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BASEBALL WIVES Gender and the Work of Baseball

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This article focuses on how the structure and constraints of the occupation of professional baseball shapes the lives of the players' wives. The major constraints on the role of baseball wives include high geographical mobility, the husband's frequent absence, lack of a social support network, and the precariousness of baseball careers. Baseball wives are expected to fulfill a traditional role of support for their husbands and families. Baseball wives play a backstage supporting role but in so doing become far more independent and resourceful than many American women, managing families and households on their own.

Most of the writing on baseball has been written by men, for men, and about men (for example, Bosco 1989; Fireovid and Weingardner 1991; Golenbock 1991; Gooden and Woodley 1985; Jordan 1975; Ripken and Brian 1997). Most accounts of ballplayers' lives focus on their achievements on the field, with comparatively little attention given to life at home or to their wives and families.¹ The typical fan's image of players' wives—which comes primarily from televised glimpses of them in the stands—is that they are pretty, wear stylish clothes, and lead a life of privilege. “When people discover that I am married to a ballplayer they are usually impressed,” said Heather Gajkowski, wife of Seattle Mariner Steve Gajkowski.

They think it's glamorous and they ask a lot of questions about the life. Even when you tell them how hard it can be, how much the players are away from home or how little money you make in the minor leagues, they don't seem to get it.

So, what is it like to be the partner of a man whose work is as all encompassing as professional baseball? This article looks at how the structure and constraints of pro ball shape the lives of the players' wives. First, it examines the major constraints on the women, including high geographical mobility, the husband's frequent absence, lack of a social support network, and the precariousness of baseball careers. It then turns to what is expected of the wives and how their role impinges on their self-identity and career choices.

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METHOD

The data for this study were collected over a six-year period between 1993 and 1999 as part of a larger research project on the culture and life cycle of professional baseball players. Formal, tape-recorded interviews were conducted with twenty-five wives from all levels of pro ball. In the sample, twelve women were married to men playing in the minor leagues, about half at the Class A level and the other half divided between Double A and Triple A farm clubs. Eight wives were married to major leaguers, and five were married to former players who were now coaching or managing (two in the major leagues and three in the minor leagues). The wives ranged in age from twenty to forty-three; half were younger than age thirty. Twenty-two were white, two were Hispanic, and one was African American. The sampling was opportunistic in that the names of prospective interviewees were gathered from players and front-office officials.² Often, they were merely asked which wives were likely to be present at the ballpark that night and if an interview could be arranged with one of them. It is likely that the more outgoing and articulate wives were often the first to be recommended. However, about half the women interviewed were simply individuals that we chanced upon in the stadium or near the family lounge (major league clubs provide a lounge for the players' wives and children). The responses to requests for an interview were excellent: only one wife declined. In addition, two interviews were conducted with the adult children of baseball families about their experiences growing up in a baseball household and their perceptions of the roles of their mothers.

An open-ended interview guide of a dozen items was used to get the interviews under way. Several of the opening "grand tour" questions were the following: "How is your life, being married to a ballplayer, different from the lives of the women you grew up with who aren't married to ballplayers?" "What have you found difficult about being a baseball wife?" "For you, what have been the benefits of being in professional baseball?" The interviews, which usually lasted from one hour to ninety minutes, were done at the ballpark and usually before the game. They were usually conducted in a secluded and quiet part of the stands and sometimes in or near the family lounge. All were done with the husbands absent to minimize the men's influence over what their wives might say. Some follow-up interviews were conducted over the telephone.

Overall, the women were cooperative and open; many were eager to talk about what the baseball life had meant for them. Big league wives

in particular felt their lives had been overly glamorized by the press and that the public had little understanding of the liabilities that go with their position. But the most outspoken were often the wives of players who were still in the minor leagues. They were less concerned about the confidentiality of their remarks than were major league wives who had experience with the press. Many of the wives clearly enjoyed being interviewed, perhaps because it resembled the outside attention normally reserved for their player husbands.

MOBILITY

Mobility is the feature of pro ball that exerts the greatest influence on the wives and families of ballplayers. In the minor leagues, the men play in a different town almost every season. If they make it to the major leagues, trades and free agency make them almost as transient there. Because ballplayers rarely play in their hometowns, their wives and children must move every year, not once but several times. In March, some wives follow their husbands to Florida or Arizona for spring training; six weeks later, when spring camp breaks, they relocate to the city of the husband's team; and finally, when the season ends in September, they return to their hometown.³ If their husbands play winter ball, they may move yet again, usually to the Caribbean or Latin America.

