

Game on: Baseball historian all set to speak on women's league



JOE HOLLEMAN
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

PLAY BALL: If sexism and two major wars couldn't stop them, don't think for a minute that the COVID-19 virus could shut them out.

Almost two years after being benched by 2020's pandemic shutdowns, the four STL women who played professional baseball in the 1940s and '50s will be the focus of a program at the Warrenton Public Library.

At 6 p.m. March 8, the library will host STL baseball historian **Ed Wheatley** as he discusses the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. The league operated for 12 seasons, 1943 to 1954, and was immortalized by the 1992 movie "A League Of Their Own."

One player was **Barbara Hoffmann**, 91, of Belleville, who played two years, 1951-52, for the South Bend (Indiana) Blue Sox.

"It was a whole lot of fun. We got to play a game we enjoyed, and we got paid for it," Hoffmann said in 2020.

After graduating from Belleville Township High, she played on adult softball and basketball teams. One of her basketball teammates was a catcher for the Blue Sox and told her team about Hoffmann.

Hoffmann stayed in Indiana after her playing days ended but moved back to Belleville in 2001.

Wheatley's talk also will highlight the three other local women who played in the league:

Erma Bergmann of St. Louis, who played six seasons for four teams and is a member of the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame. She died in 2015.

Rita "Slats" Meyer, a Florissant native who played four years for the Peoria Red Wings in the 1940s. She died in 1995.

Audrey "Kiss" Kissel, born in St. Louis and died in 2017. She played for the Minneapolis Millerettes in 1944.

Wheatley said he was pleased this program made a comeback.

"I had 72 events canceled in 2020 and 2021 because of COVID, so I'm glad this one is going to happen," said Wheatley, president of the St. Louis Browns Historical Society.

The Warrenton library is at 912 South Highway 47. To reserve a seat, call 636-456-3321 or send an email to scenicre-



PHOTO COURTESY OF BARB HOFFMAN

Barbara "Barb" Hoffmann, of Belleville, played two years during her professional baseball days with the South Bend Blue Sox of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League.

former Post-Dispatch reporter **Charles Bosworth Jr.** and STL lawyer **Joel Schwartz**.

Schwartz represented **Russ Faria**, who originally was convicted of murdering his wife, **Betsy Faria**, in 2011 and sentenced to life in prison. The conviction was overturned in 2015, and he was acquitted in a 2016 retrial.

In 2019, Hupp pleaded "no contest"

ALL-STAR ROSTER: As part of Black History Month, the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis will honor 12 local journalists — including Post-Dispatch music critic **Kevin C. Johnson**.

The event will be at 11 a.m. Feb. 26 at the league headquarters, 1408 North Kingshighway, before the organization's food distribution program.

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