

OBITUARIES

|| JOSEPHINE D'ANGELO | 1924-2013

Played in All-American Girls Baseball League

BY MAUREEN O'DONNELL
Staff Reporter

Josephine D'Angelo was one of the pioneering baseball-playing women whose story was told in the movie "A League of their Own," but she said her career was cut short—literally — by an unfortunate haircut.

Ms. D'Angelo was one of the 60 original players in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, which was started to keep the game alive when the men were off at war.

She played in 1943 and 1944 for the South Bend Blue Sox, where she shared the diamond with one of the best athletes she ever saw — Dorothy Schroeder, said to be an inspiration for the Dottie Hinson role played by Geena Davis in the 1992 film about the AAGPBL.

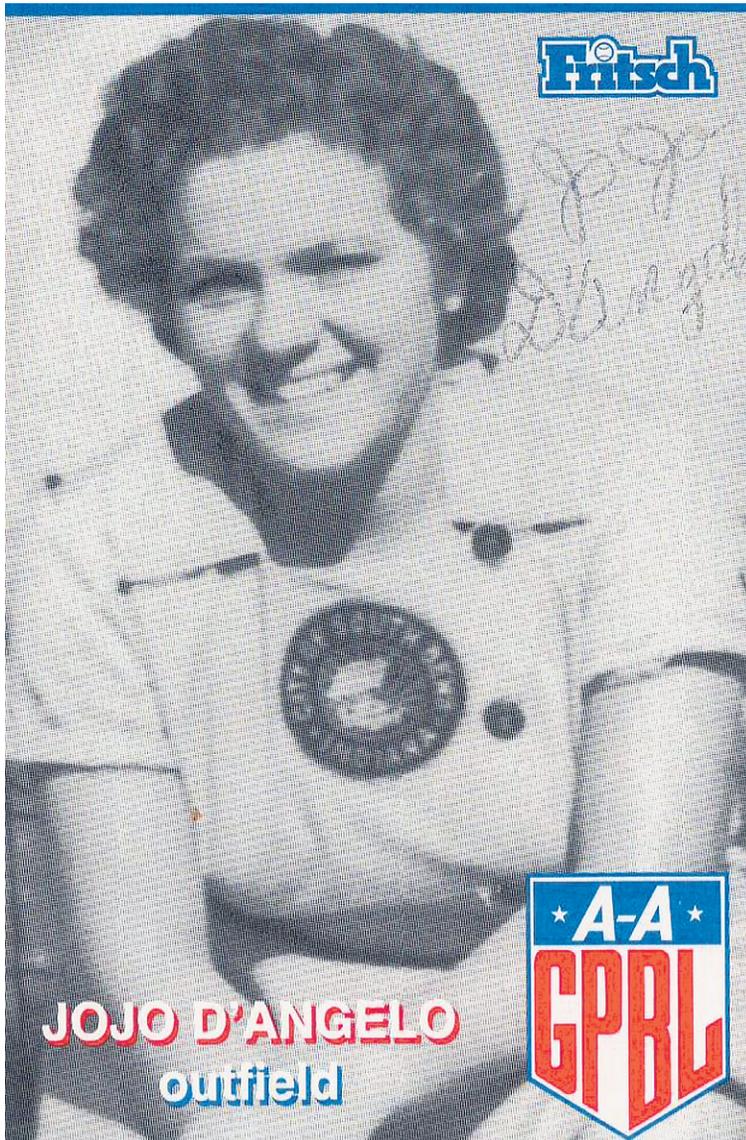
Ms. D'Angelo died Aug. 18 at age 88 at Resurrection Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Park Ridge.

For Ms. D'Angelo, sports offered an escape and a launching pad. Her mother died when she was only 3, and her father, Giuseppe, an immigrant from Sperlinga, Sicily, struggled to support his five children. Her 17-year-old sister, Mary, took over much of the child-rearing, and the nuns at the local convent helped with clothing and food, said her niece, Rosalie Kroll, who was named for Ms. D'Angelo's late mother.

