



SOFTBALL ACADEMY

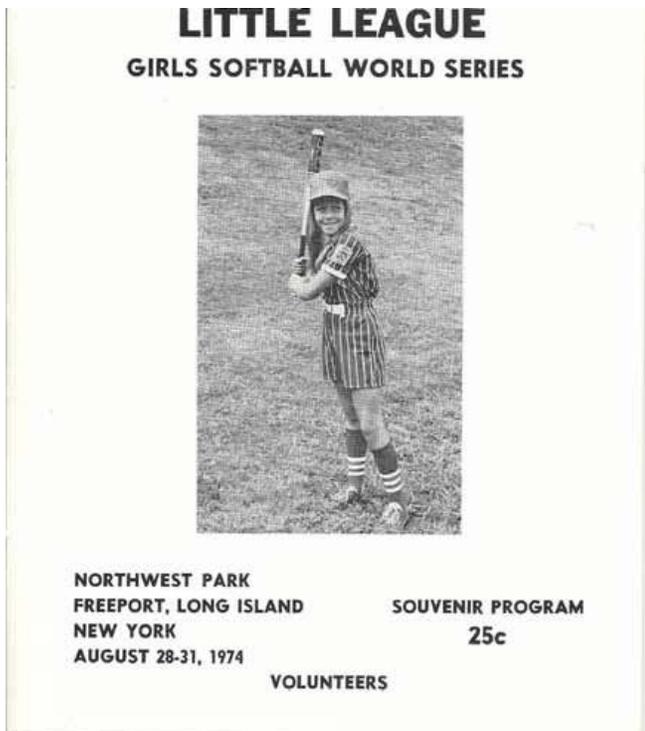
with Mitch Alexander

Title IX - Youth Softball 40 Years Ago



Title IX of the Education Amendment Acts of 1972 forbid the exclusion or discrimination of anyone on the basis of gender from any educational program or activity funded (even in part) by the federal





government. The creators of the Title IX laws proposed the amendments in response to continuing disparity in the workplace and classroom between genders. In short, women were experiencing inequalities in pay, job rank, and in being considered for certain types of jobs. Women were also experiencing difficulty being accepted to certain educational programs and certain schools. President Nixon signed the bill into law in June of

1972. The new law of the land was controversial. Schools were very concerned about the effect it would have on men's athletic programs. Out of these concerns, women's athletic programs were created. The results have not been perfect, but they are much improved since Title IX has passed.

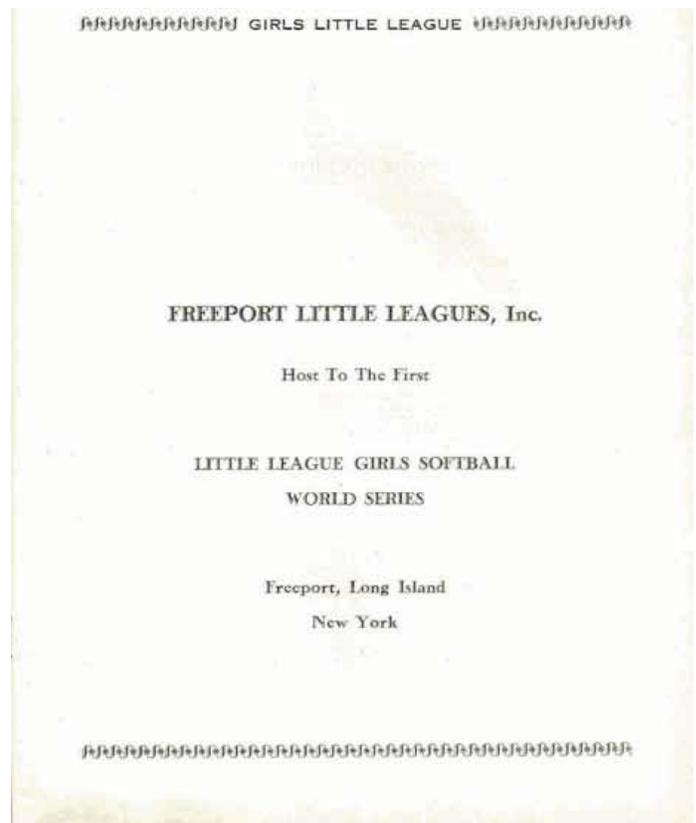
As you might expect, Title IX had a huge impact on women's sports. In the eight years after Title IX was passed, women playing in high school sports increased over 1,000 percent! During the same period, there was over a 600 percent increase in the number of women participating in college varsity programs. Title IX also had a significant impact on softball. As with most complex matters, Title IX took a couple of years to have an impact on softball.

Title IX was passed in June of 1972. School athletic directors did not even begin thinking about the implications of the new law until Fall of 1972. Some issues started being identified by Spring 1973,



but no real action seemed to take place for another year. Little League International instituted a girls' softball program in 1974, following a successful lawsuit filed by the National Organization for Women, representing Maria Pepe who played in a few Little League baseball games in 1972, but was later asked to leave the team due to her gender. In early 1974, some leagues initiated softball programs and female athletes started participating in Spring 1974. One of the first athletes in the United States to play Little League sponsored softball, was Marie Duthil. Marie played for Half Hollow Hills Little League in Dix Hills, Long Island, NY. Marie was 12 and the team's pitcher in 1974. Her younger brother was playing Little League baseball, and her parents were actively involved with the local Little League Board of Directors. Once Little League International announced that separate softball programs were going to be created, new forms were included for softball registration in the baseball registration packs sent out to district residents. Enough girls signed up for seven teams: The Robins, The Blue Jays, The Canaries, The Cardinals, The Hummingbirds, The Orioles, and the Sparrows.

