

UP FRONT



WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SPORTS MUSEUM

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Mildred Martin Allen and the Hill District's Satellites Softball Team

From 1960 to 1976, the Tri-Boro Softball League provided young women a rare opportunity for athletic competition at a time when women, especially African American women, struggled for equal rights. Mildred Allen not only helped launch the league, she coached while playing shortstop and second base for the Hill District's Satellites alongside three of her daughters. A graduate of Fifth Avenue High School, Allen competed for

school softball and volleyball teams, long before she became an organizer and coach on the softball diamond.

The Satellites were league champions in 1966 when Allen served as associate manager with her sister Beatrice Mahaffey managing and husband Thomas Allen coaching. She also served as its commissioner for many years until the league disbanded. Family time and playing softball coincided in frequent, demanding practices and traveling to area fields.

A team uniform from the 1970s symbolizes the role sports played in the Civil Rights and women's movements. Athletics became one of many ways to empower African American women seeking equal opportunities on the field and off. The United Black Front, a Hill District organization focused

on economic development, sponsored the team in 1970. The team uniform colors of red, black, and green mirror the Pan African flag and visually link the team to a larger struggle—in the Pittsburgh community and nationally—for liberation and equality. Just two years earlier, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination spurred a violent reaction in the Hill District community. Clyde Jackson founded the United Black Front to serve as a social service agency to aid victims of the riots. It also became a prime mover in the Black Construction Coalition, which developed the Pittsburgh Plan and secured more than 1,000 jobs for African Americans in the construction industry.

Just two years after wearing this uniform, the Satellites again won the league championship in 1972, the same year as Title IX's enactment. Title IX required gender equity for boys and girls in educational and athletic programs that received federal funding, changing the landscape of sport for female athletes. Mildred Allen's time on the softball diamond bridged a period of major cultural and political change—she provided African American girls from the Hill District with a place to compete while also demonstrating that all deserve equal access and opportunities, on the field and off.

The Satellites played their home games at Ammon Field on Bedford Avenue, where the community proudly rallied around them. Games could get intense with nearby rivals



The 1960 Ammon Recreation Center volleyball team. Mildred Allen is third from left.

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Hill District Satellites. Mildred is in the second row, far right, and Beatrice is six players to the left, 1970.
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such as the Garfieldettes and the Homewood Orbits. Others in the league were the Speed Queens, the Vikings, and the Jets from areas outside the city such as McKeesport, Duquesne, and East Liberty.

Mildred Allen passed away in 2003 but her legacy lives on. Decades after Crawfords legend Josh Gibson played there, Ammon Field is still used by softball and youth baseball teams and was renamed Josh Gibson Field in 2008. The Josh Gibson Foundation uses it as its home field, providing academic and athletic programs for area boys and girls. 🌞

Note: The Satellites name spelling varies over the years, including the original spelling as "Satilites."



Daughter Beatrice (Allen) Harper donated her mother's collection of softball and volleyball artifacts, including this 1970 "Satellites" uniform displayed in the Western Pennsylvania Sports Museum.
HHC Collections, 2003.44.4 a,b. Photo by Liz Simpson.