfires. Alex was seventeen when she became my teammate. She'd been the catcher on her boys' high school team. She was very confident behind the plate, took charge on the field, could play any position, and could hit for the situation. She was experienced way beyond her years.

JAN: No particular player but any who capitalized on average skills to be the best they could be.

DAVID: Did the best woman player that you ever played with or against have the tools to play Organized Baseball?

SAL: Sickinger good enough to play Organized Baseball? I don't know about that.

JAN: Maybe the pitcher on my last "A" League team, Judy Klein. To play pro ball she'd have had to drop some pounds and receive coaching to correct her tendency to pitch high and inside—good batters waited her out.

MOXIE: Justine Siegal whom I played with in Whately. An amazing pitcher and fielder. Incredible knowledge of the game. A Cleveland native, in February 2011, at thirty-six, she became the first woman to throw batting practice to a MLB team, the Indians. She's also a good coach, but the best one I've ever had was U Mass head coach Elaine Sortino who's now battling cancer. She has over 1,100 wins and was the eighth coach in Division 1 history to reach that plateau.

SAL: My top coach was Joan Wallace at Chico State. She was a star for

the Raybestos Brakettes in her heyday. She stressed fundamentals and repetition; there were no new-fangled gimmicks or tricks in her repertoire. I went to Chico to play basketball. I didn't really care for softball that much, but Kathy Arendsen was Chico's pitcher at the time and later won over three hundred games for the Brakettes. When we met during basketball tryouts, she convinced me to try out for softball. Joan not only honed my raw skills but planted the seed that maybe coaching was what I wanted to do for a living.

JAN: In junior high there was nothing athletic available to girls except the Junior Olympics in the summer. There I met my best coach—none other than George Steinbrenner! David, why aren't you as shocked as the others?

DAVID: Because he was also probably the best coach I ever had. He actually taught me things—how to throw, high jump, get out of the starting blocks.

JAN: Along with being compassionate and tough at the same time—and instrumental in getting me on the Bay Steel team, which was sponsored by the shipping company his family ran.

DAVID: We knew a different George than people remember now. Who do you each think was the greatest woman ballplayer ever?

SAL: I don't know much about the history of women's baseball—I just know I love to play the game.

JAN: Dottie Kamenshek—I played first at her size: five-feet-six and 135.

MOXIE: I know very little about modern baseball, but after attending this year's Vintage Base Ball Association conference I've become fascinated by the game's early history. David, who do you think the best early-day woman player was?

DAVID: Alta Weiss would be a strong candidate. Did each of you have a major-league idol as a kid, or a player you patterned yourself after?

JAN: Bob Feller. He filled up the whole infield when he pitched and was beautiful to watch. But when I converted to first base, Lou Gehrig was my model—his grace and character under horrible circumstances.

SAL: Sal Bando, naturally. Even though I was already called Sal, it was because of him I unofficially dropped the "ly" from my name. He was a quiet leader on those great A's teams, a team player; didn't mind letting the Reggie Jacksons get the publicity. He just went about his business of playing baseball. That he was the team captain shows his true value.

MOXIE: Mike Schmidt because he was a third baseman (my position at the time in Little League) and wore a pretty pinstripe uniform. Hey, I was a girl!

DAVID: Your favorite major-league team?

JAN: Still Cleveland. But it's fun to live near San Francisco and see the Giants. I'm a Buster Posey fan but worry about his injury potential too much to really relish watching him play—the cringe factor.

SAL: Forever the A's! Though I don't get to many games anymore for various reasons.

MOXIE: Sorry to say I'm not a fan. I don't even own a TV. Plus, I feel I can learn a lot more from watching players closer to my level.

DAVID: No TV and you've told me you rise daily at 4:00 a.m. Would you say you're eccentric?

MOXIE: Different anyway. One of Erik Erikson's theories included a map of lifetime milestones. According to his timeline, mine are backward. I've been doing the things that people do in their later years. I joined the Northampton Lions Club and became the first women's president six years after getting out of college. I vividly remember my first meeting. It was on September 11 at the Northampton Airport, which was temporarily closed because of the orange terrorist alert. The board decided to hold the meeting. There was no hysteria, but there was a strong feeling of uncertainty. It was imperative to keep my composure. I made the opening speech, carried on with business, ate dinner and made plans for the future.

DAVID: Sal and Moxie, you've played with men's teams. What's been their attitude toward you?

