

*Women in Baseball: Loving A Sport That Doesn't Love Back*

Detailing The Struggles of Women Within Major League Baseball

[https://soundcloud.com/shannon-welch-540550376/women-in-baseball-loving-a-sport-that-doesnt-love-back/s-FoX4RmlIKo3?si=d7cb59f9626345f7ab4170c6795200c3&utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=social\\_sharing](https://soundcloud.com/shannon-welch-540550376/women-in-baseball-loving-a-sport-that-doesnt-love-back/s-FoX4RmlIKo3?si=d7cb59f9626345f7ab4170c6795200c3&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing)

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Major League Baseball has long been referred to as “America’s Pastime.” It is a sport where everyone can sit back, relax, and enjoy the immense talent these athletes display on a nightly basis. However, women working within the industry, as well as female fans of the sport, are subject to significant rates of harassment, scrutiny, and outright sexism solely because of their gender. Major League Baseball organizations and fanbases have had a long history of prevalent sexism and misogyny, with very little action taken to solve the issue. Whether it is dozens of stories being revealed about female employees having to leave their positions because of consistent, unchecked harassment, or female fans having their intelligence insulted by their male counterparts, there are many accounts of women being made to feel inferior solely because of their gender. Even so, women have continued to fight to create their own seat at the table, and continue to make themselves known as intelligent and valuable members within the baseball community. The sexism that is embedded within the culture of Major League Baseball has tried to shut women out of something that they love, and through perseverance and strength, they have fought to legitimize that love for a sport that so often does not love back.

According to Major League Baseball, the sport saw a significant increase in women working within the game just in the time between 2016 and 2020. The sport went from having 106 women working in baseball operations roles and 12 in director positions or above in 2016, to those numbers increasing to 225 and 17 respectively. The sport also saw growth in overall diversity, with the league reporting that 23.8% of new jobs going to women between 2016 and 2020 (Lee). While the increased female presence in baseball is certainly progress, those within the game still acknowledge the fact that it is still a small step in the long climb to equal treatment of women within Major League Baseball. It is very common experience for women working in

Major League Baseball to be viewed as inferior, and subsequently treated as such. A research study of women working in management positions in professional baseball found that for most women, the least enjoyable aspects of their career were primarily related to their gender. The study saw many themes that seemed to be prevalent for women in the game, with those including: always having to prove themselves and struggling for credibility, dealing with a number of misperceptions, such as only working in baseball to meet and marry a ballplayer, and feeling as though they were unable to network themselves because they didn't feel part of the 'good old boys network' (Hums and Sutton). This attitude and behavior towards women is seen in front offices and management positions, as well as within Major League clubhouses. To really understand the hardships women have had to face since they were first integrated into clubhouses, it is important to look back at the experiences of the pioneers for women in Major League Baseball, Suzyn Waldman. Starting out as a reporter for the radio station, WFAN, in 1987, Suzyn Waldman became the third woman ever to serve as a full-time color commentator, working in the New York Yankees radio booth since 2005. While Waldman has seen great success over her career, it has not been without difficulty and hardships. In an interview with Sarah Langs, Waldman describes some of the more revealing experiences she had early on in her career, saying, "It's yesterday to me that I was spit at, that I had my own police detail at Yankee Stadium. Where guys at WFAN took my tapes and took words out of them so I'd sound like a moron" (Yankees Broadcast Legend Suzyn Waldman joins us for a Women's History Month Conversation). She also went on to state her personal opinion about any alleged progress that has been made throughout the sport, stating that, "I don't see a lot of change in the attitude. I'm sorry I just don't. I still think there's an 18 year old intern somewhere that thinks they know more than

you or me or any other woman just because they're male. I see who gets assignments. I see who gets called to talk about a certain subject... That's women in the workplace still getting passed over" (Yankees Broadcast Legend Suzyn Waldman joins us for a Women's History Month Conversation). While Suzyn Waldman may be one of the more notable women within the game, these experiences aren't unique to her. There are many women working in Major League clubhouses who have experienced different forms of harassment, with one of them being sexual harassment. When looking at the mistreatment of women in baseball, the way that men hypersexualize women in society needs to be considered. Similar themes of sexual harassment of women stretch into other professional sports as well, and Mariah Burton Nelson put it best in her book, *The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football*, when she wrote, "Male locker rooms are shrines to masculine might. Traditionally, women have entered only as men's fantasies and fabrications, as body parts. . . . When mentioned at all, women tend to be discussed in derogatory and often sexualized terms... Having defined masculinity as sexually aggressive and not feminine, many male athletes seem to feel they must subjugate this woman to an inferior role. In order for them to continue feeling like men, she must become Other (Nelson 230). One might wonder why this negative attitude towards women feels so much greater throughout baseball, and sports in general. A research article written by Eric Anderson looked into why men in sport perceive women to be weak, and thus treat them as inferior. His research found that the separation of sexes within sport from an early age creates an immediate division between groups, with that gender segregation being described as "grounded in a mutually agreed-upon notion of boys' and girls' separate worlds" (Anderson). Many of the participants within the study conducted by Anderson revealed that because of that gender divide, "they never really had their

preconceptions about the inferiority of female athleticism challenged” (Anderson). Seeing how women are viewed within Major League clubhouses, which includes being referred to as ‘beef’ in a Neanderthal way of thinking (Svrluga), it is clear that the “boys club” type atmosphere has greatly impacted the attitudes of major league ballplayers, leading to many women being harassed and belittled while in their presence.