Every trade, promotion, or demotion during the season means an additional move. One baseball wife who had spent ten years in the minor leagues calculated that she had moved twenty-three times and lived in every region of the United States. "We could probably stop in any state in the country and know someone from baseball," she said. Jan Butterfield, wife of Arizona Diamondbacks coach Brian Butterfield, moved a dozen times in her first four years as a baseball wife.

When a husband is traded or moved within the organization, he gets a plane ticket and a ride to the airport. The player's wife is left with the burden of moving—disconnecting the utilities, closing the bank account, removing the kids from school or camp, and then reestablishing the household in a new locality. It is she who packs the household possessions, loads the U-haul, and transports the kids to the new town. In the words of Mary Jane Davis, who has been a baseball wife for thirteen years while her husband, Doug, first played for the Angels and Rangers and now manages in the Mets organization,

Moving is probably the toughest part, especially when you have little ones. When we didn't have any children, I made like, "Okay, this is a vacation. Let's go here and let's go there." But when you have children, it's different. They're moving all over, making new friends and then they have to leave them. It gets a little tough on them. I used to be very structured, keeping a schedule book and all, but I've thrown that out the window because there is no way I can be like that anymore. You just go with the flow. There were times that Doug got called up to the majors. He'd have to leave the next morning at six, and here I was stuck with the apartment, the car, the kids, and the dogs. You're excited for him moving up but you are the one who has to pack everything up and drive down. I've lived or traveled in South America, Canada, and pretty much all of the United States. But you live out of a suitcase, and wherever you end up is usually not where your family is. . . . That's tough on the kids. They want to see Grandma.

Some wives do enjoy the travel, especially in the early years before they have children. As Mary Jane Davis said, "You get to see a lot of the world. . . . There are only a few states we haven't been in or lived in, and a lot of people can't even say that at the age of fifty or sixty." Yet, however exotic and exciting the travel may be at first, the appeal wears off for most wives. Moreover, the call to move usually comes without warning. Sharon Hargrove wrote about the frustration of a wife she knew who had just paid sixty-seven dollars for a phone jack, had cable television hooked up, opened a bank account and ordered checks when, after a mere ten days in town, her husband was reassigned (Hargrove and Costa 1989, 48). This instability—reassignments and trades being the main culprits—causes many baseball families to postpone buying homes and possessions. After nine years of marriage, Nancy Marshall said the only furniture she owned was a set of bunk beds, a television, and a rocking chair (Bouton and Marshall 1983, 85).

ABSENT HUSBANDS, BASEBALL WIDOWS

Because every team plays half of its games on the road, husbands are away often during the season. Inevitably, baseball wives spend a great deal of time alone; from April through September they are without husbands about half the time. Several of the women we interviewed jokingly referred to themselves not as baseball wives but as baseball widows.

While on the road, the men are among teammates and companions; their wives are home alone. Most wives have no local friendships to depend on, nor do they typically belong to any groups in town. They are friendly with fellow baseball wives, but these relationships are seldom long-standing or deep, again due to their husbands' mobility. Even major league wives who have enjoyed a long tenure in one locality often do not have many local friends. "There are so many people out there who want to be around you just because of who you are, who your husband is, that you have to be wary," one Baltimore Oriole wife explained. Not surprisingly, wives frequently find themselves eating out or seeing a movie alone. Many of the young wives interviewed admitted to being lonely when their husbands were away. Chrissy Estrella, age twenty, had never been apart from her parents and siblings before marrying a ballplayer and moving from Port St. Lucie, Florida, to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, for her husband's first season. Other than the manager's wife, she was the only baseball spouse in town:

When he is on the road there is nobody, nobody to hang out with. That's the hardest thing. I call my family [in Florida] and I cry to them, you know. When he was on the road this last trip I found myself sleeping all the time just to pass up the time. I think I gained five pounds because I didn't do my normal stuff. I don't know the gyms in this area like I do in Florida. I finally found a job [as a clerk in a Polo outlet store] because I was so bored and lonely.

