

Society for American Baseball Research

BIBLIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

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Comments from the Chair

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The Baseball Index (TBI) is ready to move to the next stage of development.

Our first stage, getting the database up on the Web, has been an enormous success. We've been praised throughout SABR, and have had favorable mention in Jerome Holtzman's column at MLB.com and product review Web sites such as ResearchBuzz.com. Our statistics show well more than a thousand visitors each month.

Daniel Levine at DMLCo. has recently finished some necessary fixes on the public side of the Web page. For example, one now can search by first and last name separately. There have also been some improvements in how people pay us. Now, it's time to turn to the administrative side.

As you've probably noticed, the database hasn't grown since it was first posted. Because the emphasis on the first phase was getting the database up and making it usable, the system for data entry and correction was rudimentary. It suffices for making simple corrections, but is not conducive to adding 350 new books in a batch, much less 1200 new entries from *The Sporting News* or *Baseball Magazine*.

Working with Levine, Ted Hathaway and I have devised a system for exporting and importing copies of the database that will allow us to make changes and updates at our own pace and time, and then put the database back on the Web site. The base copy of the database will still be available on the Web while we're updating. This system should allow us easily to add batches of data, and to make mass corrections (such as dealing with variant names of someone such as Grover Alexander).

Of course, these improvements will take money, and that's why we're returning to you. They will cost several thousand dollars. When we first ask Committee members for funds, we got \$11,000 in donations. For this round, I'd like to thank Steve Milman, Skip McAfee, and Jim Lannen, who have already made contributions. If you're interested in making this tax-deductible deduction, please contact me.

And all of you, whether you've contributed money or time, I urge you simply to go to www.baseballindex.org and appreciate what we as a Committee have accomplished for baseball research. TBI is an invaluable tool, it enhances a mission that is at the core of what our Committee is supposed to do, and it is available to the world. Congratulate yourselves.

While TBI, *Current Baseball Publications*, the newsletter, and other Committee projects have gone well, I'd like to get us moving on some other projects that have faded lately.

For several years, Committee members produced indexes for 74 books that were published without them. When Bob McConnell recently sent me an index for Jacob Morse's pioneering *Sphere and Ash* (1888), it reminded me that we haven't been producing many indexes during the past year. I'd like to encourage Committee members to take up such projects again. Our indexes are gracing the

pages of Southern Illinois University Press reprints of the Putnam team histories series, as well as other reprints. And, they are all available through Len Levin's Research Papers Collection. Contact me if you are interested in indexing baseball books.

Also, it's been more than five years since we produced a SABR Research Guide. The guides are basic bibliographic tools that provide such resources as lists of all the baseball figures that appeared in that library staple, *Current Biography*, over the years. With the possibility of placing these tools on SABR's Web site, their utility is even higher.

There are also projects that have been floated in these pages in the past, such as a system to identify the "best" biography of players who have been the subject of more than one. This could be another good service to SABR members. You may not have to make a judgment, but simply do a two- or three-paragraph summary of the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Let your mind roam, there are many possibilities here. I hope the rest of your winter goes well. Our next newsletter will be in April. And please put the SABR Convention, July 10-13, on your calendars. There will be a Committee meeting as well as all the other stuff that make a SABR Convention one of the best events of my year.

The Baseball Index (TBI) Fourth Quarter (2002) Report

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Use of **The Baseball Index** Web site continues to be steady through the winter months, averaging 4000 to 5000 visits each month. Visitors are principally from North America, of course, but we are regularly visited by researchers from every continent. The other day, I noticed we were being visited by someone from the "Ministry of Education" from either China or North Korea! Some modifications have been added to the site in the past quarter, most notably the dividing of the "people search" function into first and last names. This change corrected the confusion over whether to search by first name first or last name first.