Beef was not on the D'Angelo dinner menu. Chicken was a rare treat. In the spring, "The kids would find fresh dandelions," Kroll said. "They would make salads from them. They would make various pasta recipes."

Young "JoJo's" ball-playing, on city parks and playgrounds, began to draw the attention of talent scouts, according to the Susan K. Cahn book, "Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport."

Ms. D'Angelo said she played with city baseball teams representing Raab Tailors, Deyoung Florals and Hydrox in an interview with The Diamond Angle baseball maga-



Josephine D'Angelo's baseball card as a member of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. She played two years for the South Bend Blue Sox.

zine.

After graduating from Harper High School in the 1940s, she went to work in a steel mill, "working the early shift so she could continue to play ball in the evenings," she told Cahn, a history professor at the State University of New York-Buffalo.

"There was no one she could rely on but herself," Kroll said.

"Although still a teenager, she

was supporting herself, saving money for college, playing semipro athletics, and running with a group of 'gay girls,' or lesbians, she knew through sports," according to the Cahn book. Sports not only helped her advance in life, but allowed her "to forge private social networks with women she described as 'people of a kind,'" Cahn wrote.

Ms. D'Angelo tried out at Wrigley Field, a scene dramatized in the

Penny Marshall-directed movie.

She made the cut, and she loved the competition and travel. Though she had begun to identify herself as lesbian, she followed the league's strict rules, Cahn said, which included the barring of "freaks" and "Amazons." Ms. D'Angelo stayed away from the league's "gay crowd" and dressed in feminine attire, she told Cahn.

But it all came to a halt at the end of her second season, when a team official "approached her in the hotel lobby and told her she had been released. The reason? D'Angelo had gotten a severe, or, in her own words, 'butchy' haircut," Cahn wrote.

Ironically, she didn't really want her hair cut short. The hairdresser convinced her she would look good with a bob, Cahn said.

Ms. D'Angelo wound up returning to Chicago and went to college.

"It always hurt me a lot," she said in the 2000 HBO program "Playing the Field: Sports and Sex in America." "I was just a kid."

The rejection stung. "She didn't see the movie. Neither did I — 'A League of Their Own' — whatever it was," said a longtime friend, Marion Shortino.

Ms. D'Angelo returned to Chicago and earned a degree in physical education from DePaul University, said her nephew, Terry Sommerfeld. Later, she earned a master's in counseling. She spent most of her career at Crane and Schurz high schools.

Persistent, determined and crusty, "She was a very strong personality," Shortino said. "She knew what she had to do, and she did it." She was one of the first in her family to get a car, a Ford with a stick shift, her nephew said.

Before spine and knee operations left her in chronic pain, she enjoyed travel to Australia, China, Europe and Machu Picchu, Peru. She shot nature photography and developed and enlarged the pictures in her own darkroom, winning a \$50 photography prize from the old Saturday Review magazine,



Josephine D'Angelo was released from the South Bend Blue Sox after two years. A friend says she never watched "A League of Their Own."

Shortino said.

She grew sanguine about her AAGPBL firing. "I had a good time and used the money for my college tuition," she said in an interview with The Diamond Angle.

And, Ms. D'Angelo had a tip for girl players: "Play with boy players early in life," she told the baseball magazine.

In retirement, she didn't follow Major League ball. "Too much money paid to the players. I don't follow the teams — the game as it seems much too slow," she told The Diamond Angle.

"I have as much respect for her as a teacher as a ballplayer," Cahn said. "She taught for 30 years. She was right there, always right there, with the students, always trying to work with the racial politics, and the kids."

Ms. D'Angelo is also survived by her nephews, Joseph and Dominic Rubino.

Services were held at Suerth Funeral Home. Those who came to pay their respects received a unique prayer card. Instead of a picture of a saint, it featured a photo from "JoJo's" playing days that made it resemble a baseball card.