The first place team (The Robins) was coached by Mary "Bobby" DeMalo and the second place team (The Blue Jays) was coached by Marie's mother, Elsa Duthil, who was also Secretary of the local Little League. In those days, the first



place manager was awarded the Williamsport team and the second place manager became the head coach. The All-Star team of 14 girls became the Williamsport team.

The team won the District, Section, NY State, and Eastern Region Titles. When the team arrived in Providence, RI for the Eastern Regional Tournament, they were treated like rock stars and even had a police escort due to the attention they were given everywhere they went. They competed in the first ever Little League Softball World Series against teams representing the North, South, and West regions.

The final series was held at Northwest Park in Freeport, Long Island, NY. The first game was played at 5:45pm on Wednesday, August 28, 1974 (40 years to the day from the writing of this article), and the championship game was played at 1:00pm on Saturday, August 31, 1974 – Half Hollow Hills vs. Tampa, Florida. Girls from all the teams arrived in Freeport earlier in the week. On Tuesday, August 27, girls from all the teams traveled to Governor's Island for a private tour of the newly commissioned Coast Guard cutter, "Granite." Following that, they were brought to Hofstra University where they were introduced to the audience of the Emmett Kelly Jr. circus and attended with special VIP seating. As guests of the Freeport Chamber of Commerce, they attended a performance of "Fiddler on the Roof" at the Jones Beach Marine Theater and auto races at the Freeport Speedway. The Wellswood Little League team from Tampa Florida won the first Softball World Series in 1974. However, Half Hollow Hills returned to the World Series for the next 6 consecutive years, a feat not to be duplicated.



The rules of the World Series games were far different than they are today:

- Rosters were limited to ten players
- No bunting or “chop hits” were allowed
- No base stealing was allowed
- No sliding was permitted, and the runner was called out if they slid into any base, even accidentally
- The ball was pitched underhand in “arc style” with a permissible arc of three to ten feet from the point of delivery
- Pitchers were not allowed to pitch with excessive speed and would be warned and then removed if a “fast pitch” was pitched again
- A “flat” ball would be called by the umpire for any pitch with less than three feet of arc. The ball was still playable, but was considered a “ball” if not swung at

***** GIRLS LITTLE LEAGUE *****

IN THE BEGINNING

It all began last December. Leagues around the Country were asked their feelings about participating in a Pilot Program of Little League Softball for Girls.

The response showed enough interest to justify the launching of the program—and once launched, it grew by leaps and bounds!

From Coast to Coast over 50,000 Girls participated in more than 450 leagues. Under the guidance of volunteer Women Managers and Coaches, skills were developed, and a great deal of sport and fun were enjoyed by all participants.

As the season drew to a close, plans were under way for Statewide Tournaments in Division 1 (9-12 year olds) and Division 2 (13-15 year olds).

Even as plans were being finalized, Little League Headquarters decided to extend the Divisional tournaments to the Regional and National, or “World Series” level.

A nationwide series of tournaments began in Mid July and culminated the weekend of August 16-17, when the four finalists were decided.

And so, a Hearty Welcome and Good Wishes to our four Guest Champions.

East—Half Hollow Hills, New York.

Central—Dryton, Ohio.

South—Tampa, Florida.

West—Kirkland, Washington.

PLAY BALL

These rules were added for the World Series only and were far different than those used in regular season play. The Half Hollow Hills team was surprised about the special rules for the World Series. Parents were told that they were put in place because the public wanted to see girls playing a toned down game of softball, a “more ladylike” version of the sport.

The players from Half Hollow Hills



were treated like celebrities. They received special privileges, had police escorts, signed autographs, and had their final game televised, which was a rare occurrence for amateur sporting events in 1974. They received certificates of recognition from the Huntington Town Board and Proclamations of Recognition from Suffolk County.

Marie, the player from Half Hollow Hills, is my wife. Marie, her team, and all the other rec ball players in 1974 helped lay the foundation for millions of girls and women who have played softball over the past 40 years. Our sport has come a long way in 40 years. There's still more to do - a lot more. Marie re-



turned to the Little League Softball World Series again in 1975. Our daughter, Elizabeth, also a pitcher, played on two Williamsport Little League teams in 2011 and 2012. In 2012, her team won the District, Section, and made it to the NY State Championship final round. Elizabeth, (like her mother) was also coached by her mother, creating a unique lineage of softball history at Half Hollow Hills Little League all made possible by Title IX.

Mitch Alexander is the CIO for a major electronics company and coaches both Little League and Travel softball teams and is currently completing his PhD. He is a certified SUNY, ASA, and Double Goal Coach. His wife, Marie was one of the first female student athletes in the country to play Little League softball after Title IX was passed and played in the first Little League Softball World Series. Over the years, both have managed teams together and helped spark a love for softball in their student athletes. In his spare time, Mitch designs websites for fastpitch teams and businesses and can be reached at fastpitch2001@optonline.net.

