

The Secret History of Little League's First Girl

Today you can sign up for almost any sport you want. But it wasn't so easy for Tubby Johnston. BY TOD OLSON

In the spring of 1950, a new kid named Tubby Johnston showed up for Little League tryouts in Corning, New York. No one recognized him. But he was good—really good. It was no surprise when Tubby made the team.

About a week later, the new kid shocked everyone. Tubby revealed that his real name was Kathryn. For the first time ever, a girl was playing Little League Baseball.

It's Not Fair

When Kathryn Johnston was growing up, it wasn't easy for a girl to play sports. At school, girls could join the tennis, swimming, or track team. Usually, those were the only choices. At the 1948 Summer Olympics, there were 136 events. Women competed in 19 of them.

But Kathryn loved sports. She played baseball with her father whenever she could. Pretty soon, she could hit better than her brother, Tommy. But it was Tommy who got to

play Little League. Kathryn told her mother it wasn't fair. Her mother's response: "Why don't you try out?"

Together, they cut off Kathryn's long braids. Kathryn borrowed a pair of Tommy's pants. She tucked the rest of her hair under one of his hats. By the end of the day, she was playing first base for the King's Dairy team.

Secret's Out

Before long, Kathryn realized she couldn't keep her secret forever. So she told the coach. "If you're good enough to make the team," he said, "you're good enough to stay on the team."

Kathryn's teammates welcomed her right away. But players from other teams tried to