

Babe

THE LIFE AND LEGEND OF
BABE DIDRIKSON ZAHARIAS

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A Sportswriter's Dream: Beautiful Sports, Manly Sports, and Muscle Molls

screen, a strong and assertive woman ought to willingly give up her career for the man she loves. As the depression wore on, women's job opportunities dwindled when men began taking jobs in teaching and other occupations considered traditionally female.¹

As one historian maintains, despite the gains of the twenties—the vote and greater job opportunities—life for many women really did not change much even by the thirties. Women were still discriminated against at home and at work. The media, she argues, created the illusion of an improved status for women by focusing on the image of the sportswoman as an ideal and especially by singling out star athletes.²

Women did participate in high school, college, semiprofessional, and league sports in greater numbers than ever before, yet chroniclers of the 1900–1930 era largely fail to make social class distinctions when discussing sports popularity. Although by the 1870s women participated in baseball, wrestling, boxing, ballooning, and gymnastics, the majority of these athletes came from the working class. Wrestling, circa 1870, was a “titillating spectator sport performed by women in music halls and theaters.” Boxing between women also enjoyed only a brief heyday. Richard J. Fox, editor and proprietor of the *Police Gazette*, a sports magazine that was flourishing in the 1880s, did much to promote female pugilists. He staged the matches, awarded the prizes, and published the results, all to boost his circulation and draw attention to himself. Although evidence suggests he never took female fighting seriously, “he did crown the woman champion of New York, a powerful Amazon named Alice Jennings, who had a great left hook.”³

Although boxing and wrestling enjoyed short-lived popularity, other equally physical pursuits followed; soccer, shooting, skiing, gymnastics, muscle-building, bowling, and roller skating dominated indoor activity during the 1880s. Roller skating continued as a favorite street sport among immigrant and working-class girls into the 1920s. Horseback riding, swimming, and footraces were among girls’ and women’s favorite country pastimes. Shooting in particular was popularized by Annie Oakley’s expertise in the 1880s. In her stage appearances, her corsetted waist, tight dark stockings, short dress, and leather boots cast a fetching—and daring—image. Oakley shot holes in playing cards with such proficiency that a free ticket, generally punctured with holes (so it wouldn’t be tallied with the receipts), a pass on the house, or anything free became known as an “Annie Oakley.” Trap shooting, one of the sports in which women were on par with men, began around 1916 and attracted sharp-shooting women from all social classes.⁴

When Babe Didrikson garnered national attention in 1932, the country was in the midst of a social and cultural upheaval. General opinion opposed married women working, even in female-dominated occupations. Yet 24 percent of all workers were female and 29 percent of these were married. By 1940 over 25 percent of workers were women and 35 percent of these were married. Although most women were employed in domestic service or clerical and sales positions, considered “traditional” occupations for women, they faced hostile public opinion. Most Americans believed that male breadwinners deserved priority over all women workers. Women, conversely, were idealized as domestic, nurturing, full-time companions for their husbands.

These expectations of motherhood and home conflicted with the real economic need to work during the Great Depression. Because the male head of household was “supposed” to be the sole breadwinner, bills were introduced in twenty-six states to prohibit married women from working. In fact, the employment of women was viewed by many as “reprehensible.” The Economy Act of 1933 declared that two members of the same family could not both be employed by the federal government. Workers were forced to resign. Seventy-five percent of them were women. Part of the impetus behind this legislation lay in changing attitudes about appropriate behavior for women. As Katharine Hepburn and Joan Crawford demonstrated on the

class distinction in women's sports

1930s women's work debate

Working-class girls and women also popularized skate sailing and yachting, ski jumping, downhill skiing (which got its greatest boost after the 1932 Winter Games held in Lake Placid), snowshoeing, archery, mountain climbing, curling, stag hunting on skis, bobsledding, and tobogganing, which were special favorites in many Scandinavian countries. Ice skating, spurred to even greater popularity by Sonja Henie's first Olympic crown in 1928 at age fourteen, had been a favorite for years among working-class youth who frequented local ponds.⁵

Without stuffy parlors to enclose them and without any of the economic accoutrements to circumscribe their social behavior, "exuberance and physical display were far more the province of the poor, the immigrant, the working-class woman." Middle-class Americans were appalled, indeed threatened, "with the unbridling of instincts for bodily display [which] were thought to lead to such evils as prostitution."⁶ The popularity of the physical oddity shows of P. T. Barnum among the working class, which shocked many middle- and upper middle-class Victorians, proved the working-class's appreciation of physical display. Similarly, dance halls and amusement parks, a favorite destination from 1890 through the 1920s, provided ample opportunity for young working-class women to cavort and frolic with abandon. These places were viewed as morally suspect by middle- and upper-class Americans and some ethnic working-class parents but were considered great fun by young working-class women.⁷

In short, working-class and middle-class girls and young women were judged according to different standards. Many working-class girls (like boys) spent the bulk of their days outdoors, away from parental supervision, playing in sex-mixed groups. Sports that required little or no equipment, such as running and swimming, were pursued at will, with or without parental approval, by working-class girls. Middle- and upper-class girls, in contrast, were expected to behave with decorum since their social status and marriageability were largely dependent upon their perceived femininity, refinement, and domestic skills.

Thus the explosive popularity of sports for girls and women from 1890 to 1930 really applied only to members of the middle and upper classes; working-class girls and women were already active players. When a social observer commented in 1894 that "outdoor recreation and the spirit of sport had transcended the former image of American womanhood," he was describing ideals of genteel middle- and upper-class womanhood. Middle- and upper-class women gained greater opportunity to participate in sports at college. Foot racing, for example, done in floor-length skirts, was common

by the early 1900s. Collegiate play, however, was characterized by heavy attention to rules and proper etiquette—features less accentuated in street play. Women's athletic clubs also pandered to sports enthusiasm by the middle and upper classes. The Chicago Women's Athletic Club, founded in 1903, boasted seven hundred wealthy members who "participated in activities such as fancy dancing, aesthetic calisthenics, fencing, basketball, bowling, gymnastics, track and field events, water polo, and swimming in the club's luxurious pool." Even traditionally working-class pastimes like bowling became more tightly organized. The Women's International Bowling Congress was "established in 1916 for the sole purpose of fostering women's athletics."⁸

Here again Babe defied norms. Unmarried, self-supporting, and earning big money, she implicitly rejected the economically dependent status expected of women. Babe experienced virtually none of the austerity and sacrifice that ruled most depression-era women. True, her own economic fortunes followed an alarmingly predictable boom-bust cycle, but she always had her Employers Casualty income. That alone was three times as much as the year-average income of an American man and six times that of a woman.⁹

Friends, Foes, and Friendly Foes:

Sportswriters Respond to a Shifting Cultural Context

To ensure her income, Didrikson pursued the press relentlessly and often pandered to it at her own expense.¹⁰ To ensure attention, she supplemented her accomplishments, dramatic and frequent as they were, with self-aggrandizing mythmaking. Her father's penchant for storytelling, coupled with Texas's tall-tale tradition, helped her create an irresistible verbal style.

For example, after her Olympic victories she was asked by a reporter when she had first become aware of her exceptional coordination. "Babe told a story of teasing an old farm bull, then jumping onto a fire engine to outwit him."¹¹ An unlikely feat given her upbringing in an industrialized oil city, yet a tantalizing Texas tall tale.