Daniel Levine (DMLCo.) is currently working on developing a ready means whereby we can edit existing data and add new data. Several thousand new entries are waiting to be added and I trust we will be announcing their addition before the next newsletter. This past quarter, volunteers indexed more than 2500 additional articles. **Joe Murphy** has been making heavy use of our online data entry forms at: <http://www.rationalpastimes.com/dataentry.html>. This past quarter he indexed almost 1800 articles from *Baseball Magazine* and *Baseball Digest*, as well as several baseball annuals from the 1950s and 1960s. Joe has finished his work on the many copies of *Baseball Magazine* loaned to him by **Bernie Esser** and is now working on microfiche copies of this publication from 1920 and 1921. We obtained a microfiche reader and copies of fiche for Joe, and he has

manfully agreed to index them, the miseries of microfiche/film viewing notwithstanding. Joe also indexed several hundred new articles from all twelve 1970 issues of *Baseball Magazine*. Thanks, Joe!

Terry Sloop finished indexing the 1951 issues of *Sport* and has also keyed in 248 entries from *Baseball Magazine* indexed on paper by **Terry Smith**. I also indexed several issues of *Sport* from 1947. Both the 1947 and 1951 issues were kindly loaned to us by member **Steve Milman**. We have also been graced by online and paper contributions from members **Bill Ivimey**, **Cary Butlein**, and **David Southwick**. Thanks to all who have contributed to building TBI this past quarter: we are most grateful for your work.

Book Review

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EXTRA INNINGS: Writing on Baseball

Richard Peterson. Urbana & Champaign: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2001. \$29.95

This book is part of the Univ. of Illinois Press' distinguished series on sport and society. It is the second of the series that addresses the literature of baseball; the first was Timothy Morris' *Making the Team: The Cultural Work of Baseball Fiction* (1997). The two works define and approach their subject from different perspectives. Peterson's is important because it is informal and contains an unusual understanding about what baseball literature is; it is also critical as well as analytic.

Extra Innings is an academic book, but its stance is informal. The book begins with an odd autobiographical essay, an account of the author's four appearances at the annual Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture. Its oddness comes from Peterson's manner of presentation. He speaks of his appearances as "an adventure that would end up, like the quest for the white whale, in deception, scandal, horror, and tragedy" (p.1). He must be kidding, I thought to myself, and, having finished the book, I think I was right. One dimension of the chapter parodies the excesses Peterson finds in baseball fiction.

The book's last chapter also has an odd informality about it. Called "How to Write a True Baseball Story", it is a fantasy about Peterson's encounter with Ring Lardner, on the latter's birthday, in the stacks of the Southern Illinois Univ. library. Lardner proposes to tell Peterson how to put the truth about baseball into fiction: "No boobs or rubes. No naturals or supernaturals. No fields of dreams. No fathers playing catch with sons. No two outs in the bottom of the ninth, bases loaded, three-two counts, no let's win the pennant or World Series for little Bobby or Billy in the hospital. Just the truth" (p.154). What Lardner proceeds to tell as truth is in the form of a fairy tale that Peterson characterizes as "a bitter parable about the betrayal of baseball by those most responsible for loving and taking care of the game" (p.156).

Where this conclusion leaves us, I'm not sure, but these two chapters establish an unorthodox context for the critical material of the nine chapters in between. In these nine chapters, Peterson describes a literature of baseball that includes history, fiction, and journalism in ways that are new to this reader. In the first two of these chapters he describes what he calls the essential "dream narrative" of baseball writing that has "praised and kept faith in the world of baseball by developing a narrative tradition in the midst of social, political, and cultural change that is capable of evoking images of baseball as timeless, seamless, and self-delighting as well as instructive, cathartic, and purposeful" (p.37). The next two present an examination of baseball historians from Spink and Spalding to Alexander and Rader

in terms of this "dream narrative". The movement, Peterson is glad to say, is away from the "dream narrative" and toward the complexities of human history.

