

SPORTS

Women's softball takes off in Boston

By Anita Diamant

It used to be that public diamonds, courts and field were the exclusive preserves of men—ex-jocks reliving high school or college glory, guys drinking beer, staying fit, having a good time together, enjoying the spring, summer or fall. But on any given day now the runner, cyclist or sport enthusiast approaching you is as likely to be female as male.

The national physical culture boom first attracted women to non-competitive sports—jogging, lap-swimming, cycling. But now women have entered competitive sports, from marathon running to lacross, in record number.

Two years ago only 30 teams played softball in the Boston Women's Softball League. This year there are 81 teams playing in nine divisions all over the city. (Men's participation has jumped as well, from fewer than 300 teams 3 years ago to 670 in 1977.)

The names of the women's teams reflect interests, background, neighborhood and even the politics of the participants. *Topliff Tokers* play *Columbia Gold* in the Atlantic Division. Workplace teams represent a wide range of occupations, from the traditional—*Ma Bell's Belles*, *Woolworths* (#1 & #2), *The Meds*, (Blue) *Cross and Shield*—to the non-traditional—*Bread and Roses* (a women-run restaurant), *Equal Times* (a local women's newspaper), *Women's Center and Health Project*.

In this "year of the angels" there are *Sherwin's Angels*, *Ward's Angels*, *Mr. Hay's Angels*, and of course, *Charlie's Angels*. In response to all the "angels," "dolls" and "girls," one team decided to be *Nobody's Baby*.

Boston is a city of neighborhoods—*Neponset Hoodsies*, *Savin (Hill) Sluggers*, *Brighton*. The *South Boston Marshals* and the *Ebonettes* echo the city's racial tension.

Bob Curran, coordinator for the Women's Softball League, says games have to be scheduled in "neutral" territory to avoid trouble. "It's never the players," he said, "it's the crowds."

Many of the best teams seem to be sponsored by neighborhood bars. According to one player, "Drinking beer is a big part of women's softball."

Crossroads vs. JBL

The first women's softball game I attended involved the two most winning teams in the best city division—the only one to allow players to steal, slide and bunt. Coach Elaine Hanlon had led the *Crossroads* (a bar) to a 9-2 season, tied with the 1975 and 1976 league champions, *JBL* (electrical contracting company). *JBL* has basically stuck together since coach Elaine Lombardi helped coach their high school team four years ago.

The second and final meeting of the regular season for these teams was scheduled for 6:00 one evening in August. *Crossroads* had won the earlier game. It was threatening to rain so everyone was there early, warming up and anxious to beat out the clouds.

At five till six a group of men approached and started waving a permit at the *JBLs*, claiming rights to the diamond. The team's leader "suggested" that the women move to an empty baseball diamond across the park. (A baseball diamond differs from a softball diamond with 90 vs. 60 feet between bases).

The *JBLs* and *Crossroads* "suggested" the men go play at the Little League diamond themselves. A *Crossroads* pitcher hammered the rubber into the mound and the women took the infield to warm up.

The men started practicing in the out-

field to prevent the game from starting. They also called the police.

"This happens all the time," "Ah, they always win," "The Park department is always messing up like this and usually the girls have to give in," grumbled the women.

Unlike the women, the men had no umpires and were not part of the organized city league. "This is just a government inter-office game," said one man who argued with his teammates that in fact they should leave. "These girls are organized. This is an important game."

The police showed up, told everyone they were acting childish and flipped a coin to settle the matter. The women won it on a 50-50 chance. Can you imagine the cops flipping a coin if the scenario was reversed? Imagine 20 women with their inter-office teams harassing, postponing and seriously threatening the game of an organized, umpire wielding, division-leading group of men.

League organization poor.

According to Coach Lombardi, league organization is terrible. "This sort of thing is not unusual and the women get kicked off. But my biggest complaint is that the men get the best fields. They give us holes, pits, for fields. The kids could get hurt."

Most players agree and feel that a woman running the league would be preferable. "this is a girl's sport. There ought to be girls running it." Bob Curran, on the other hand, said there were no complaints or problems about a man's running the women's league.