Another curious myth Babe fostered was that of her physical invincibility. In numerous interviews she claimed she'd had an injury-free childhood. Yet in *This Life I've Led* she tells of slipping while scrubbing the floor. I "slit my knee wide open sliding around like that."¹² In later years, she continued to disavow any physical frailties or accidents. This was done, no doubt, to complement the "otherworldliness" of her physical prowess.

She also lied about her size. When in the Olympics, she claimed, "I wasn't much over five feet tall, and weighed only 105 pounds."¹³ In fact, she approx-

imated her full adult stature: 5 feet 5 inches and 130 to 140 pounds. Like age myths, size underestimations were employed to accentuate her feats. In minimizing her size, Babe was perhaps also attempting to heighten her femininity. By 1955, petite stature might well have appealed to Babe more than her own "lithe, muscular, sinewy" nineteen-year-old body.

Another example of myth-building is the much contested date of her first game of golf. In 1955 she claimed in the *Saturday Evening Post* that until Grantland Rice invited her to play following the Olympics, she had never golfed before.¹⁴ In fact, Babe had played regularly at the Beaumont course during her high school days and was shown in the 1929 high school yearbook as a member of the golf team.

Her self-aggrandizing, however, was truthful at times. In 1932, just after she had set a new world's record for the 80-meter hurdles and had won the broad jump and baseball throw in Dallas, a reporter wrote that she had boasted that "one big university offered her a four-year scholarship if she'd matriculate there in time to represent the school in the Olympics." In fact the University of Southern California had offered her a scholarship so she could represent it at the games. She declined, fearful it would jeopardize her amateur standing. This opportunity has been ignored by many journalists because it was believed to be another Didrikson ruse.¹⁵

Members of the press fed on her tales and made up a few of their own. Tiny Scurlock led the way among sportswriters enshrining Babe. As he wrote, "Our 'Babe Didrikson' file is jam-packed with stories and pictures and we have collaborated on several yarns on the Babe that hit national slickies." There was a mutual promotion. Sure, he admitted, "some of her exploits might have been glamorized over the years . . . but most of the stories are right smack on the nose." Tiny's claims of veracity were undermined by Frank G. Menke, who dug through Babe's clippings in search of the true statistics. Few wanted the mundane information; most preferred the lavish praise. Tiny's assertion that Babe won 634 events, may be, by his own admission, "slightly inaccurate." Unhindered by exactitudes, copy like this enthroned her: "She is just the athletic marvel of this age," Tiny wrote (again, and again, and again). "There is only one Babe."¹⁶

A sportswriter and devotee like Tiny was useful for much more than reporting scores and times because he reaffirmed her normalcy. Particularly in the twenties and thirties, when controversy swelled around Babe's gender identity, Tiny, who at one time had called her a "muscular gal with the liteness of a Texas cowpuncher" wrote, "Feminine? decidedly so. She can cook, sew, and is a neat housekeeper when she stays around home long

enough." She was also a splendid dancer, Scurlock claimed, liked and knew flowers, and could play the harmonica and tunes by ear on the piano.¹⁷

Other press coverage had the same power. The author of a July 1932 *New York Times* article entitled "Miss Didrikson Buys First Hat for Trip to U.S. Title Games" managed to fill three paragraphs describing her purchase. It was a pink hat, Babe's first bought under the prodding auspices of Mrs. Wood. Her sports accomplishments were mentioned only in the final sentence. The point was clear: Babe had done something appropriately feminine that at least momentarily superseded her Amazonian persona.¹⁸

Grantland Rice, Didrikson's ardent admirer, supported women's participation in sports and used Babe in his arguments. In the twenties he wrote of "the accomplishments of the great female stars in track and field, tennis, golf, and swimming." Like others of his era he was "intrigued [with] . . . how close women were to the athletic accomplishments of men." He suggested that the disparity in women's and men's athletic performances was attributable to a less competitive experience for women.¹⁹

Rice blew Babe's horn as a female athlete who proved detractors wrong. In a July "Sportlight" column he proclaimed her "the most remarkable athlete of the entire [Olympic] lot [who] doesn't happen to be a member of the male species." Her versatility and stamina ("more than a battleship") impressed him immeasurably. From afar, he appraised her as "lean, wiry, and strong-looking without an ounce of surplus flesh. She wears no bulging muscles to her wars. She has hands that are hard and strong with the grip of steel." In *Collier's* in 1932 he used Babe as an example of why women should be allowed to participate in Olympic competition. He decried critics who claimed "women don't show to advantage on the track or in the field. . . . Maybe, too, these critics overlooked Babe Didrikson. But Grantland Rice did not. She belongs to the future—women's future in sports."²⁰

After their first meeting Rice became smitten with Babe. He was not alone among sportswriters in his response. He thought her clever, limitlessly talented, fun, witty, and excellent company, and his stories about her reflected this. He had vociferously proclaimed she'd been cheated of the third gold medal against Shiley. He admitted once trying to conjure realms in which Babe didn't excel. "Frankly," he wrote, "I failed. But I was certain, one day, I had the stopper. 'How is your sewing?' I asked. 'I frequently make my own clothes,' she replied. 'And if it interests you, I'm a pretty good cook.'" Rice, further enamored of her after these latest revelations, editorialized, "I forgot to ask how her archery was. I knew it was excellent."²¹

Rice recalled their first round of golf together, along with Paul Gallico,

Westbrook Pegler, and Braven Dyer, a prizefight manager, with admiration: "The Babe was then a tallish, slender young kid of 17. In legs, arms and body she was constructed like a champion. She had powerful hands, legs like a halfback and, above all, complete confidence in herself." In her physique he saw the makings of a champion—"not in track and field where she already had proved her gold medal rating—but in golf, a sport where a gal might compete with men on their own terms." "If Miss Didrikson would take up golf seriously," he wrote, "there is no doubt in my mind but what she would be a world beater in a short time." He returned repeatedly to her form, which he saw as structurally ideal: "In my mind she had all the physical attributes *physically + body description*... wonderful legs, slender enough but strong... long muscled arms... nice height and above all, a pair of fine strong hands and wrists." He stated emphatically, "You are looking at the most flawless section of muscle harmony, of complete mental and physical coordination the world of sport has ever known."²²

Rice mistakenly believed their golf game together was Babe's first and marveled that she drove the ball farther than the men on the first hole and shot "around 100." Only years later did Babe confess to her previous experience and also that after their match had been scheduled she got a quick lesson from Olin Dutra, the club pro. Rice, paired with Babe against Gallico, Pegler, and Dyer, recalled that Babe's clever trickery and will to win emerged even in that informal contest. On the seventeenth hole it was all even, and Gallico "drove the green." Babe whispered, "Don't worry, Grant, I'll handle this." She turned to Gallico and said, "Paul, I'll race you to the green." Rice delighted in the recollection. "Paul," Rice wrote, "takes no challenge from any woman and few men." Babe outran him easily, but tauntingly, staying two feet ahead of him "like Rusty the electric rabbit at a dog track." When they reached the green, Gallico collapsed. "When it came his time to putt, Paul four-putted. We won the hole and the match." Rice, immensely entertained, was delighted when Babe became known as "Grant's girl." It was all right with him. She, meanwhile, nicknamed him "Granny."²³

Rice has been accused by one historian of being the leading "ladler of syrup" regarding Babe. At times he praised her to the point of incredulity. As he wrote in "The Other Babe and Women in Sports," "the two girls who did most to turn the world spotlight on their sex—with the possible exception of Cleopatra—were Eleanor Sears [tennis player] and Babe Didrikson Zaharias." His characterization of the two near-Cleopatras, however, was believable: "a Boston society girl and a solid Texas miss." Unlike many of his male colleagues, Rice preferred women in "manly games." He glowingly

described Sears's "smashing game" and Babe as a golfer who could "punch her shots."²⁴

