

**HELEN EARLENE
“BEANS”
RISINGER
1927-2008**



**GIRLS
BASEBALL
LEAGUE
PITCHER**

In 1943, with the financial backing of Chicago Cubs owner Philip Wrigley, the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) was born. “Beans” Risinger’s six seasons as a professional baseball player etched her place in League history.

Helen Earlene Risinger was born in March 1927 in Hess, a tiny town of thirty people near the Texas border – not even on the map. She grew up in poverty during the Dust Bowl and Great Depression. Her parents dubbed her “Beans” because she liked pork and beans for breakfast. She loved sports, often watching her father, uncles and cousins play on a sandlot team on Sunday afternoons. He taught her to throw a baseball at an early age, and they played catch almost every day.

After high school graduation in 1945, Risinger had no money for college so she worked in the local cotton fields. While reading The Oklahoman newspaper at the local grocery store in the spring of 1947, she learned about a traveling All-American Girls baseball team coming to Oklahoma City. Beans had no idea that girls could play baseball professionally.

Risinger sent a postcard to the sports page editor, who forwarded it to the league’s office in Chicago. They invited her to tryout in Oklahoma City, where she received an offer to play for the Rockford Peaches. She borrowed money from a bank and got on a train, but turned around in Chicago and came back home because she was so homesick. Then she went back to the cotton fields to repay the bank.

She got her second chance in 1948. This time she took a one-day bus ride to Springfield, Illinois. The manager and chaperone took the 6’2” Risinger under their wings, and made her a pitcher. In her rookie season, she compiled a 3-8 record for the Sallies, but they folded due to poor attendance. During a January 1949 tour of South America, the Grand Rapid Chicks coach taught her the finer points of pitching, and moved her to his team, where she played the rest of her career. In the 1949 season, Risinger went 15-12.

After a record attendance of 910,000 in 1948, the number of teams began to decline. In 1950, Beans went 14-13 but the next two years dropped to 8-8 and 10-15. Her best season was in 1953, when she was selected to the All-Star Team. She hurled a six-hit shutout in the first round against Rockford to send the Chicks to the final series, where they swept Kalamazoo to clinch the 1953 Championship Title.

The League’s last year in 1954 ended in controversy. When Fort Wayne’s catcher was injured during the playoffs, league officials allowed them to add the Rockford all-star catcher to the roster. The Chicks played the first game under protest – but won. Refusing to play, the Chicks forfeited the next two games, sending the Daisies to the championship round, where they were defeated by Kalamazoo.

Beans’ high leg kick was an imposing figure on the mound. Known as a tough pitcher to hit, she threw a good fastball, curve, and changeup, but she often walked more batters than she fanned. Although Beans didn’t always have great control, she was what 21st century commentators called “effectively wild”.

After baseball, Risinger remained in Grand Rapids, working as an x-ray technician until her 1991 retirement. The AAGPBL was inducted in the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1988, after giving over 600 women the opportunity to play professional baseball, representing one of the most unique aspects of baseball history. Risinger served as a consultant for the 1992 film “A League of Their Own”, which told AAGPBL’s story. She also wrote a one-page autobiography to help young women realize that dreams can come true. Risinger, who spent her winters with family in Oklahoma, died in July 2008 in Altus at age 81.