



Fastpitch: The Untold History of Softball and the Women Who Made the Game

Erica Westly

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If you think softball is just a “women’s version” of the great American pastime of baseball—well, think again.

Fastpitch softball is one of the most widely played sports in the world, with tens of millions of active participants in various age groups. But the origins of this beloved sport and the charismatic athletes who helped it achieve prominence in the mid-twentieth century have been largely forgotten, until now.

Fastpitch brings to life the eclectic mix of characters that make up softball’s vibrant 129-year history. From its humble beginnings in 1887, when it was invented in a Chicago boat club and played with a broomstick, to the rise in the 1940s and 1950s of professional-caliber company-sponsored teams that toured the country in style, softball’s history is as diverse as it is fascinating. Though it’s thought of today as a woman’s sport, fastpitch softball’s early years featured several male stars, such as the vaudeville-esque Eddie Feigner, whose signature move was striking out batters while blindfolded.

But because softball was one of the only team sports that women were allowed to play competitively, it took on added importance for female athletes. Top fastpitch teams of the 1940s, ‘50s, and ‘60s, such as the New Orleans Jax Maids and Connecticut’s Raybestos Brakettes, gave women access to employment and travel opportunities that would have been unavailable to them otherwise. At a time when female athletes had almost no prospects, softball offered them a chance to flourish. Women put off marriage and moved across the country just for a shot at joining a strong team.

Told from the perspective of such influential players as Bertha Ragan Tickey, who set strikeout records and taught Lana Turner to pitch, and Joan Joyce, who struck out baseball legend Ted Williams and helped found a professional softball league with Billie Jean King, *Fastpitch* chronicles softball’s rich history and its uncertain future (as evidenced by its controversial elimination from the 2012 Olympics and the mounting efforts to have it reinstated). A celebration of this unique American sport and the role it plays in our culture today, *Fastpitch* is as entertaining as it is inspiring.

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