Toward the end of the season, two members of the Pittsfield Mets Booster club tried to help out by telephoning Chrissy when the team was on the road and occasionally inviting her out. Talking to their husbands on the phone, of course, reduces the loneliness, but in the low minors many couples cannot afford the expense of frequent long-distance phone calls. Indeed, some couples run up huge phone bills before they realize it. Many wives listen to their husbands' road games on the radio primarily to make them feel closer to them and lessen the loneliness.

Young wives, who may be only a few years out of high school, are not just lonely but feel vulnerable and insecure being on their own. "Before the guys leave for a road trip you hear some of the wives talk in the stands about how scared they are to stay by themselves," said a veteran wife of ten seasons. "Some get nervous and will keep the lights on; some of them have alarm systems. Of course, there are others who aren't bothered one bit." Some wives mentioned times when they felt especially

defenseless. Fran Kalafatis watched her husband and teammates board the team bus for a road trip in the Southern League as a hurricane approached, leaving her and the children in the parking lot to deal with the approaching storm. As the bus pulled away, the players yelled out warnings and instructions to their wives. In her memoir, Sharon Hargrove recounts two wives who were left alone in Kinston, North Carolina, to cope with a tornado watch. Having come from regions unaccustomed to severe weather, the women were clueless about what to do (Hargrove and Costa 1989). Several wives lamented about being alone while pregnant and not having their husbands at the hospital when they gave birth.

Even when the team is at home, husbands are not around the house much. Ballplayers may spend late mornings at home, but they typically leave for the ballpark by early afternoon, and by the time the game has ended and they have showered and changed, it is after eleven o'clock. Even then, many players like to go out to eat and unwind from the game before going home. In short, a player's schedule does not mesh well with the needs of a family. Children are in school when he is home in the mornings, and they are asleep by the time he arrives home at night. School summer vacations fall in the middle of the season, when the father is most occupied in the baseball world. Nor do the men have weekends free like most other workers. In fact, major leaguers have only about three days off per month (minor leaguers even less), which are often spent traveling. Even when they are home, the physical grind of the baseball schedule leaves husbands with little energy for family life. Referring to the groupies who pursue ballplayers, Waleska Williams, wife of Yankee centerfielder Bernie Williams, said,

If the young women that have these fantasies about being with ballplayers really knew what it is like being married to one, they might not be so eager. They don't know that you don't have him around for half of every year, and that there are times you wish he were in some other profession so he would be home every night.

LEARNING INDEPENDENCE

The husband's absence means that his wife cares for the children by herself—supervising homework, preparing meals, setting standards, enforcing discipline—acting as both father and mother for much of the

baseball year. Amused by the irony, Waleska Williams described how in the absence of her husband, it was she who taught their six-year-old son how to play baseball. "It's really like being a single parent," said another wife. Lynn Rigney Schott, the daughter of former player and manager Bill Rigney, recalled her mother's experiences:

As I look back on what it must have been like for her, I realize it wasn't easy. She struggled with a lot of stuff. Even things like teaching her kids to drive. . . . They want dad not mom to do it. My mother had to do that with all three of us. My dad should have been the one teaching us to drive. It's a small thing, but it created a lot of tension and stress for her. When we'd get in trouble at school, the things that teenagers do. . . . I came home a couple of times in really deep water because I had told her a song and dance and she'd end up calling my dad in Detroit or somewhere because it's two in the morning and Lynn isn't home yet and she's worried sick. That's pretty crummy. It was hard for her to shoulder all that herself. And we weren't bad—just normal teenage stuff. It was real hard for her. If my Dad had been at home no way would I have stayed out till two in the morning.

What wives object to most is being left alone during holidays, birthdays, pregnancies, and special events in their children's lives, such as a toddler taking her first steps. "I want a normal life. I want to have cookouts with my kids in the summer and camping trips, do the things that normal people do," said one disgruntled wife. In the words of a mother of three,

My husband has been gone on every one of my kids' first birthdays. My daughter played T-ball for the time this summer and he missed that. It's funny, people think that because your husband is a coach that your kid is going to be a talent, but the truth is they aren't ever there to help the kids.

Lynn Rigney Schott remembers that the only real family vacation that she ever had as a child was the year her father was fired as the manager of the California Angels. For a few months, he was free to travel with his family.