Another sportswriter in the ilk of Scurlock and Rice was Herb Grassis, a sportswriter for the *Chicago Daily Sun* and *Esquire* magazine when he met Babe in the mid-1930s. He said she was "always good copy, easy to interview, liked to showboat and was attractive and pleasant." She "had the ideal stroke, a swinging hit" and revolutionized the game of golf, according to Grassis, who later became president of the Golf Writer's Association.²⁵

Other sportswriters were not so charitable with Babe or other women athletes of the time. These writers did not welcome women athletes on the national scene and held their competitive play in contempt. John R. Tunis argued in "Women and the Sport Business" that women's sports had adopted the evils inherent in men's sports, "where winning and financial gain were the only concerns." He, like other critics, attributed these changes to women's "new position in society."²⁶

Westbrook Pegler took a far more hostile position in a syndicated piece in 1933 entitled "That Didrikson Babe Is a Sissy." And, According to Mr. Pegler, It Seems She Can Sew." This article, attempting humor, succeeds in ridicule, generates laughs at Babe's expense, and fosters a "freakish" perception of her. Ironically, the author liked and admired her and hoped to demonstrate her "well-roundedness" in this piece. Pegler used Babe's own definition of girls' games, sports, and domestic interests as "sissy." "She is a sissy and I can prove it," he wrote. "I can prove that she sews for one thing." About sewing, Pegler recounted her prize-winning dress and asked what her prize was: a flask? suspenders? shaving brush? No. "She got a beautiful hand embroidered pin cushion. Yoo-hoo, sissy, how are you getting along with your ruching? Did you even hear of Jack Dempsey or Babe Ruth sewing or ruching?" She's a sissy, too, because "she makes the beds and does the market-ing." While affirming her "normalcy," Pegler speculated on the outcome of a match between Babe and a known boxer in a fifteen-round fight. "Name me one good boy she ever licked," he challenged. His sarcasm permeates the piece. He wanted her to be both traditionally feminine and athletically invincible, but the possibility of the latter repulsed him.

But it was her touting of their golf scores—in which she emerged the rightful winner—that provided the final straw. Humorously he wrote that the next time he sees her "I am going to walk up to Miss Didrikson and pop her right square on the nose. Then I am going to kick her a couple. Then I am going to chase her right out of town, publicly."²⁷ What's so striking is the gender slippage in his treatment of her. At times he affirms her femaleness,

yet in the next sentence uses male images and language to challenge her and feign violence toward her. In fact, he doesn't know what she is—he bullies her literally and figuratively as if to punish her for her difference. It's a disturbing example of the cruelty and insensitivity that greeted Babe in many instances.

Paul Gallico, however, articulated the most extreme contempt for Babe and for other athletes as well. After his defeat to Didrikson at golf, he expressed his displeasure in print at will. His first salvo, "The Texas Babe," appeared in 1932 in *Vanity Fair*, where he labeled her a "Muscle Moll." This was merely part of his larger disdain for female athletes who fit the masculine stereotype. His copy was often cruel in making his point. In "Women in Sports Should Look Beautiful," a *Reader's Digest* article condensed from *Vogue* (1936), he said that women looked beautiful in only eight of the twenty-five sports they generally participated in. Ball games were no good—they made women perspire. "The acceptable included archery, shooting, fishing, riding, flying, and skating because women moved gracefully, if at all, and wore 'some pretty cute costumes.'" Curiously, golf doesn't meet with Gallico's approval. "Golf was never meant for women. . . . If you are a gentleman reader, [think back] to some of the instructions given you by your professional as to what to do with your whatsit and your whosit when you swing. A girl just can't do those things and still be a lady."²⁸

Gallico was not alone in his suggestion that women should play only "beautiful" sports. People subscribing to this viewpoint argued that women participating in these sports were normal and healthy; no harm had been done to them by their athleticism. Gallico surely approved of a September 1940 *Life* magazine article entitled "Beautiful Skeeter: Pat Laursen Is National Champion," which followed up on an earlier *Time* piece declaring Laursen the world's most beautiful athlete. *Life's* reporter dubs her a good shooter from a rich family. The remainder of the two-page spread pictures her physique alongside running commentary. There's a full-body profile of her shooting a rifle, a series of three pictures of her legs while she shoots, a full-body swimsuit pose, a back view of her curly hair and her winning patches sewn on her jacket, and a close-up of her in a short tennis outfit. Commentary also focuses on her physical assets, not her sports acumen. A photo of her holding a rifle in resting position is captioned "Glasses, used for shooting, handicap her beauty but improve her aim. They also protect her eyes from flying pieces of pigeon. Here she is holding a twelve-gauge Winchester repeater." Another caption debates the significance of the engagement ring she's wearing.²⁹

Others echoed support for "feminine" sports and feminine sports stars. Ethel McGary, the assistant director of Life Saving Service at the New York chapter of the American Red Cross, wrote in favor of competitive swimming for women in a 1931 issue of the *Sportswoman*. Her rationale? Of the sixty women who participated in the last three Olympic Games, "investigation shows that about 20 are married, others are engaged in business, professions or college. All report no harm from their swimming activities."³⁰

McCombs, Babe's Employers Casualty coach, hurled himself into the debate on female athletes' femininity in an interview with *Collier's* in 1936. Of course they make fine marriage partners, he argued, he himself married Ruth Almand, a Golden Cyclone. Sports don't "unfit them or weaken them for marriage and motherhood. It's positive bunk. . . . I don't know a finer group than those of the former Cyclones who have set up homes for themselves." The rules of fair play, he asserted, were also "the rules for successful homemaking."³¹

Echoing these thinly veiled concerns with social and sexual normalcy was a 1939 *Life* magazine photo spread on the national women's swimming championships. In two photographs swimmers comb their hair and put on lipstick while juggling a mirror. One swimmer is shown posed in a racing start, but none of the eleven photos show a swimmer in the water. The message was clear: female athletes must constantly prove their normalcy. Even women in the "beautiful sports" were suspect. But for women in the "manly sports," speculation knew no bounds. Gallico was eager and, he believed, qualified to thus testify.³²

Within this charged cultural context, labeling Babe a muscle moll was like damning her, not simply teasing her as other writers have trivialized it. He later regretted the weight and implications of his words and rescinded his earlier aspersions. In "Frisking for Sex," Gallico gave a brief history of sex testing and women Olympians. He rakishly recalls that in 1932 "the accepted method of determining that a lady was indeed a girl—less clinical and more delightful [than physician's certification]—was to date her and take her out." There "was an absolute swarm of lovelies competing that year," and, he asserted, "even if Babe Didrikson was rawhidey and hoydenish, no one challenged her on matching the requirements of a regulation girl." Gallico, of course, did just that. This piece, written twenty years later amidst Babe's repeated hospitalizations, was more an attempt to save face than an apology.³³