SAL: When I first tried out for the MSBL, the reception was, "What the hell is this girl doing here?" Only one guy even offered to warm up with me (Andy Weissmann). During the tryout, I opened some eyes but not wide enough for any team to draft me. You, my friend, at Andy's urging, took a chance on me and added me to your "over forty" Arizona World Series roster. I was the first woman to play in the MSBL World Series and believe our opponents thought that I was only there as a favor to my boyfriend. They would soon find out otherwise. I knew I'd have to have thick skin that week but relied on my skills and ability to play the game to prove myself. I was tested on every play and the recipient of some cheap shots, but I just got up and went back to my position and readied for the next pitch. Not all of the guys in Arizona were jerks about me playing, but many were.

DAVID: When I sought permission from the National MSBL commissioner in 1992 to add you to the Oaks' roster even though you didn't qualify age-wise, he was reluctant but finally supposed, "A thirty-year-old woman is the equivalent of a forty-year-old man." How did you feel about that?

SAL: I wish I still felt like a fortysomething. Seriously, I was just excited to be allowed to play. I saw the commish at a game and went up to thank him for the opportunity, and he just looked at me and walked away. If he only knew then what a can of worms he'd opened.

DAVID: Talk about spending almost a week in Phoenix with an all-male team, plus having to have a male roommate.

SAL: I was fine with hanging out and talking baseball with the guys. Initially the idea of sharing a room was a bit awkward for both parties, but there was nothing but respect and no big deal; I was there to play baseball. I think it was of more interest to the other teams who was rooming with the girl.

DAVID: Remember when a Denver player took you out at second base and was dissed for it?

SAL: A take-out slide would have been fine; the problem was he came in standing and flung an elbow in my face causing me to throw wildly. Knowing the rules, I threw while being interfered with, which should have been an automatic double play. His excuse was he'd pulled his groin and couldn't slide. I was prepared for aggressive play by opposing players but within the rules. I was angry that he elbowed me in the face and I couldn't complete the double play, but I was angrier at the umpires for not seeing the elbow contact and ruling no interference. The support of my teammates throughout the entire week was awesome and their reaction on that play was not focused on me as "the girl" but for the unsportsmanlike conduct of an opposing player. When he got an earful for his shabby maneuver, I smiled inside.

MOXIE: Like Sal, I've received nothing but positive reinforcement and a sense of complete equality throughout my baseball experiences. Lately, however, when it began to seem that fewer batters were hitting balls my way, I began being called Otto. That sounded derogatory until I learned it was really Auto for automatic out. I rarely make errors. Recently Chris Flynn, aka Blackjack of the Pittsfield Elms, moaned, "I hit the ball as hard as any man could and she threw me out." A tip of the hat from an opposing player in vintage baseball is as satisfying as a peck on the cheek.

DAVID: In the early years of the game there were barnstorming Bloomer girls teams. Would you have lived out of a suitcase and led the rugged life Bloomer girls did just for the chance to play baseball and be paid for it, albeit rather meagerly and sometimes not at all when your manager or the promoter ran off with the gate receipts?

JAN: Probably not since I had kids.

SAL: I basically did that with fastpitch softball for many summers, trav-

elling all over the country to play tournaments. Just about every Friday we'd head out for a tournament somewhere, get home Sunday night, go to work on Monday, wash our unis and be gone again on Friday. We weren't paid, but our travel expenses were covered. This was probably the only time my dad was miffed by my ball playing. He wanted me to pursue a career in golf, where I could make some money.

MOXIE: I have a difficult time traveling for sports and pretty much loath the idea. But if times were tough and I had no other work, although I might be miserable, I'd do it.

DAVID: How old were you when you first discovered that for a dozen years there had been a flourishing women's professional baseball league?

JAN: In my twenties. Even though the league existed until I was in high school I was unaware of it. There was no coverage of it in the Cleveland sports pages.

SAL: I'd heard of it but really became aware of the league through the movie about it.

MOXIE: I never knew until very recently.

DAVID: Would you have tried to play in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League if it had still been extant during your peak playing years?

JAN: Without question.

SAL: Sure, but I would have hated the "charm school" stuff.

MOXIE: Absolutely.

DAVID: Do you feel *A League of Their Own* was a fair portrayal of what life in the AAGPBL must have been like in its early years of existence?

JAN: Despite all the Hollywood add-ons, I believe the feeling of the period was accurate. The stuff on the field I'm not so sure about.

SAL: I'm sure a lot of it was accurate, but some the baseball scenes were unrealistic to me. Personally, I fell asleep during the movie.