With husbands away so much and the operation of the household and its decisions left to her, it is not surprising that the baseball life requires a wife to be independent. "There are things I never dreamed I would deal with that I have become comfortable with," said Jan Butterfield.

Some of the things women learn to do for themselves are often reserved for men in more conventional households, such as repairing the car, fixing the plumbing, or disciplining the children. Explained Birmingham Barons manager Tony Franklin, "It takes a very independent woman to get by in baseball. It takes a woman that does not depend on you to make her life worthwhile. When you are not there, she can't be afraid to do things for herself." Former player and coach and now baseball analyst Tom House (1989) thinks that baseball wives grow up faster than their husbands do because they have to stay at home to "anchor" the relationship and deal with the real world while their husbands are off living in a fantasy world. Some older wives said they now enjoy the independence their lifestyle fosters. Fran Kalafatis found that the time her husband was away encouraged her to develop new interests, which she now values. Danielle Gagnon Torrez (1983) finally came to view the time when her husband was gone as a "mini-vacation."

THE SUPPORTING ROLE

Clearly, the baseball wife's primary role is to support her husband and his career. Baseball careers are not only demanding; they are usually short—an average of just four years in the major leagues. Competition from other players, trades, injuries, and prolonged slumps can end a career at any time. Given this uncertainty, husbands and wives want to do everything to maximize his chances of success. To this end, husbands want to be able to focus on baseball, which means that wives are expected to shield husbands from distractions. So, wives arrange household and children's schedules to suit their husbands, and they screen phone calls and field requests for tickets. Mary Jane Davis tries to get her son involved in new activities to keep him occupied and prevent him from complaining and becoming unhappy, "and that helps him, which helps me, which helps my husband. It's like a chain reaction." "His job is baseball, mine is the home and the kids; I take over all household authority during the season," said Jan Butterfield. "I am both the mother and the father until September," explained Megan Donovan.

Most wives said they were expected not to trouble their husbands with domestic problems, except for crises, while the men were at the ballpark. While most wives of businessmen, doctors, and university professors have no qualms about calling their husbands at the office, it

is nearly unthinkable for baseball wives to call their husbands at the clubhouse. The ballpark is sacrosanct. Beverly Crute (1981), who wrote her doctoral dissertation on the wives of professional athletes, quotes one baseball wife: "You just don't call at the ballpark unless they're [the children] on their deathbed or something. I mean, there are girls that have babies while their husbands are at the ballpark, and they don't call them" (p. 82). The enormous financial rewards for those who make it to the major leagues, and the brevity of the average career, justify in the minds of most wives the sacrifice required. Not surprisingly, most wives are deeply concerned with their husbands' performance, both for his sake and because it affects their joint fortune. "I'm very nervous when he pitches," said Heather Gajkowski,

I can't sit still, I pace the stands or stand on the ramp just out of view so I barely see him. I am especially nervous if he isn't doing well. When he is on the road and I am listening to the game on the radio, I turn the volume down when he isn't pitching well.

When we asked one player how his wife felt about the burdens of being a baseball wife, he replied,

Fine. That's what really attracted me to her, because I knew that she was going to stick by me one hundred percent. She knows I love the game and she's pretty much in it for me. That's what's great [about our relationship].

A wife supports her husband not just by listening to him talk about his performance and attending his home games but sometimes even participating in his superstitions. Wade Boggs's wife prepared chicken dishes for him every day for years. Megan Donovan reported that her husband insisted that she wash her hair each day he was to pitch. In her memoir, Danielle Torrez (1983) reported that one "rule" she learned as a baseball wife was

to support your husband's superstitions, whether you believe in them or not. I joined the player's wives who ate ice cream in the sixth inning or tacos in the fifth, or who attended games in a pink sweater, a tan scarf, or a floppy hat. (p. 225)

THE UPSIDE

Baseball life is not completely burdensome, of course. Many wives say they feel fortunate to be able to go to the games and watch their husbands at work and that ballgames are usually enjoyable affairs. By providing free tickets, child care, family lounges, and special sections in the stands for wives and children, the teams encourage family attendance. Being at the games can strengthen a wife's identification with her husband's career. As Jan Butterfield said, "You become more involved and you can talk about it more with him because you are experiencing the moment with him. It creates a bond that might not exist otherwise." At the ballpark, wives also learn a lot about the business of baseball, which enables them to better handle the decisions made by the club about their husbands' careers. Being at the ballpark also exposes the wife to the fairly unique situation of seeing people cheer or jeer her husband's performance. The wives of teachers, dentists, or stockbrokers never experience anything remotely like it.⁴

LOOKING GOOD

Baseball wives and girlfriends are expected to look attractive, and most are. "Yes, the wives are usually very striking; you see one and you're like, 'Wow. She must belong to one of the players,'" said one public relations director. "They wear no numbers; they are not on any roster. But you can tell they are player's wives," writes baseball observer Jean Ardell, about wives at spring training games in Arizona.