She did not struggle alone with these misogynist sentiments. Among all women "muscles, strength, strain, sweat and dirt were offensive and unfem-

in the section in Olympics

ine," according to some journalists. Musculature specifically was thought to be particularly damaging to women's real calling: motherhood. As Dr. Donald Laird wrote in "Why Aren't More Women Athletes?" (1936): "What woman needs—and has—is a good system of involuntary muscles . . . for simple household tasks. . . . She has ample development for a multitude of light office and factory work." "But men," he cautioned, "should keep her away from the heavier tasks, both out of chivalry and good sense." Other medical experts in the mid-thirties were equally vehemently opposed to "Amazon athletes." Their contentions, explained in the misleadingly entitled "Emancipation of Women," were simple: "that excess exercise is more harmful to women than men" and "that nothing can be good for a girl's body which renders her less capable of motherhood."³⁴

In fact, the muscle moll label came dangerously close to the mythic man-nish lesbian. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, a turn-of-the-century psychological and sexual theorist, asserted that "not only was the most degenerate lesbian the most masculine, but any gender-crossing or aspiration to male privilege was probably a symptom of lesbianism." Didrikson dressed and acted like a man with enough frequency that she became suspect—if not defined—as lesbian because "her behavior or dress (and usually both) manifested elements designated as exclusively masculine." The cross-gender figure that she embodied had "become the public symbol of the new social/sexual category 'lesbian.'"³⁵ Her physique, her trousers and plain shirts, her short-cropped hair, and her sheer competence in the male realm of competitive sports presented an intimidating image to a culture recently attuned to the medical definitions of female homosexuality. According to Krafft-Ebing, lesbians "desired male privileges and power as ardently, perhaps more ardently than they sexually desired women." Also called a true invert, this creature, neither man nor woman, constituted a "third sex" or "trapped soul." Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, and Sigmund Freud delineated the derangements of this new type. She was "between genders and thus illegitimate." What these sexual theorists failed to consider was the gleeful skepticism toward gender categories, access to male privilege, and rebellion against the male order that the mythic mannish woman enjoyed. Sportswriters and social commentators spent ink on all of these fears as they met its embodiment in Babe.³⁶

Living with Difference

As her biographers noted, Babe was "seen by many reporters and members of the public as a freak. She was insulted, ignored, laughed at. . . . She was

an aberration, in her way, a living put-down to all things feminine." Her high school days barely behind her, Babe "was bucking society even then," as Ruth Scurlock said. But suddenly she was in a national arena with cameras rolling and pens poised where "just being herself" was tantamount to gender heresy. Once she gained national prominence she lost the flexibility she had had in her working-class town because she was judged by middle-class ideals, which increasingly circumscribed her image. She abhorred the accoutrements of femininity (clothes, makeup, flirtation) and could not conform. "She really had no other choice," Scurlock believed. And while Babe spoke of the toll of her nonconformity to no one, "it must have been painfully difficult at times." Babe, significantly, never spoke in later years of these innuendos about her androgyny. In fact she refused to discuss her track and field days at all, saying, "My sports career began with golf." Denial of this magnitude hints at immense distress and severe personal pain. Just as Babe kept her silence so did her family members, athletic peers, and allies. Even thirty-five years after her death only a couple of people dared discuss this aspect of Babe's life.³⁷

Her sexual identity provided a constant tension in press coverage between 1934 and 1938. Surrounding her Olympic victories, sports copy dissected her physique and features, often painting a fascinating creature who was not quite female. For example, one story comforted the reader that "she is not a freakish looking character . . . [but] a normal, healthy, boyish looking girl." Another account in 1932 said, "She likes to fight. Her voice is deep, her remarks virulent and pointed. She has few close girl friends and isn't much interested in boys." Babe was keenly aware of how these portrayals cast her outside the female gender. The latter interview closed with Babe saying, "I know I'm not pretty but I do try to be graceful."³⁸

One reporter, stammering and blushing, croaked out the question, "do you-er-find that binding undergarments-er-what I means is . . ." Babe, all ways to the point, asked, "Are you trying to ask me if I wear girdles, bras-sieres and the rest of that junk?" "Y-y-y-es," sputtered the reporter in sudden relief. "The answer is no," she snapped. "What do you think I am, a sissy?" This "sissy" comment came to haunt Babe. Because the term was usually used as a pejorative levied at effeminate men, Babe's use of it further muddled her gender identity in the public eye.³⁹

Speculation about Babe's sexuality escalated when she returned to Dallas to continue competing for Employers Casualty Company in the fall of 1932. As she prepared for the next basketball season, Babe claimed the Illinois Women's Athletic Club, the team that had come in second to her solo first place finish at the national track and field meet, offered her \$300 a

month to join it. In a bidding war that Babe had hoped for all along, Homer R. Mitchell, the president of ECC, raised her salary from \$75 to \$300 a month.⁴⁰

At this time Babe was aware of the rumors about her personal life, according to Betty Jameson, a friend and golf peer of Babe's in the 1940s and 1950s. During her track and field days "some people even questioned her being, you know—she looked—she wore her hair a little short and she was so strong and did all these things—and they would say well she never lost her tomboyishness." Babe later told Peggy Kirk Bell, a dear personal friend, that she was glad she'd gotten into golf because it had quieted "that talk." Bell told Jameson, "She knew what people said about her at one time, about being mannish, but she really outlived that. . . . That was in her track and field days." So badly did Babe want to shed this chapter of her life, Dodd recalled, that she kept her Olympic track and field medals stuffed in a coffee can on the kitchen counter, not displayed openly alongside the golf trophies.⁴¹

Although she was pained by her androgyny in her later years, in the 1930s Babe embraced her oddity status. In fact, she often separated herself even further from other female athletes, a group already on the social fringe. For example, after the Olympics Babe told reporters that she wasn't nervous before running a race. "Why should I be that way?" she cracked. "I'm only running against girls." In an ironic twist, Babe cast herself in a separate category from female track athletes. To her thinking, her separate status spoke to her superior skills. To the public's ear, her comments easily reinforced her freakish status.⁴²

Because of this attitude she was often judged harshly. To her biographers she "began to act more mannish, more hard-boiled. Her features were lean and bony, and her hair was cut in a stark bob that could scarcely be less complimentary." To these authors, "she seemed to glory in a coarse demeanor which implied that if she could not be feminine and pretty, then she would be as absolutely unfeminine and unpretty as possible."⁴³

One could interpret this as willful, almost acidic arrogance, as these biographers do. Yet a more likely—and more sensitive—interpretation is this: Babe felt alien among women, as Ruth Scurlock said. She was also a foreigner to male privileges and norms. Thus stranded, she developed a set of survival skills that helped her excel in a large family, a tough neighborhood, and international athletic competition. Through her midtwenties, being different worked for Babe. She gained attention, status, money, and their accompanying privileges: parental approval, fame, self-esteem, self-determination, and a complex gender identity. The press helped her attain these things. She

recognized that. Although she never became psychologically independent of the press and public attention, in the 1930s she was, fleetingly, able to function without their full approval.