MOXIE: (laughs) The charm school scenes were hilarious.

DAVID: Sal, only you here had firsthand experience with the Colorado Silver Bullets. What went wrong?

SAL: The Silver Bullets were both good and bad for women's baseball. They brought attention to the fact that females can play baseball and offered girls a chance to play it and not be herded into softball. On the negative side, the Bullets didn't choose the best baseball players; their players were successful softball players, but that doesn't always transfer over to baseball. Also, the belief that a team of women could compete head-to-head with a men's professional baseball team comprised of eighteen to twenty-five-year-olds was far-fetched. As it turned out, they couldn't;

they then began challenging high school and MSBL-type teams, with similar results. Men are just genetically faster, stronger, hit for more power and receive better coaching growing up. I know a few of the players from the first year's Bullets team and went to a game once. After watching two innings, I went looking for a beer. I was completely disgusted; it appeared that the lineup was drawn from a hat—a quality shortstop was in left, the leftfielder was at second. Seeing that made me thankful I wasn't selected for the team because I was "too old."

DAVID: Moxie, you alone have played vintage baseball. There are several forms of it, each employing the rules extant in a particular nineteenth-century season. What seasons have you participated in and what's your favorite season?

MOXIE: Playing 1886 rules with the Whately Pioneers. In 1886 they pitched overhand. The ball was similar to a modern ball, harder than the earlier version so it goes further when hit but not as far as a modern ball. The Pioneers play in New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. I also play 1865 and 1864 with the Wethersfield Liberty. I like to play by these rules because they're so different from 1886. We slide into first, steal more frequently, play without gloves and therefore need to develop different offensive and defensive strategies. Presently I'm designing a skirt to fall just below the knee for my 1864–65 uniform. The skirt will be worn over my knickers. Then I'll be in complete compliance with how women dressed when they first began playing the game.

DAVID: Why do you prefer vintage ball to modern ball?

MOXIE: No swearing or spitting, no high fives or fist bumps. A simple handshake, tip of the cap, and a "huzzah" for a spectacular play is the way to congratulate a teammate or an opposing player. Doesn't that take you back in time? Furthermore, the game is based on fundamentals like squaring your body in front of the ball to snag a grounder or a fly. Backhanded catches are very rare. After playing for thirty-five years, I've developed an eye for knowing with whom and how I like to play. Right now I choose to play with vintage players and by old-time rules.

DAVID: Was Title IX as pivotal as it's been made out to be with respect to women's sports?

JAN: Title IX has fallen as flat as many other mandates. It did bring the inequity to the attention of some male and female coaches who were able to carry out its intent initially. Overall, it's a fizzle, and I find it ironic that to assure gender equality softball had to be dropped from the Olympic Games because baseball was dropped.

SAL: At the time Title IX was instituted, it was a great thing, affording

girls the same athletic opportunities and funding as boys. Today, I believe it needs to be re-evaluated; some of the decisions that have been made lately don't seem like what was intended when Title IX was written. Now in colleges men's sports are being cut based on the campus population; I think there are more guys interested in playing sports, but women make up the majority of the student body on campus. There is also a glaring inequity in the athletic opportunities available to white females as opposed to those belonging to minority groups, particularly ones from poorer families who can't send their daughters to college, never mind tennis camps.

MOXIE: Title IX was essential, at least for me. I came onto the scene when everything was already developed. It would have been a shame to miss out or start late. I've heard many stories from both men and women who were unable to play soccer because the school didn't have a program. I feel very fortunate to have had so many choices right from childhood.

DAVID: Do you feel you came along too early, too late or at the right time to fully utilize your skills and passion for baseball?

JAN: I was far too early, and my life circumstances—caring for my mother, working my way through school, being a single parent—prevented me from playing the game I so dearly loved during my prime years.

SAL: I came along too early to take full advantage of the opportunities that are available for women now. However, having said that, I also think I came along at the right time to help pave the way for the opportunities currently available.

MOXIE: I came along the right time and I live in the right place. There are so many baseball options in western Massachusetts.

DAVID: Jan, we go back the farthest, so the last question belongs to you. Prior to our senior year of high school you ran a brilliant campaign and won the student council presidency. In looking back over your life, which was more meaningful to you? Being the student council president with all its attendant recognition and challenges, or your experiences playing ball?

JAN: Baseball by far, David. More effort, more results, more friends, more life lessons. And, above all, more life skills.

The author thanks Merrie Fidler and Debra Shattuck for their generous counsel in preparing this article.