There follow three chapters on baseball fiction. Here is Peterson's own summary of fiction's vision of baseball (p.111): "The game of baseball is often a reflection of the game of life, where the baseball dream routinely transforms players into heroes and legends, and where baseball's readers can indulge their romantic fantasies while picking up lessons on the value of moral conduct and the virtue of having a good heart. For all the claims of Mark Harris for a tradition of realism and for all the accomplishments of Asinof and Greenberg in writing serious novels, baseball's own romantic tradition with its dream narrative still reigns over the baseball fictional landscape and still invites fairy-tale narratives, moral romances, and romantic tragedies."

There is a chapter on short fiction and one on novels. The third of these chapters focuses on the image of African-Americans in baseball fiction, concluding that they "still wait for a more realistic lens to give the proper perspective and rightful place to their experiences in the history of baseball" (p.124). Parenthetically, I think Peterson would respond positively to Gary Ashwill's "Underground Pastime: The Hidden History of the Negro Leagues" in the Fall 2002 issue of *Southern Exposure*.

Peterson's chapter on "the postmodern baseball writer" is a kind of miniature of the book as a whole. Peterson comments on books as various as Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* (1970), David James Duncan's *The Brothers K* (1992), and John Helyar's *Lords of the Realm* (1994), showing how each is "postmodern". These "kiss-and-tell biographies, ... revisionist and mediated histories, and ... subversive fictions" (p.136) "have anticipated, helped define, and continue to explore and perhaps even exploit the disillusionment and cynicism surrounding baseball today" (p.125). His use of the "dream narrative" to discuss various kinds of writing is one of the book's principal strengths.

Another strength is that he uses the "dream narrative" as a critical as well as an analytic tool, to make judgments about the quality of the books he's discussing. For this reader, this was most noticeable in Peterson's treatment of "realist" writers Ring Lardner and Mark Harris. Peterson wonders if Lardner is really part of a realist tradition in baseball fiction (p.81): "While the narrative voice and the realistic details appear to give Lardner's baseball stories an air of reality, the inflated egos and outrageous behavior of Lardner's bookish narrators and the magical appeal of names like Cobb and Ruth also play to the view of baseball players as larger than life and the game itself as mythical. By freely mixing the historical, legendary, and fantastic, Lardner's stories actually blur the line between the credible and the incredible. As narrative models they anticipate the intertextuality of magic and realism now common to the baseball short story. As standards for baseball fiction they invite the celebration of baseball as a metaphor for American life and as an expression of the American Dream even as they mock human nature."

Peterson hopes for a different sort of writing. He hopes for "a consideration of baseball as an ordinary event on an ordinary day—not all games are the final or seventh game—or an interest in turning the ordinary, the common, and the routine in baseball into the extraordinary through a narrative art limited by an air of reality or the ring of truth, rather than inflated by the traditional belief in the generative and transformative power of the game itself" (p.87). Neither Lardner's nor Harris' fiction reaches this standard. Harris' fiction is dismissed (p.101) as "a series of baseball novels with the trappings of realism that nevertheless remain sentimental and superficial as literary narratives. While they appear to offer a realistic look at baseball, Harris's novels hardly mark the beginning of a tradition of realism for baseball's readers. Instead they open the door for baseball novels that often display a surface or superficial realism but rarely advance beyond baseball stereotypes and hackneyed plotting." I found both

these judgment initially unpalatable, but Peterson's thoughtful argument made them comprehensible, if not acceptable.

When Peterson comes, in a last chapter entitled "In Defense of Baseball Books," to name ten baseball books deserving of being ranked among the twentieth century's 100 best, it's not surprising that Harris is absent from the list. Lardner's *You Know Me Al* (1914) is, surprisingly, one of only two works of fiction that do make the list [Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* (1952) is the other]. *Extra Innings* covers so well the various kinds of prose writing on baseball that it's too bad it doesn't contain a chapter on poetry. Readers are advised to remember that Peterson's "Works Cited" is not a full bibliography of the subject. Otherwise, *Extra Innings* is an important contribution to the study of writing about baseball.