The press helped Babe gain notoriety in these few years. Texas physical education teachers, themselves squeezed between cultural tolerance for girls' and women's athletics and their own personal fears of innuendo and accusations of abnormality, used Babe to prove a point. They "posted signs on school bulletin boards reading: 'DON'T BE A MUSCLE JOKE.' 'Muscle moll' had become code for unfeminine, rough, and unacceptable. Dr. Belle Mead Holm, dean of the women's physical education department at Lamar University in Beaumont, said of her youth, "My mother used to cry when I played softball. She'd say, 'I just don't want to you grow up to be like Babe Didrikson.'"⁴⁴

Holm, a native Texan, speculated on how things might have gone for Babe "if there had been fashions to make her look attractive." "The Babe and the bob," Holm recalled, "it was bad business, men didn't know how to cut women's hair in those days." While short hair was the rage in big cities, it was also accompanied by an undeniably flirtatious and sexual demeanor. Babe had the hair, but not the behavior to go with it. What Babe "violated," as Holm correctly knew, was "proper" female aspirations. "A girl was taught from babyhood," Holm said, "that she must always be presentable in order to be marketable."⁴⁵

Babe was anything but a "marketable" female at that time. Sportswriters zeroed in on this. Pegler wrote, "Few girls deliberately assume the disadvantage that the Babe imposed on herself in refusing to paint on a new mouth and arched brows." What's critical to note is that Babe did not want to be marketable, she did not want to conform, she did not want to fit in quietly to sex roles as they existed. Not then.⁴⁶

Paul Gallico epitomized columnists obsessed with Babe's lack of femininity. She was, he wrote, "a lean, spare girl of medium height, made apparently of rawhide, with taffy colored hair, green eyes and a prominent Adam's apple." Her hair was "cut short like a boy" and she had "a faint down on her upper lip." His description of her behavior capped off this alien creature: she was "brash, truculent and cocky." And Betty Hicks paid Babe a backhanded compliment that echoed Gallico: "The image remains vivid of the geometric, bosomless, narrow-thin Texan with the hacked-off hair, skimming the low hurdles to an 80-meter world record. I had dreamed adolescent dreams of being a star athlete; now I saw what a woman athlete had to be."⁴⁷

In "Texas Babe," penned in October 1932 and run in *Vanity Fair* just two

months after his much ballyhooed afternoon with Babe on the links, Gallico was obsessed with Babe's oddity. He compares his curiosity about her with his attraction for the bearded lady and the albino girl at the circus sideshow. After their golf game, "Nobody knew whether to invite the Babe into the men's locker room for a bath and a drink, or whether to say—"Well, good-bye kid, see you later."" She went off with some women folk, but "the strange, nineteen-year-old girl-boy child would have been right at home there." Gallico's is a bipolar love-hate, admiration-disdain account of Babe. He used the word "boy" over a dozen times in describing her, yet crowded, "She can do anything" athletically. The same characteristics that made her "not-quite-female" also made her a champion. It apparently did not occur to Gallico that she could be both a woman and a champion.

He painted her as comic in their golf match in her pink dress and hat perched on the crown of her head. He wasn't alone in his speculations about Babe, he told his national readership. "Everybody in Los Angeles was talking about the Babe. Was she all boy? Or had she any feminine traits?" She roughhoused with men she barely knew but bought undeniably women's shoes on a Dallas shopping trip. An enigma.

Gallico pitied Babe, whom he called "a very paragon of Muscle Molls. But not a very happy girl I judge," because she was not pretty and "cannot compete with other girls in the very ancient and honored sport of mantrapping." She used no cosmetics in her quest for competing rights with other women, "but she competes with girls, fiercely and hungrily, at everything else." She was closed out of the inner circle of good-looking female athletes because she was always competing for the wrong prize. As her peers chattered away in a clique, Gallico concluded, "The greatest woman athlete in the world stood on the outside, looking on."⁴⁸

While others echoed Gallico's sentiments, few rivaled his acidity. In "Honey," a short story printed in *Vanity Fair* in the spring of 1933, Gallico ridiculed Babe with accusations of being neither male nor female and discussed, but dismissed, her lesbianism. It's fiction, yet a huge, full-body shot of Dikrikson, titled "Tough Babe," dominates the page opposite the story. It's a handsome, strong, self-confident twenty-year-old, with elbows resting on spread knees, who's smiling at the reader. Gallico despised all three of these attributes (although he was bewitched by her strength) and attacks each in turn.

The story would be libelous if it were not a story about "Honey Hadwell." But for those too dense to see through the charade, Gallico inserts "Babe Fredrikson," another female athlete. Gallico's fictional Babe is first assailed

for her looks. When Honey appeared at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, she "had the most beautiful body that anyone ever saw on a woman because it happened to be a boy's body . . . and the two little buttons she wore for breasts" did not hit her in the chin as she hurdled (a common problem for the other girls, we're told by Gallico). "Her chassis," Gallico informs the reader, "was strictly utilitarian."⁴⁹

Here, Gallico disembodies Honey's face and head from her impressive, albeit boyish, body. Thinly veiled sexual imagery permeates his text: "Her face," he begins ruthlessly, "is something else again." It is hard, as hard and tough as Honey is. "Her mouth was just a pale slit." She is pale because she shuns rouge as sissy, her term for all that is frivolously feminine. "She had a hawk's beak for a nose and a pair of cold eyes."

Gallico builds a thin plot around Honey and her uncategorizable physique and gender. He strikes a nerve here; she does not "belong" with women or men. Perhaps she is lesbian, he speculates. In the Olympic village she "danced a lot with one of the girls because the men rarely asked her." The dance partner "wanted to be her sweetheart," but Honey overhears her female suitor referred to "as a Lez." And though "Honey had never heard the term before, her instincts made the small hairs at the nape of her neck bristle." Honey abruptly rejects her suitor. Gallico convinced that Honey is neither quite female nor male, thus dismisses lesbianism. Gallico has a second reason: he needs his hero to have a heterosexual encounter so he can determine her success at that as well.

Honey overhears "real" women gossiping, who ridicule her drawing speech, her swearing, and her unattractiveness to men. They also mock Honey's attempts at femininity, roaring at the backless swimsuit she has shown them. Honey, hearing all through the walls, rips and shreds the suit as she tears it from her body. Her outsider status among women is now secured.

Unfeminine, not-even-female Honey floors one and all when big Mike Suss, the Polish javelin thrower who is as gloriously all man as she is perplexingly "other," attaches himself to her at several consecutive nightly dances. The young women swoon with furrowed brows. Why did he choose Honey? They never danced; "mostly they just stood on the fringe." Gallico's decision to disallow Babe any real heterosexual contact reasserts her third sex status. The female in-fighting is ugly in its stereotypical predictability. Jo-casta, a high diver, complains to the others, why did he pick "that dried-up tough-as-nails-little-bitch?"

It seems that Suss was practicing javelin throws with Honey, and once he'd

smashed the world record by ten feet, he stopped paying her any attention. He'd used her to learn her javelin skills, much to the delight of the other athletes, one of whom muses, "All's fair in love and sport!"

The story closes with Honey's self-hatred in full swing. "The sobs tore her boy's breast. . . . She lay on her face on her bed, like any girl, and cried miserably and seemingly without end. . . . She clawed at herself," crying, "Sissy! Sissy! Sissy! Cry baby!" And to literally punish herself for her inability to catch and keep a man "she punched at her chin with her own right hand and hurt herself."