It isn't just the jewelry: the golden earrings, rings, and bracelets; a Rolex watch so dazzling with diamonds that you cannot see the time. Nor is it what you might call their daytime evening clothes: backless, strapless, silky numbers that set off their tans and two-carat diamonds. These women are as well kept and sleek as cats. They also possess a feline watchfulness, beyond that of even the most die-hard fan. . . . It is an unlikely sorority. Day after day, the women sit together, their only common interest being their baseball-playing husbands. (Ardell 1994, 365)

In the words of a San Francisco Giants official,

When you see them all sitting together, it's like a fashion show. They don't come out to the ballpark like other folks, just to have a good time. They are here to watch their husbands play, but they also know they are being looked at and that they have to put their best foot forward. Their appearance is very important to them and to their husbands.

Such comments reveal another aspect of the role of the baseball wife—she is viewed in large measure as a player's property, part of the assets he brings to the game. When team public relations directors were asked about interviewing wives, they invariably said that the husbands should be asked for permission first. After doing so, I would then approach a wife, saying that we had spoken with her husband and that he said it would be all right to do an interview. Usually, that was good enough for the wife to consent.

At no time is looking good more important than during playoff or World Series games, when television cameras pan the wives' section and zoom in at different moments. Danielle Gagnon found the attention she received during the World Series, when her husband Mike Torrez was on the mound, to be a poignant reminder of the degree to which wives are seen as window dressing. She complained that press photos always showed her and the other wives with "glossy lipstick, white pompons, and continual smiles" (Torrez 1983, 7).

A wife's looks and behavior, some wives claimed, can even affect her husband's baseball career. "You're part of the package, and if you don't look the part, well, some are going to notice," said Sherry Fox. Fran Kalafatis remembers being told by veteran wives how a baseball wife was to act:

It was the older wives that taught the new recruits that you were to dress up for the games and you were to look good. We wore pantyhose in Montgomery, Alabama when it was 99 degrees. It was insane when you look back on it. But you thought it might just make the difference between your husband being called up [to the big leagues] or not if you were presentable. These were the unwritten, unsaid thoughts among the wives.

To capitalize on the fans' fascination with baseball wives—on the wives' public relations value—some major league teams organize public appearances for the wives and involve them in charity work. Baltimore Oriole wives, for example, sponsor a yearly canned-food drive for

local food banks. Canned goods are collected at the stadium during which the Oriole wives, each wearing an outsized jersey with her husband's name and number, staff the collection areas throughout the stadium. The charity drive reflects well on the wives and on the team. Fans, of course, are attracted to the promotion by the opportunity to see the wives up close.

STATUS AND IDENTITY

Baseball wives enjoy a measure of status by virtue of being married to professional ballplayers. When they are with their husbands in public, they also receive attention. Television cameras focus on them at games, they are asked to participate in community and charity events, and they may meet celebrities outside baseball. But their identities are always tied to their husbands. This holds true for the wives of many professional athletes (McKenzie 1999; Powers 1990; Thompson 1999). Marilyn Monroe aside, the baseball wife's identity is submerged under that of her husband. He is seen as the breadwinner, and if he is in the major leagues, he probably earns more in a year than she will in a lifetime. He is in the limelight; he is in demand. As Danielle Gagnon Torrez came to understand, her role outside the home was as an accessory (Torrez 1983). To the public, baseball wives are not known by their own names; rather, they are always Mrs. Roger Clemens, Mrs. Bernie Williams, and so forth. One wife, who is a high school teacher, resented that during the baseball season she simply became an extension of her husband. Others spoke of the irritation they felt when people would approach them in public and direct all their conversation and eye contact at their husbands, sometimes never even acknowledging their presence. We came across an ironic illustration of this on the dust jacket of Sharon Hargrove's memoir *Safe at Home* (Hargrove and Costa 1989). Despite having written the book, in which she discusses the identities of baseball wives as ancillary to their husbands, the biographical blurb about the author on the dust jacket reads, "Sharon Hargrove is the wife of Mike Hargrove, formerly a big league baseball player and presently a minor league manager." Nothing else is said about the author, other than her having four children.

