Out of Her League?

Pam Postema grew up in Willard, Ohio, hooked on sports and with an unusual ambition—she aspired to be a major-league baseball umpire. At the time, this seemed like an impossible dream. No one took her seriously. Postema persisted, however, and in 1977 enrolled in the country’s top umpiring school. At that time, she was twenty-two and well aware of the strong bias against women in professional baseball. Although the school she chose to attend had previously accepted several women, none had completed the course. In its entire history, the school had graduated seven thousand men but not one woman!

The umpiring school’s chief instructor treated Postema fairly, and he was also very candid with her. He told her that her chances of getting a top job in the future were slim. In order to make it into the major leagues, she would have to be twice as good as any man. Postema was determined to succeed, and she did well at the school, graduating seventeenth out of a class of over a hundred students. She began at once to look for a job as a professional baseball umpire.

Within a few months, Postema made her professional debut with the Gulf Coast Single A League. During the next few years, she advanced steadily. In 1983, she began calling plays in the Triple A Pacific League, one step below the majors. It was not easy, though. If a male umpire made a bad call, it was brushed aside. If Postema did the same thing, she was accused of becoming flustered. Some baseball fans seized on any errors she made as “proof” that umpiring was not an appropriate occupation for a woman.

Postema believed that a manager would often view a confrontation with her as a test of his manhood; if he failed to intimidate her, he felt somehow disgraced. She wanted to show that no one should expect to attack her authority with impunity, so she ejected managers and players from the game at twice the rate of other umpires. She even had three spectators thrown out of the ballpark for making obnoxious remarks about female umpires. Postema admits she sometimes enjoyed arguing, whether with managers, players, or even other umpires. In fact, she says that many umpires are addicted to arguing.
In 1988, Postema got a job umpiring the National League spring-training games, where she had to deal with major-league players and managers. When the starting pitcher for the Pittsburgh Pirates told a reporter that God never intended women to be major-league baseball umpires, Postema retorted that she doubted that God was interested in baseball. Not everyone was as blatant as the Pirates’ pitcher. But the hostility directed against her, far from diminishing, seemed to intensify as her career advanced.

Pam Postema’s career as a professional baseball umpire was marked by talent and spirit. Her stint in the minors had lasted seven years when she was dropped from the official list of umpires. There was nothing unusual about this. After about five years in the minors, most umpires are let go to give others a chance; very few make it into the majors.

**Answer each of the following questions in the form of a sentence. If a question does not contain a vocabulary word from the lesson’s word list, use one in your answer. Use each word only once.**

1. When did Pam Postema make her first professional public appearance in a major-league game?

2. Did Postema fulfill her chief aspiration?

3. How did Postema show that managers could not easily intimidate her?

4. According to Postema, what habit is often common in umpires?

5. Why was it especially important for Postema not to get flustered?
6. How did three fans learn early on that they couldn’t insult Postema with **impunity**?

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___________________________________________________________________

7. What happens to most minor-league umpires?

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___________________________________________________________________

8. Why might Postema have had reason to respect her instructor’s predictions about her future in the major leagues?

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9. Was Postema the first woman to attend the umpiring school?

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10. How did the Pirates’ pitcher show his **bias**?

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11. Was the remark of the Pirates’ pitcher typical of other pitchers as well?

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12. How did Postema feel about sexist remarks from spectators?

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13. Who had the last word in the argument between Postema and the Pirates’ pitcher?

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14. According to Postema, why did managers often make life difficult for her?

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15. How did Postema demonstrate that she was not a quitter?
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FUN & FASCINATING FACTS

• The English word candid comes from the Latin verb candere, which means “to shine.” Truth is like a light, sometimes exposing what someone might wish to hide. A candid person shines the light of truth on something others might wish to conceal.

• The Latin verb punire means “to punish” and forms the root of several other English words besides punish and impunity. If a jury awards punitive damages to someone who has been injured, the intention is to punish those who caused the injury. If you pay a penalty, you are being punished for doing what you shouldn’t have done or for failing to do what you should have done. A state’s penal system is designed to punish criminals by putting them in jail.

• Obnoxious is formed from the Latin noxa, meaning “an injury”; so is noxious, meaning “harmful” or “unhealthy” (noxious gas from car exhaust). The smell from a skunk is obnoxious but not noxious. Carbon monoxide gas is noxious but not obnoxious (because it cannot be smelled). Cigarette smoke is noxious; it is also obnoxious to non-smokers who are sometimes forced to inhale it when someone near them is smoking.