This type of behavior towards women is not only seen within professional levels of Major League Baseball, it can also be seen within fanbases of these teams. The experiences women have in front offices often times mirrors that of female baseball fans. A research study written by Kelly Lynn Balfour dives into many different aspects of female baseball fandom, and is meant to understand the experience of women who self-identify as fans of Major League Baseball.

Balfour’s research found that “the participants focused on two main ideas in terms of how the male fans perceived them as fans. The first was that the male fans had an initial assumption that the women were only at the games because they wanted to see the good-looking ball players. The second was that the male fans did not think they were knowledgeable about baseball because they were female. The participants noted that they felt as though they had to prove their knowledge to the male fans” (Balfour). Even in environments such as fantasy sports, where well-established knowledge regarding the league as a whole is a must, female fans often feel undermined in their intelligence. A research study investigating women’s experiencing within fantasy sports found that what should feel like a space for women to exercise their knowledge of the sport often times still feel doubted and unwanted. The respondents to the study described fantasy sports as a “male or masculine domain where they encountered exclusionary, and, at times, sexist and hostile environments, had their competency questioned, and found their

accomplishments discounted” (Kissane). Mistreatment of women within Major League Baseball is not limited to those who are employed by the sport, but also permeate throughout fanbases, as well as more intimate communities.

While it is important to acknowledge the horrible treatment women involved in Major League Baseball regularly experience, it would be negligent to not also discuss the progress that has been made just over the last few years, and that has come from women continuing to fight for that progress. Suzyn Waldman expressed her desire to fight for her spot within the game when she said, “It turned into nobody’s gonna tell me no. I know more than they do. I might not know radio yet but I know how to perform and I know more sports than most of these guys. So I wasn’t going to let it deter me” (Yankees Broadcast Legend Suzyn Waldman joins us for a Women's History Month Conversation). Following her role as play-by-play announcer in the first all female baseball broadcast in 2021, Melanie Newman discussed how she is viewed within the game today, and how the fight doesn’t just stop here. In an interview, she said, “Being able to be a peer with these men and they really took away that title of gender because they see that we’re working just as hard if not harder than they are. That respect is finally coming around and it might’ve taken a while to get here but the foot doesn’t come off the gas now” (Meet 5 Women Who Made Baseball History Calling A Major League Game). The progress can be seen within professional settings as well as fanbases. Seeing more and more women integrated into the sport on the professional level allows for younger girls to see someone like them, and that they can be that as well. Those participants in the Kelly Lynn Balfour research study referred to this point, saying that they did feel the norms shifting, and that was represented by the growing number of little girls in the crowds for baseball games (Balfour). It is important to acknowledge that, even

with the continued harassment and mistreatment of female employees and fans throughout Major League Baseball, progress has still been made, and will continue to be made, because of the extraordinary women who have paved the way.

So, why does all of this matter? Why is it so important to understand the hardships of women in this particular industry, while also acknowledging the levels of progress that have been made throughout the years, and having further discussions of greater progress? The treatment of female baseball employees and female baseball fans can be viewed as a microcosm of society, where women are faced with mistreatment in the form of harassment, micro-aggressions, or flat out misogyny. It can often be very difficult for women to carve out their place in the world when faced with so many obstacles, especially within areas that are viewed as male dominated industries. However, it is possible to succeed, and demonstrating that possibility goes a long way in instilling confidence in young women that, not only are they capable of success, but that they are worthy of it as well. The best way to demonstrate that is by having the growing representation that Major League Baseball has been fostering for the past few years. In her interview with Sarah Langs, Suzyn Waldman recalled an interaction she once had on a talk show with one of her co-hosts, a former Philadelphia Eagles football player. In her recollection, Waldman said, “he came out and he said ‘ya know Susan, I don’t like you on the air. I don’t like women in sports. But last night, I was sitting there and I was watching my ten year old daughter and she was watching you and I looked at her and I thought to myself this is something she’s never gonna know you can’t do because there you are.’ And this is a guy who didn’t like me... but it made an impression” (Yankees Broadcast Legend Suzyn Waldman joins us for a Women's History Month Conversation). After making history being a part of the first all-female baseball

broadcast, play-by-play announcer Melanie Newman made even more history by leading the first all-women's broadcast for a nationally broadcast MLB game that took place on September 29th, 2021, on ESPN. When specifically asked about representation, Newman stated, "the number of younger girls who have felt they couldn't be a fan of sports in general solely out of not seeing women in front still amazes me" (Daniels). These comments and experiences are why all of this matters. Representation matters, and it has the potential to make a profound impact on many individuals all around the world. Having women in visible positions of power gives young girls the chance to realize that they can be whatever their heart desires, and that includes positions in perceived "male-dominated" areas. It is important to encourage young girls to know that if they want it, there is a place for them whenever, regardless of their gender, and that is how true progress can be made.



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