Mobility is partially to blame for the wives' dependent identity in that transience makes it next to impossible for women to pursue their

own careers. Even those who have the credentials or degrees have difficulty finding work. "No one wants to hire you if you are only going to be in town for five months," said one wife with a social-work degree. Several wives talked of being unable to seriously plan careers of their own as long as their husbands were in baseball. The few wives that we met who had careers were schoolteachers. They stayed behind when their husbands went to spring training and for the early part of the season and then joined them during the long school summer vacation. Otherwise, most wives with career ambitions just had to put them on hold until their husbands retired from baseball. As Jessica Stockam put it, "We will start our life when he gets out of baseball." She meant that she could not begin a normal life until her husband's career was over and they could settle permanently in one place. She did not want him to leave baseball, and she was not unhappy being a baseball wife; she simply recognized that for all its benefits, there were certain things baseball did not allow. Above all, it does not offer the kind of stable life most American women expect.

Elinor Nauen, editor of an anthology of women writers on baseball, described the players' wives she came to know in the Eastern League: "Even the ones who had gone to college and weren't stupid had very much accepted that the important life in the family was his." Danielle Gagnon Torrez, who had to scale back her modeling career when she married Montreal Expos pitcher Mike Torrez, noted that it was unusual to meet a baseball wife who saw the need to have her own achievements apart from her husband's (Torrez 1983). One wife compared her marriage to a wheel in which her husband was the hub while she was merely one spoke, with the other spokes being his career, his education, and his other interests. Nancy Marshall writes to fellow wife Bobbie Bouton in their book *Home Games*,

One of the things I think you and I did wrong from day one was to act like puppy dogs at our husbands' feet. They had all the success, all the glory, and the notoriety. It was only natural that we fell into the trap of idolizing them much as their fans do. (Bouton and Marshall 1983, 170)

It would be wrong, however, to claim that all wives feel this way. Marshall is looking back on her dozen years of marriage to a ballplayer. The discontent that she describes builds over time and is uncharacteristic of younger wives. Most of the wives that we got to know accepted their

subservient role as temporary but necessary, and although they complained about the loneliness and the burdens they shouldered, few were eager to exchange it for a “normal” life.

Another dimension of the wife’s dependency is that her status among the other baseball wives is influenced by her husband’s status. In the major leagues, there is usually a loose pecking order among the wives in which their individual standing is swayed by their husband’s salary, performance, and standing on the team. The wives of star players bask in the glow of their husbands’ reflected fame, while wives of lesser players, no matter how talented the women themselves may be, enjoy less prestige. As one major league wife explained,

Somebody who has been in the big leagues for a while might talk about stuff that is way over your head—you know, “Oh, I went to Bloomingdales today and I bought all this stuff and it’s being delivered. Well it’s very hard for someone who has just come up from Triple A to relate to spending that much money on shopping. But a lot, too, depends on the person’s personality. It’s not just money. Nolan Ryan’s wife was the nicest person I ever met and she would talk to you even if you’d only been in the big leagues for two days.

Children confound the pecking order a bit in that wives caring for young children are often drawn to other wives with young kids, overriding other considerations. Team hierarchy also influences relationships in that the spouses of players and the spouses of coaches do not mingle much, even when they are of similar age. They may sit together at the ballpark but rarely do they fraternize on the outside, just as in the business world the wives of management do not socialize with the wives of workers. The anomaly in baseball is that the workers and their wives are a usually much wealthier than the managers and their wives.

DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY

Baseball wives probably contend with more uncertainty than do most American women. In addition to having to move without notice, an injury to her husband can suddenly end his career and their livelihood at any time. The vagaries of baseball performance in which bad times or slumps inevitably follow good times can make the baseball life

an emotional roller coaster, and all of it is beyond the wife's control. About the uncertainty big league wives face, Tom House (1989) observed,

One day you're the toast of the town, the next day you're invisible. That's the reality of it. It's an incredibly insecure existence, made tolerable by the false sense of security created by the success and fame. When those start to fade—or, even worse, when they're suddenly yanked away—both husband and wife go down together. (p. 59)

It is not much better for the wives and families of managers and coaches. Most are on annual contracts and have little job security. When ownership or general managers change, the new regime usually cleans house and brings in its own people. "It's always in the back of your head," said Mary Jane Davis, the wife of a Class A manager:

It takes just one person to buy out the team or come in and take over and they'll want all their men to manage and coach. Hopefully another organization will pick you up, but you never know. You try not to look too far into the future with baseball because it's a crazy situation, you never know what is going to happen.

CONCERNS OVER GROUPIES

Wives may also worry about their husbands' faithfulness, especially while they are on the road. Perhaps in all occupations where men travel and are away from home a good deal, there are concerns about infidelity. But many wives say the concerns are greater in baseball, where there is temptation in every town from groupies who pursue ballplayers. Cyndy Garvey, wife of former Dodger first baseman Steve Garvey, described her discovery of her husband's "little black book":

I leafed through it. On the back page was a listing of National League cities. New York. Chicago. Cincinnati. St. Louis. And next to each city there was a woman's name and phone number. Some of the names had stars next to them. It was horrible. Too horrible. Too much of a bad cliché to be true. (Garvey 1989, 132)

While many players do not indulge in such relationships, groupies are successful often enough to make some wives uneasy about what their husbands do while away from home. One major league spouse reported this about wives sitting in the stands together:

You can tell those who have close relationships with their husbands and aren't worrying from those who are paranoid, who aren't sure and are listening to his answering machine, going through his briefcase, and being nosy. Sometimes you just wonder if your own husband has the moral fiber to turn down the easy sex and good times.

Bouton and Marshall (1983) devoted an entire section to the groupie problem in their joint memoir. They describe three stages in the evolution of the baseball wife's concern about her husband's fidelity. In the first or "true believer" stage, the wife fully trusts her husband and thinks that he is always faithful. Then, in the "knock on the head" stage, the evidence and suspicions of infidelity incrementally mount until finally, in the "realism" stage, the wife becomes fully aware that her husband sometimes sleeps with other women on the road. She is disillusioned but also realizes—perhaps rationalizes—that it really doesn't reflect on her, that the players' infidelities are really "entertainment" for the men while they are away.

Not all wives are so philosophical. Discovery of infidelity does sometimes lead to the breakup of the marriage, although probably much less often in baseball than in other professions. Beverly Crute (1981) found that some wives coped by excusing their husbands' behavior with "boys will be boys" or "what he does on the road is his business, what he does at home is my concern" (p. 124). Pete Rose's wife, Karolyn, declared to some of her husband's teammates, "I know Pete gets fucked on the road all the time: I say as long as he doesn't do it at home, I don't care" (House 1989, 59). Karolyn eventually tired of his extramarital escapades, however, and divorced him. Many players, of course, do not sleep around, although their wives may still wonder. Some players talked about making an effort to allay their wives' concerns. As one Oakland A's player put it,

We go on a ten-day road trip and there are groupies out there looking for ballplayers in every city. My wife knows that. There's got to be a lot of

trust in the marriage. . . . I call home every night and do things that try to make her [wife] at ease. Baseball wives should get a lot of respect for what they have to go through.

Overall, the wives have little choice but to accept the insecurity, although some said they tried to keep their husbands happy at home in the belief that a contented husband is less tempted to fool around.

BASEBALL WIVES AND THE GENDER ORDER

Recent writing on sports, and baseball in particular, has explored the role of sports in creating and maintaining gender hierarchy, which includes the notion of “hegemonic masculinity” (Burstyn 1999, Disch and Kane 2000, Trujillo 2000). Hegemonic masculinity refers to a culturally idealized set of masculine characteristics, such as aggression and competitiveness, and views the male body as privileged, celebrated, and connected to familial patriarchy, including male dominance over women and children (Trujillo 2000, 15). Media coverage of sports and the public consumption of this media, by glorifying the occupation of the male professional athlete, reinforces male privilege, gender differences, and the gendered division of labor (Burstyn 1999, Davis 1997, Trujillo 2000).