The very next day Honey Hadwell breaks the javelin record. Alone in her room she touches "the steel tip of her spear with a horny finger" and ends this dreadful piece of fiction by saying, "Ah throwed it right through his black heart." The message is clear: Honey traded athletic excellence for any semblance of a personal life. She is a freak to one and all—the bearded lady, the albino girl.⁵⁰

Gallico, who many believed was Babe's personal friend, "wrote about her as a member of a breed of 'women who made possible deliciously frank and biological discussions in the newspapers as to whether this or that woman athlete should be addressed as Miss, Mrs., Mr. or It.'" Although in retrospect this may have fostered some meaningful reinterpretations of sexuality, it did so in the cruelest possible fashion that left Babe bearing the pain of it.⁵¹

In retrospect even Gallico admitted his painful barbs at Babe were excessive. She bore "all the jokes that were made about her—mostly having to do with her prowess and masculinity—many of which were on the borderline," he wrote. In a self-reflective moment Gallico confessed, "I wrote about her in this vein in those days, . . . we were free and easy in our prose and columns then, . . . and I am afraid that we often wrote as though the subjects were blind, or could not read, or would never see our articles, or had no sensibilities." He comforted his conscience by maintaining that Babe never "seemed to be angry with [him] for thus publicly prying into her being" or reprimanded him for "discussing the possibility of [her] case of suppressed femininity." Perhaps she "was too polite to say so, or shy of the power of the press." Gallico speculated that "while Mildred's exterior might be thorny and callused (circa 1932) [she had] a deep-seated desire for the very frilly things she so mocked."⁵²

Gallico, even years later, underestimated the virulence of his prose labeling Babe as someone somewhere between man and woman. Members of the "intermediate sex," as one historian argued, had "shed their primary identity as women before the world they inhabited accepted the legitimacy of

androgyny." In turn they received "public condemnation, social ostracism, and legal censorship." Lacking real economic or political power to legitimize their difference, they failed. Little wonder that Gallico's and others' prose wounded Babe deeply and helped precipitate her fierce public rejection of all things "masculine."⁵³

Sex Testing and Women Athletes

Babe's personal circumstances were compounded, no doubt, by widespread speculation about the chromosomal and gender identity of women track and field athletes in general. Hostility toward women track athletes and their feared abnormality permeated all levels. In 1936 at the Berlin Olympics, Avery Brundage, the U.S. Olympic Committee president, remarked, "I am fed up to the ears with women as track and field competitors. Their charms sink to less than zero." Brundage's sentiments were shared by many. According to one sportswriter, "What male does not want girls to be sweetly feminine, and nice and sweet and frilly?" He then attacked one sprinter, nicknamed the "Galloping Ace," as "a big, lanky, flat-chested girl with as much sex appeal as grandmother's old sewing machine." Like Brundage, the sportswriter concluded that her success was due to her masculinity and "beauty and success in girls' track and field sports don't go together so well."⁵⁴

Unfortunately, the only defense against such virulence was to prove one's femininity rather than deny the attacker's limited worldview. Thus Roxy Atkins, adoringly referred to as "the most beautiful competitor" and thus beyond reproach, "challenged the 'masculine' label, emphasizing that 'innuendoes' concerning the 'Galloping Ace' were false, and citing numerous examples of sportswomen who were attractive, feminine and 'gilt-edged securities in the marriage market.'" This strategy did not work in all instances, as the name-calling continued. In the 1936 Olympics, Helen Stephens, an American sprinter, was described derisively as a "bobbed-haired, flat-chested, boyishly built winner." And these were the kinder cuts.⁵⁵

Rumors abounded in the 1930s "that several of the outstanding performances in the women's track and field competitions had been contributed, not by females, but by males," according to a sports historian. A few highly touted cases fueled these suspicions. Some female athletes were male and others were pseudohermaphrodites according to contemporaries who relied on visual inspections, the athletes' confessions, or their own surety. Middle European countries, American logic declared, "in their zeal to have winning teams," encouraged or recruited these individuals. Suspicion of one athlete

Babe became part of broader

led the genders of all to be impugned, and since such cases were nearly impossible to prove or disprove, a charge was tantamount to assumed guilt.⁵⁶

In many instances it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate truth from fiction. Stella Walsh of Poland, credited by many as being "the greatest woman track athlete of all time," is still believed by some to have been a man. Her skill at events such as the broad jump, discus, basketball throw, and sprints led her to thirty-five national championships between 1930 and 1951 and made her one of Babe's prime competitors. Their rivalry climaxed in 1930-31. At the AAU nationals in 1930, Walsh set three world records; Babe set two records but lost to Walsh in the long jump. In that same year Walsh appeared in the Women's Olympics in Prague and won the 60-, 100-, and 200-meter dashes. The two met again in 1931. This time Babe won three events to Walsh's one. Speculation about Walsh's chromosomal makeup continued at that time. There were no tests, and rumors were founded upon visual impressions. Some athletes who competed against Walsh maintained she was a man.⁵⁷

This debate deeply affected Babe's perceived normalcy. If Walsh was male, as many believed, and Didrikson proved to be the superior athlete, what did this mean about Babe? To some it meant she dwelled in or bordered on third sex status; rumors abounded that she took estrogen to "qualify" as female. As Bertha Bowen recalled, while on the golf tour, "when Babe was first coming out, and was a little husky there was always whispering going on. . . . You have to cope with it [the talk] when you get it."⁵⁸

Little wonder, then, that Babe began to transform her gender identity between 1932 and 1936. Several years after she was dubbed a muscle moll, she was still openly refuting the charge. In "I Blow My Own Horn" Babe adamantly reaffirmed her "normalcy" in an attempt to hush rumors. She did this by pointing to ways in which she was heterosexual and feminine. First, she cautioned the reader not to think her unfeminine because "when I was little I would rather play with my Dad's hammer or hatchet than dolls." Here she scolded the reporter, "Don't put that down as proof that I'm not feminine. I like to sew and knit, and I can cook pretty good, too. One of the first dresses I designed and made won the first prize at the Texas State Fair." She further claimed that her love of dancing exceeded her love of golf. And though when "the boys shuffle up to dance with me they look kind of doubtful [because] they think I'm a Muscle Moll and they wonder if I'm going to hit their feet like I hit those tee shots," she surprised them with her smooth footwork.

As for the frequent and annoying inquiries about marriage? People, she

said, "are always asking me 'Are you going to get married, Babe?'" and it gets my goat. They seem to think I'm a strange, unnatural being summed up in the words 'Muscle Moll', and the idea seems to be that Muscle Molls are not people." Babe reassured her fans and doubters that "I look forward to having a home and children just like anybody else, maybe more than some." As deftly as she'd tinker with a sprint's time or the length of a javelin toss, Babe created this bit of "fact": "Only I can't get married for a while yet. My contract won't let me, and I've got a three-year contract." This was followed quickly by a statement that approximates the truth. "I wanted to be independent first before I got married."⁵⁹

We can see the evolution of her persona through this question. In 1931 she said that she wouldn't pick out a husband because "a girl can't get ahead that way." She was wearing a diamond and snapped, "Bought it myself. It was a diamond I wanted, not a man." To Babe, her professional sports career meant money and money meant freedom, "doing the things I want to do when I want to." One year later an article entitled "Babe Sure She Will Marry" finds Babe sounding more certain, less adamant about independence, and siding with mainstream middle-class gender-appropriate values. "Of course I am going to marry . . . and there is plenty of time, after I have had a year or two of touring the country. I haven't picked out my future husband—and so far as I know, no one has picked me out." Annoyed, Babe continued, "Another question that disturbs me is: 'Babe, are you going to have children?' Every normal woman looks forward to having children, and I don't think I am much different from most women. At least I know I like children, and expect to have some of my own."⁶⁰

Later this speculation about gender escalated. In 1957, Dora Ratjen, a German world record holder in the high jump in 1938, "admitted . . . that his name had always been Hermann." Similarly Lea Caula and Claire Bressolles, 1946 European track and field medal winners, "later appeared as Leon and Pierre." And in 1964 Sim Kin Dan of North Korea, who set records in the women's 400- and 800-meter events that year, "was soon thereafter recognized by an elderly South Korean gentleman as the son he had lost during World War II."⁶¹

