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Women's watch

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“There’s no crying in baseball.”

That’s what actor Tom Hanks, who played the gruff, washed-up major-league player turned women’s baseball coach, emphatically reminded his players in the 1992 hit movie “A League of Their Own.”

Well, as it turns out, there’s no giggling in baseball, either. Boys baseball, anyway.

Girls baseball is a different story.

That’s what 13-year-old K.C. Dunne, an eighth grader at St. Mary’s School in Buffalo Grove, discovered is the biggest difference between the two sports.

And yes, she’s done both.

“The guys are all tough and macho,” Dunne said. “With the girls, things are just more ... girly. There’s giggling. The boys don’t giggle at all.”

After graduating from park district tee-ball at age 5, Dunne spent the next seven years playing Little League baseball with the boys.

There were no baseball teams for girls. And softball wasn’t really an option. She loved baseball too much.

“I tried softball and I just couldn’t get used to it,” said Dunne, a pitcher and a shortstop. “Softball and baseball are so different — the size of the ball, the hitting, the pitching, the rules. I just felt that baseball was more fun, more competitive. I didn’t want to stop playing.”

So Dunne wound up being the only girl on her teams, many of which she made after trying out against the boys. She says the boys were accepting and that she became good friends with all of them. She says she loved the experience so much that she plans on trying out for the Buffalo Grove High School baseball team next year when she’s a freshman.

For now, though, Dunne is intrigued by the opportunity she has to finally be one of the girls.

On a girls baseball team.

Thanks to some dedicated local parents and the American Women’s Baseball Federation, a first-of-its-kind local girls baseball team — appropriately named the Pioneers — is being assembled in the Chicago area. It will participate in an international tournament next month that will be held at the Disney Wide World of Sports Complex in conjunction with the Women’s World Series.

The team, comprised of players ages 10-14, hopes to expand from there and eventually provide multiple local baseball teams for girls in this area.

Interest by girls in baseball isn't obvious, but it is there. Just by word of mouth over the last two weeks, 17 girls from the North and Northwest suburbs heard about the Pioneers and rushed to join.

The team, which practices once or twice each week at facilities in Niles and Northbrook, is still looking for players. Nine of the current 17 players have made the financial commitment (\$1,200 per player) to participate in the Disney tournament, which runs Oct. 6-9. The Pioneers are looking for at least three or four more players for that trip.

Each player is also required to bring and subsidize a chaperone. The team is hoping some of the cost will be defrayed by sponsorships.

"All of the players and the families that are involved are doing so much to chip in and help us get the team organized and get sponsors," said Skokie resident Mary Jo Stegeman, a member of the AWBF advisory board whose daughter Joni played on the AWBF national teams in 2001 and 2002. "And they're all doing it naturally, without having to be asked. That tells me how much this team means to them.

"If you're a girl and you're still playing baseball at this age, you have to really want to. You have to absolutely love it. Because it's not easy."

Stegeman says that while traveling in Canada to watch her daughter, she discovered 400 girls played Little League baseball in the Toronto youth system alone.

Girls and women's baseball is also huge in Australia and Japan.

"It's so funny to people in some of those other countries because they hear that baseball is supposedly our national pastime here in the United States, yet 50 percent of the population doesn't participate," Stegeman said. "It's so engrained in our society that baseball equals boys and softball equals girls.

"But girls who like baseball don't view softball as an equal substitute. To them, softball is as different from baseball as, say, hockey.

"Some of them have switched over to softball anyway, though, because that's all there is."

Perhaps the Pioneers can help to change that.

"All I know is that our girls are just so thrilled that their prospects for playing baseball don't have to end when Little League does," Stegeman said.

The 411: To learn more about the Pioneers, contact Mary Jo Stegeman at (847) 707-8944. The next practice is Monday (7:15 p.m.) at Frozen Ropes in Niles. More information about the AWBF can be found at www.awbf.org