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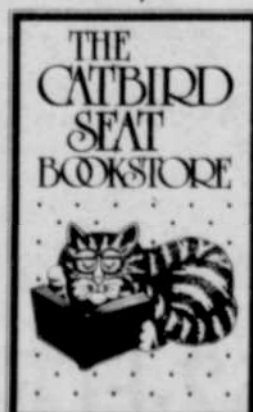
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A League of Their Own

Women in the audience are laughing, crying and experiencing vicarious sports thrills



(l. to r.) Doris (Rosie O'Donnell), Mae (Madonna) and Dottie (Genna Davis) discuss strategy.

by Sandra de Helen

Could a movie get much better? Well, maybe — if they told us which ones were the dykes, gave us some hot love scenes between them, included women of all races, ages and abilities and gave it to us for free — but *A League of Their Own* is pretty darned good. This film, produced by Columbia Pictures, directed by Penny Marshall (who also gave us *Big*), starring Tom Hanks, Geena Davis and Madonna (in that order), is playing locally at Act III Theatres. Women in the audience are laughing, crying and experiencing vicarious sports thrills.

The screenplay by Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel tells the story of two sisters from Willamette, Ore., who were recruited for the All American Girls' Professional Baseball League in 1943 by a sleazy agent, played by Jon Lovitz.

Geena Davis and Lori Petty are the sisters Dottie and Kit.

Dottie is a young married woman whose husband is off fighting in the war. Kit is her younger, always competitive, always resentful sister. They both play ball, but Dottie is taller, prettier and a better ball player. The agent recruits her for her combination of skill and good looks (he calls her a "dolly"). Dottie refuses to go off to Chicago to try out for the league unless Kit gets to go too.

In another "sisterhood is powerful" scene (gorgeous! too bad we don't see more scenes like this in real life) both Dottie and Kit refuse to go farther than Denver unless the agent also accepts a power hitter named Marla whom he thinks is too ugly to play. Predictably Marla later becomes more lady-like and acceptable looking and attracts a husband.

Once in Chicago, Dottie, Kit and Marla must win their places onto one of the teams through fierce competition. This is where they meet up with May (Madonna) and her sidekick, Doris. Here are two "toughs" from Brooklyn, but they respect good ball playing, and soon they're all buddies. Of course they all make the same team. But before they do, there is yet another heart-warming scene of one woman looking out for

another when one young woman can't read or write and so doesn't know whether she's on a team or on the dreaded cut list.

Teams chosen, uniforms dictated (yes, they really did have to wear dresses), the "girls" are now subjected to beauty and charm school. This is good for a few laughs, but they are bittersweet because we know this was all for real in 1943.

Tom Hanks shows up as the team's coach. He's an alcoholic has-been professional ball player, hired for his celebrity status. Hanks does a good job in the role. Even though he received top billing, Hanks is not the star of this movie — Geena Davis is.

There is a nasty bit of business about halfway through the movie when Hanks kisses the chaperone and insults her and then Madonna poisons her so the "girls" can escape for a night out in a roadhouse.

There are several moments of revelation for the various players as they become self-actualized. The primary shift comes for Dottie and Kit, of course, but there are others equally validating.

The film continues to acknowledge the harsh reality of the 1940s with a scene showing several African-American women watching from outside the fence. One of the balls goes out to them, and an African-American woman picks it up and burns it in to Dottie. Much passes between their eyes.

Another difficult reflection was the interaction with a child who accompanied his mother on the tour. Too many jokes were at the expense of the child's well-being.

Things become progressively more interesting, building to a World Series and an ultimate competition between the two sisters. When it's over, you may not want to leave the theater — at least until there are women playing professional baseball again. So, go ahead, stay and watch the credits and see a few wonderful minutes of older women hitting the ball and running the bases. Then go home and write Fay Vincent (Commissioner of Baseball in this country) a letter demanding that women be allowed to play...in real uniforms!

What I'm doing to fight the OCA

I initiate conversations at work, with people I don't know that well, about why the OCA must be stopped.
Sandra de Helen