This string of revelations plus rumors about other "questionable" women athletes prompted the International Amateur Athletic Foundation in 1966 to force women track and field athletes at the championships in Budapest "to prove their femaleness before their events by parading nude in front of a panel of three women gynecologists." Outraged by this "invasion of privacy, 234 participated and passed with flying female colors." Yet several

prominent Eastern European athletes failed to show up, causing speculation in *Time* and *Life* magazines. *Sports Illustrated*, however, questioned the ethics of the examination.⁶²

In fact, succumbing to cultural pressures, women athletes themselves often decried musculature in female competitors. Also in 1966 the female chair of the Women's Board of the U.S. Olympic Development Committee, referring to the bulky physiques of competitors, said, "To most of the women in the U.S. and to many women of other nations, the shot put and discus throw are forms of competition that are generally unacceptable to the feminine image." Reliable chromosomal testing to determine gender came thirty-four years after Didrikson's Olympic appearance. But the rumblings and suspicions were ever present in 1932 and Babe was the primary target.⁶³

- conflating musculature (body type) with gender identity with sexual orientation
- psychologists only recently removed homosexuality from the DSM

Trials, Triumphs, and Sideshow Trickery

In 1932–33 Babe was marginally successful at exploiting her deviance. Yet double-edged appeal, bragging, and gender slippage rendered her an enigmatic character to many. After the Olympics she ran afoul of the AAU, which devoted itself to reducing her competitive chances. Her antihero status had begun to backfire. Yet she continued to mold the characterization of herself as an Amazonian renegade. A patchwork existence of one-on-one exhibitions and sideshows gained her notoriety, but it also exacerbated her appearance as "other," an outsider status that haunted her for years.

On February 1, 1933, a Dodge automobile ad appeared in the *Chicago Daily Times* that pictured Babe hurdling with the caption "Dodge 6 is a real champion. Claims she owns one, her second Dodge. The Stuff That Makes Real Champions—Babe Didrikson." The southern branch of the AAU acted swiftly, decisively, and disastrously: it declared her a professional. Although Babe claimed she did not receive any money for the ad and wired the AAU, "I positively did not give anyone authority to use my name or picture in any advertising matter," she was instantly disqualified from rejoining the Golden Cyclones or entering future AAU track meets. The Dallas Dodge dealer wrote the AAU, as did the advertising agency involved. Both swore to her innocence. It is difficult to determine Babe's complicity or motives in this matter, however. She did deny any firm endorsement of the ad and she did know product endorsement and compensation equaled professional status. Yet did she try to hustle Chrysler and the public? She may have privately given her approval of the ad in return for later compensation. That the dealership as well as the agency echoed her every word could speak to their savvy that Didrikson as an ally would become an asset.¹

75. *Ibid.*

76. *TLIL*, 57. Yet, as the Babe Didrikson Zaharias Museum in Beaumont, Tex., quickly points out in a flyer given to all visitors upon entering, "The International Amateur Athletic Federation sanctioned Miss Didrikson's jump as the world record, which she held jointly with Miss Shiley for six years." Later she was given a first place tie. See "The 'Babe.'" In the 1990s, local Beaumonters devoted themselves anew to securing a posthumous first-place gold for Babe's jump.

77. Evans, "Status," 164; "Mid-Week Pictorial," *New York Times*, n.d.; "Babe Didrikson," cartoon, Metropolitan Newspaper Feature Service Inc., n.p., n.d.; "America's Hopes in 1932 Women's Olympic Games," n.p., n.d.; "How About a Women's All-Around Championship?" n.p., n.d., all in Scrapbooks. Arnold, *The Olympic Games*, 65, 164. Her closet rival was Helen Madison, "the outstanding Olympic swimmer, who received 45 votes."

78. "Personal Glimpses: The World-Beating Girl Viking of Texas," *Literary Digest*, Aug. 27, 1932, 26.

79. "Current Events, USA," *American-Scandinavian Review* 20 (Aug.-Sept. 1932): 448; Bergman, "Sports," 292–93; Hansen, "Contributions to Sports," 164–65.

80. Post-Olympic coverage, Scrapbooks; Johnson and Williamson, "Whatta-Gal," 5; Knudson, *Babe*, 36; Scurlock, "Fabulous Babe."

81. Johnson and Williamson, "Babe," part 1, 126.

82. Arnold, *The Olympic Games*, 47; Johnson and Williamson, "Whatta-Gal," 6–7.

83. "Welcome Home, Babe," *Dallas Journal*, Aug. 11, 1932, 5, Scrapbooks; "Dallas Welcomes Babe Didrikson Home," *Dallas Dispatch*, Aug. 11, 1932, 1, Scrapbooks; "Parents May Go to Dallas."

84. *Dallas Journal*, Aug. 11, 1932, 1, Aug. 12, 1932, 1, Scrapbooks; Johnson and Williamson, "Babe," part 1, 127.

85. "Parents May Go to Dallas"; "Dallas Welcomes," 1; See Testimonial Citation from the Citizenship of Dallas, Aug. 11, 1932, Scrapbooks. The signing mayor was Charles E. Delaney. "Babe Honored by Ad League," n.p., n.d., Scrapbooks; Johnson and Williamson, "Babe," part 1, 127.

86. Johnson and Williamson, "Babe," part 1, 49; Johnson and Williamson, "Whatta-Gal," 109.

87. "Parents May Go to Dallas."

88. "Crowds Cheer 'Babe' in Welcome Parade: City Turns Out to Pay Girl Honor," *Beaumont Journal*, Aug. 16, 1932, 1, Doct 11.1.4.17; Merita Mills, "Beaumont Places Her Laurel Wreath on Brow of 'Babe,' Returning Heroine," *Beaumont Journal*, Aug. 16, 1932, Doct. 11.1.4.19.

89. Mills, "Beaumont Places Wreath."

90. *Ibid.*; Didrikson to Scurlock, Aug. 25, 1932, Doct. 11.1.14.16.

91. Cartoon, *Amarillo Globe*, Aug. 15, 1932, 1; "Babe," n.p., n.d., Scrapbooks.

92. "Girl Star's Plea Heeded: Court Gives Miss Didrikson Right to Handle Own Business Affairs," *New York Times*, Aug. 30, 1932, 15.

Chapter 3: A Sportswriter's Dream

1. Riley, *Inventing*, 109; Ethel Klein, *Gender Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Carol Ruth Berkin and Mary Beth Norton, eds., *Women of America: A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979); Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies, and the American Dream* (New York: Avon, 1974), 139–258. Hepburn later starred in the film *Pat and Mike*, in which Babe appeared.

2. Evans, "Status."

3. See, for example, Doris Watts, "Changing Conceptions of Competitive Sport for Girls and Women in the United States from 1880–1960" (Ph.D. diss., UCLA, 1960); Mrozek, "The 'Amazon,'" 59; quotation from Sally Fox, *The Sporting Woman: A Book of Days* (Bulfinch Press, 1989), p. opposite Mar. 13–18; John Durant and Otto Bettman, *A Pictorial History of American Sports from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1952), 84.

4. Durant and Bettman, *Pictorial History*, 49, 98, 100, 147; see P. Vertinsky, "The Effect of Changing Attitudes towards Sexual Morality upon the Promotion of Physical Education for Women in Nineteenth-Century America," 165–77; Mary-Lou Squires, "Sport and the Cult of True Womanhood: A Paradox at the Turn of the Century," 98–140; and Karen Kenney, "The Realm of Sports and the Athletic Woman, 1850–1900," all in *Her Story in Sport: A Historical Anthology of Women in Sports*, ed. Reet Howell (New York: West Point, 1982).