Although *JBL* got an early lead and kept it, the game was tense. The official men's league game across the park was called for rain during the women's fourth inning. But the women's umpires didn't stop play, so batters towed their bats and pitchers wiped off balls and the game continued for the full 7 innings, with *JBL* winning 11-7.

Thirty spectators and two full, vocal benches weathered the storm to watch the action. Competition was intense but good natured. The coaches kidded each other and watched their own players intensely, yelling instructions, reminders and encouragement. Between innings there were huddles, "We're down 4-1. Be mad! Get some runs."

Playing for fun seriously.

Most of the players in the Boston League are between 19 and 30 years old and many are dedicated amateur athletes. Being a member of a team can take from two to four evenings a week, depending on the number of practices and games scheduled. Some players also coach or officiate. (There are 6 umpires on the *JBL* bench, all with opinions.)

Softball league players also tend to be basketball and/or volleyball players. Many played for high school or college teams, though for others sports is a relatively new interest.

The women don't feel much support from the Parks department or the city. "They take us very lightly" is the consensus. And there are complaints about lack of coverage in the media. "I called the *Globe* last year about the championships. There was nothing about us—even in the local neighborhood paper. And we won the championships," recalled Lombardi. Men's league play, especially slow pitch, is given far more coverage.

Support and encouragement come from teammates and even competitors. Players from other teams attend games and yell for friends and favorites.

League coordinator Curran typified the players as "girls getting out of the house in the evening." But almost all the

Team play is for women now, as it has been for men traditionally, an opportunity to share the pleasure of testing individual skill and strength with and against peers you respect and enjoy. It is about the best sport has to offer.



JOE WERNICK

"girls" I met put in 8-hour clays at work. A 6:00 p.m. game is hardly a boredom-killer.

It is for women now, as it has been for men traditionally, an opportunity to share the pleasure of testing individual skill and strength with and against peers you respect and enjoy. It is about the best sport has to offer.

The liberating aspect of sport is difficult to articulate, submerged as most

American sport is in profit and hype. But "playing for fun seriously" is only a contradiction when money is involved. Amateur women athletes who devote hours to sports are claiming a kind of time for themselves to develop the self-respect that comes of being competent, accurate and informed with the body as well as the mind.

Anita Diamant writes regularly on sports for *In These Times*.

Sports Quiz

By Mark Naison

"Radicals and Racists"

1. Who was the West Indian cricket star who became the first black man to sit in British Parliament and a strong advocate of West Indian independence?
2. Who was the player-coach—a Hall of Fame first baseman—who was considered most responsible for the exclusion of blacks from major league baseball in the 1890s?
3. Who was the New York Yankee star who wrote a sports column for the *Daily Worker* in the 1930s?
4. Name two well-known black leaders of American Communism who were star athletes in college.
5. Name a novel and a play, written by left-wing authors in the 1930s, which had boxers as their leading characters?
6. Who was the offensive lineman who played for St. Louis in the 1960s who was a member of SDS and whose grandfather was a member of the IWW?
7. What famous radical historian was a pitcher for the great semi-pro Bushwick team in Brooklyn?
8. Name two socialist literary figures in the U.S. who spent part of their journalistic careers as sportswriters?
9. What was the title of the counter-olympics sponsored by the Communist International in 1928 and 1932?
10. What was the name of the great Harlem basketball team that played numerous benefit games for the Scottsboro boys?
11. Name two famous heavyweight champions who refused to fight black boxers during their reign.
12. What Hall of Fame shortstop was an active member of the Socialist party?

Answers: 1. Leanne Constantine (Sir); 2. Cap Anson; 3. Red Rolfe; 4. Benjamin Davis Jr., James Ford or Paul Robeson; 5. *Golden Boy* by Clifford Odets, and *Walk Tall, Talk Loud* by Len Zimberg; 6. Rick Sornun; 7. Herbert Aschberger; 8. Heywood Brown and Jack London; 9. Spunkies; 10. The Renaissance Five; 11. John L. Sullivan and Jack Dempsey; 12. Honus Wagner.