Many sports maintain male privilege largely through taboos on female participation. In baseball, women are consigned to auxiliary roles as wives and fans (Disch and Kane 2000) or, more disreputably, as groupies (Gmelch and San Antonio 1998; Voigt 1978). This female audience exaggerates and emphasizes the power of the male athlete (Disch and Kane 2000). Karlene Ferrante (1994), for example, writes that “baseball embodies a nostalgia for a pure and perfect experience of individual, masculine achievement, and that the sacredness of that ideal is protected against the mundane by the taboo against women [participants]” (p. 238).

These characteristics of baseball—male privilege and the relegation of women to auxiliary roles—would suggest that baseball wives have low status. But this is not the case, as we have seen throughout this article. Instead, the all-consuming nature of the men’s work in baseball mitigates against the low status of wives. In her discussion of athletes’

wives, Crute (1981), borrowing from Coser's (1974) work on "greedy institutions," refers to the encompassing nature of many professional sports, which demand their members' time, labor, and loyalty. Baseball players and coaches are a perfect example of this. So, in baseball families, it is the wives who during the baseball season rule the family and run the household, including single-handedly moving the family to new locations. While baseball culture idealizes masculinity and male dominance, it also idealizes images of home and family (Ferrante 1994; Trujillo 2000). Players and coaches need wives to have "homes." Wives provide companionship, stability, and emotional support off the field—all positive goods in the baseball world.

We think that male absence and the reliance of players on their wives to maintain the home lessen the male dominance fostered by baseball. There are many examples in the anthropological literature of patriarchal systems in which women have power in the domestic sphere because their men are away or otherwise occupied outside the home (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1993; Menon 1996; Rogers 1975, 1991; Sanday 1981; Sirman 1995). Men may have authority and receive deference from women, but women control important resources and make important decisions (Rogers 1975). Women's work may often be invisible, but it is no less important than men's work (Moore 1988).

CONCLUSION

Clearly, there are both significant rewards and costs to being the wife of a professional ballplayer. Baseball wives are fortunate to have the prestige and financial security if their husbands reach the major leagues, but they must also deal with isolation, heavy responsibility in daily life and parenting, and the postponement of their own career plans. It is no wonder that some people refer to the baseball wife as "the fifth base," an anchor point outside of the field but bound to the game itself.

In conversations with players, we found that many seemed insensitive to or downplayed the considerable burdens their wives shouldered. Nor did we detect much of an effort by the players to lighten their wives' responsibilities, but that may be due to our reliance on interview data. Observation of daily life in baseball households might lead to a different conclusion. Yet, there is much that argues that players may really be somewhat indifferent. The ready availability of attractive women is

clearly a factor. Groupies offering themselves to ballplayers may well increase the player's sense of self-importance (and sense of his attractiveness to women), which perhaps lessens his empathy for a spouse or girlfriend. Also, sociologist Gary Fine (1987) reported in his study of Little Leaguers, *With the Boys*, that from an early age the athletes come to see male dominance as the natural order of things. As youths, Fine says, athletes define their masculinity in terms of attributes that females lack, notably competitiveness and aggression, and they learn to avoid displaying feminine qualities, such as emotional expressiveness, nurturance, and compassion (Fine 1987). The latter are the very qualities that would make ballplayers more understanding and compassionate spouses.

Many baseball wives have no idea of what they are getting into when their courtships with ballplayers begin, whether they start in school or when the players are already in pro ball. In one respect, these baseball wives represent a traditional gender role, sacrificing for their husbands' careers, but in another sense, precisely because of this sacrifice, they become far more independent and resourceful than many American women, managing families and households on their own.

NOTES

1. Several wives (e.g., Garvey 1989; Hargrove and Costa 1989; Torrez 1983) have published memoirs about their experiences being married to ballplayers, and two graduate students (Crute 1981; Powers 1990) have produced dissertations about the role of wives among professional athletes generally.

2. Team media relations directors often help arrange the interviews. We are especially grateful to Kevin Kalal, Steve Copses, Sam Kennedy, and Ethan Wilson.

3. The time varied depending on whether they accompanied their husbands to spring training (most minor league wives do not go along) and winter ball. The geography of the league also influenced how long their husbands were away. Long road trips are less frequent in minor leagues where teams are less spread out.

4. To protect the wives from abusive and gawking fans, major league teams are increasingly sitting the wives and children in a special section, with security and shielded from the other patrons.

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