5. Durant and Bettman, *Pictorial History*, 147.

6. Mrozek, "The 'Amazon,'" 286.

7. *Ibid.*, 286–87; See Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*.

8. Kenney, "The Realm of Sports," 107–9; Barbara N. Noonkester, "The American Sportswoman from 1900–1920," in *Her Story in Sport*, ed. Howell, 181.

9. Susan Ware, *American Women in the 1930s: Holding Their Own* (Boston: Twayne, 1982), 1–24; Riley, *Inventing*, 99. In 1937 women's annual yearly wage was \$525, while men averaged \$1,027. Domestic earned \$312. The average family had "\$20 to \$25 a week to feed, clothe and provide shelter for itself."

10. Hagood, in *Mothers of the South*, 243, defines survival and achievement as "women's two primary life values."

11. Crawford and Ragsdale, "The Texas Babe," 274.

12. *TLIL*, 21. This sense of invincibility, albeit tinged by denial, came to play a major role in her ability to maintain hope amidst bouts with cancer.

13. *Ibid.*, 33.

14. B. D. Zaharias, "Valiant Woman," part 2, 34.

15. "Works as Clerk in Office and Devotes Spare Time to Training, Babe Didrikson of Dallas, Olympic Prospect, Holds Eight Track Records," n.p., n.d., Doct. 11.1.4.6; "Babe Doing Heavy Thinking," n.p., n.d., Scrapbooks.

16. Scurlock, "Fabulous Babe," 4; Johnson and Williamson, "Whatta-Gal," 9; Scurlock to editor of *Coronet*.

17. Scurlock, "Fabulous Babe," 4.
18. "Miss Didrikson Buys First Hat for Trip to U.S. Title Games," *New York Times*, July 11, 1932, 19.
19. Evans, "Status," 78–79; see also Grantland Rice, "Leading Ladies," *Collier's*, Apr. 6, 1929, 16; Grantland Rice, "Our Glorious Sports Girls," *Ladies Home Journal*, Nov. 1930, 22–23; and Grantland Rice, "Women with the Wallop," *Collier's*, July 11, 1925, 14.
20. Grantland Rice, "The Sportlight," July 23, 1932, Scrapbooks; Grantland Rice, "For Men Only?" *Collier's*, Sept. 24, 1932, 19.
21. Grantland Rice, *The Tumult and the Shouting: My Life in Sport* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1954), 240.
22. Ibid., 238–39; Grantland Rice, "'Babe' Athletic Marvel: Miss Didrikson's Feats Hard to Believe until You See Her in Action," 1932, North American Newspaper Alliance, Scrapbooks.
23. B. D. Zaharias, "This Life I've Led," part 2, 34.
24. Johnson and Williamson, "Whatta-Gal," 91, 237.
25. Herb Grassis interview, Mar. 15, 1987. The Golf Writer's Association collected money for Babe's cancer efforts.
26. Evans, "Status," 79–80.
27. Westbrook Pegler, "That Didrikson Babe Is a Sissy: And, According to Mr. Pegler, It Seems She Can Sew," Feb. 6, 1933, Doct. 11.1.13.10.
28. Paul Gallico, "The Texas Babe," *Vanity Fair*, Oct. 1932, 36, 71, reprinted in *The Thirties: A Time To Remember*, ed. Don Congdon (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 73–78; Paul Gallico, "Women in Sports Should Look Beautiful," *Reader's Digest*, Aug. 1936, 12–14.
29. Alfred Einsenstaedt, photographer, "Beautiful Skeeter: Pat Laursen Is Nationally Supervised," *Life*, Sept. 16, 1940, 54, 57.
30. Ethel McGary, "Ethel McGary Favors Competitive Sports for Women if Wisely Supervised," *Sportswoman*, Nov. 1931, 11–12.
31. Cunningham, "The Colonel's Ladies," 62.
32. Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds*, 78.
33. Paul Gallico, "Frisking for Sex," 48, within "The Little Babe from Texas Turned Out to Be One of the World's Greatest Athletes," *Esquire*, Mar. 1955, 48, Doct. 11.1.13.16. Gallico suggested in 1955 that any "oversized women" (he mentions a 6-foot-2-inch, 185-pound Russian high jumper) be forbidden to compete against other women. "She is unquestionably a female," he wrote, "but since she is so far from the norm of the average woman in height and weight (5 feet 4 inches, 135 pounds), it seems to me . . . silly and unfair to let her compete against average women." Here, Gallico's definition of normalcy creates another method by which women athletes can be deemed abnormal: size. This is the same year Babe claimed her eighteen-year-old frame had been 5 feet and 100 pounds.
34. Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds*, 77; Laird as quoted in Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds*, 39; Geoffrey Theobald as quoted in Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds*, 38.
35. Esther Newton, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin B. Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr. (New York: New American Library, 1989), 287, 282–83; Also see John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 288–95.
36. Smith-Rosenberg, "The New Woman," 271, 289–90; The ultimate fear, that she would usurp male enjoyment of women's erotic love, lurks in the foreground.
37. Johnson and Williamson, "Whatta-Gal," 20, 56, 58; quotation from Dodd interview, June 17, 1987, and Betty Jameson interview, May 19, 1988.
38. "Statements Describing Babe"; "Works as Clerk in Office."
39. Johnson and Williamson, "Whatta-Gal," 74.
40. B. D. Zaharias, "Valiant Woman," part 2, 34.
41. Jameson interview; Dodd interview, June 17, 1987.
42. Johnson and Williamson, "Whatta-Gal," 51.
43. Ibid., 74.
44. Ibid., 133.
45. Ibid.
46. Westbrook Pegler, "Babe Didrikson—A Real Champion," *Journal American*, Oct. 9, 1956, Doct. 11.1.10.7.
47. Gallico, "The Little Babe from Texas," 48; Betty Hicks, "Babe Didrikson Zaharias: 'Stand Back! This Ain't No Kid Hittin,'" *womenSports*, Nov. 1975, 27.
48. Gallico, "The Little Babe from Texas," 71.
49. Paul Gallico, "Honey," *Vanity Fair*, Apr. 1933. Gallico was not alone in his disdain for flat-chestedness. Some physical educators also believed that women with small breasts needed development. Certain high schools adopted rules that discouraged two-handed basketball passes because they supposedly cultivated flat chests and round shoulders. As one historian noted, "The flat-chested woman, after all, would fare poorly beside her buxom sister in the marriage selection process." Himes, in "The Female Athlete," 133–34, discusses the "Newcomb" style of basketball as espoused by Clara G. Baer, physical educator at Newcomb College, and physical educator Henry S. Curtis.
50. Gallico, "Honey."
51. Johnson and Williamson, "Whatta-Gal," 20.
52. Gallico "The Little Babe from Texas," 48.
53. Smith-Rosenberg, "The New Woman," 295–96.
54. King, *Spectators No More*, 62; Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds*, 76–77.
55. Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds*, 77, 80.
56. Gerber, Felshin, Berlin, and Wyrick, *The American Woman in Sport*, 418.
57. Evans, "Status," 133, 155–56; Hicks interview, Mar. 8, 1988. During the autopsy following Walsh's murder in 1980 the coroner discovered her hermaphroditism; she did have male sexual organs. Ralph Hickock, "Stella Walsh," *A Who's Who of Sports Champions: Their Stories and Records* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 817–18.