ART «» ENTERTAINMENT

BOOKS

Unmasking liberal hatchetmen



ON ACTIVE SERVICE IN WAR AND PEACE: POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY IN THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL PROFESSION

By Jesse Lemisch
New Hogtown Press, University of Toronto, \$3

The Cold War in the U.S. was—and continues to be—an expression of the subtle and often volatile relationship between the advocates of American imperial expansion and the inchoate yet potentially cohesive legions of domestic dissenters. The strategic aim of the cold warriors was to suppress dissent or, failing that, to keep dissenters scattered, ineffective, leaderless and in fear.

Equating any dissent with Communism, friendship for the Soviet Union, or with "disloyalty," the cold warriors have used tactics of convenience: the Truman loyalty-security program, HUAC, the McCarran/Eastland committees, the FBI, the CIA. In the effort to search out and destroy dissent, they have also utilized various fronts, including many colleges and universities. These tactics, though crude, have been effective in preventing the rise of stable anti-imperialist groups.

In the academic arena a variety of tactics have been used to suppress dissent. The lid was recently lifted off those used at Harvard, for many the premier American university. Two victims—Sigmund Diamond and Robert N. Bellah—in letters to *The New York Review of Books* charged that Harvard, while publicly asserting its opposition to Cold War McCarthyism, was privately exerting pressure on them as ex-Communists to admit their past associations and to cooperate with the FBI by naming their associates.

Both Diamond and Bellah implicated McGeorge Bundy, dean of the faculty of arts and sciences from 1953 to 1960, as

the arm twister. Bundy, who went on to play an ignoble role in the Vietnam fiasco and to wind up as head of the Ford Foundation, conceded that he had warned Bellah that his post-doctoral appointment would not be renewed if he failed to speak with complete candor should he be called before "legally constituted public authorities." With Diamond, Bundy took refuge in a technicality—that Diamond had not confessed to him his former Communist ties.

In both instances, the jobs at stake were menial, yet for Diamond and Bellah they represented academic survival.

The publicity aroused by the two cases has created the impression that Harvard was the center of the action; but it was only one institution among many across the country that hectoring and disposed of its Communists, present, former and suspected.

The scope of the Cold War on the campus is documented and explained in this brilliant booklet by Prof. Jesse Lemisch of the University of Buffalo.

Written with verve and becoming sarcasm, the booklet goes beyond its title to become an anatomy of the ideology of anti-radicalism. Although one is not astonished to find reactionaries condemning radicalism, it will perhaps come as a surprise to some that the chief architects of anti-Communism were members of the liberal intelligentsia, especially Reinhold Niebuhr and Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. Proposing that ideology was ended, Schlesinger, for instance, spoke of "fire and treason in the blood," "aggressive and sinister impulses" and suggested that irrationality, not ideas, impelled men to action. Radicalism was, in his view, a psychological aberration.

Not only did the liberals erect a scaffold for the campus Cold War, they also contributed victims to the *auto-da-fe* by finger-

ing victims. There was no more sterling anti-Communist in those days than a former Communist turned liberal.

Lemisch points out that "all of these [liberal] individuals and groups were engaged in drawing the line," adding that, "by focusing their activity on drawing the line—rather than opposing the very idea of setting up a line—these liberals were simply expressing their anti-radicalism, their underlying conservatism."

Teachers were relatively easy victims of the Cold War. Their defenders were few and timid. Fear on the campus was so pervasive that even a non-Communist like Chandler Davis received next to no support for his position that he could not be compelled to discuss his politics under oath. Davis went to jail, and I would doubt that the letters of sympathy from former colleagues would fill a book.

At the height of the Cold War on the campus there was no bomb shelter save cooperation with the repressors. The cold warriors did not draw nice distinctions between Communists, former Communists and radicals. They all were perceived as equally harmful.

Lemisch is among those nurtured by the New Left who have dared to step outside the system and sight the possibilities of a different social and economic and political model. When the domestic Cold War bubbles anew, as now seems a virtual certainty, those academics who see the system as impermanent are most likely to be the strongest and most principled foes of the cold warriors. Meantime, Jesse Lemisch's booklet is must reading for anyone who wants to know the score in the recent period of the cold war.

—Alden Whitman

Alden Whitman is a freelance writer who somehow survived 19 counts of contempt of Sunny Jim Eastland's Senate Internal Security Subcommittee.

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ton on China; David Mandel from Israel on Begin's policy in the occupied territories; an interview with the best of the old left sportswriters, Lester Rodney.

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