Book Review

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MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL: Community Building through Hometown Sports

Rebecca S. Kraus. New York: Haworth Press, 2002. 209p. \$49.95 (hard cover), \$19.95 (soft cover)

Followers of minor-league baseball don't have it easy. In the best of circumstances, their favorite players won't be with the local team for long, since this is just a stopover, a tune-up before heading to "the Show". With a stream of athletes that is commonly in flux, what is it, then, that binds America to its bush-league ball clubs?

Kraus seeks to answer that question. "On the minor league level," she writes, "the relationship appears to go beyond more money and prestige. Minor league teams occupy a special place in our hearts. We are more forgiving when they lose, and extremely proud of them when they win."

The self-proclaimed "baseball sociologist" cites numerous studies on the link between sports and community. While she is obviously passionate about the topic, her methodology is uneven. She writes at length in the appendix about how she set out to "prove" such a relationship, but this assertion simply doesn't come through in the narrative.

Kraus discusses the distinct eras in the long history of the minor leagues. She chronicles the golden days following the postwar years; the "downs", as other forms of entertainment such as television began to take prominence, reducing game attendance; and the resurgence of the minors as the majors began subsidizing the affiliates and new owners with modern marketing methods took over for the outmoded "Mom and Pop" administrators.

The author's information is mostly anecdotal and she spends an inordinate amount of words documenting the movement of teams from city to city and the changes in their big-league affiliations. ultimately, it appears she can't decide whether to make her approach academic or personal.

While *Minor League Baseball* is a warm-hearted overview of an increasingly popular subject, it just doesn't seem to fit in a supposedly scholarly treatise.

Top 29 Baseball Books

The December 16, 2002 issue of *Sports Illustrated* listed the "top 100 sports books of all time". Culling the list for purely baseball books, this is how *SI* ranked the top baseball books of all time:

Rank	SI rank	Title	Author	Date
1	2	The Boys of Summer	Roger Kahn	1971
2	3	Ball Four	Jim Bouton	1970
3	5	You Know Me Al	Ring Lardner	1914
4	14	Bang the Drum Slowly	Mark Harris	1956
5	18	The Summer Game	Roger Angell	1972
6	19	The Long Season	Jim Brosnan	1960
7	24	The Natural	Bernard Malamud	1952
8	27	Babe	Robert Creamer	1974
9	31	Joe DiMaggio	R.B. Cramer	2000
10	33	Veck ... as in Wreck	Veck & Linn	1962
11	37	A False Spring	Pat Jordan	1975
12	41	The Unforgettable Season	Gordon Fleming	1981
13	42	The Celebrant	E.R. Greenberg	1983
14	44	Historical Baseball Abstract	Bill James	1985
15	47	Shoeless Joe	W.P. Kinsella	1982
16	49	Eight Men Out	Eliot Asinof	1963
17	50	Baseball's Great Experiment	Jules Tygiel	1983
18	52	Dollar Sign on the Muscle	Kevin Kerrane	1984
19	53	The Bronx Zoo	Lyle & Golenbock	1979
20	55	The Baseball Encyclopedia	Macmillan	1969
21	57	The Glory of Their Times	Lawrence Ritter	1966
22	58	Complete Armchair Book ...	John Thorn, ed.	1999
23	60	Lords of the Realm	John Helyar	1994
24	61	Universal Baseball Ass'n	Robert Coover	1968
25	74	Only the Ball was White	Robert Peterson	1970
26	78	The Great American Novel	Philip Roth	1973
27	84	Can't Anybody Here Play ..?	Jimmy Breslin	1963
28	86	The Science of Hitting	Ted Williams	1970
29	98	Bingo Long ...	William Brashler	1973

Readers sent letters to the editor (Jan. 13, 2003 issue), complaining that the list omitted three other baseball books: *Men at Work* by George F. Will (1990); *Take Time for Paradise* by A. Bartlett Giamatti (1989); and *You Gotta Have Wa* by Robert Whiting (1989).

A fourth book was mentioned by Carolyn J. Thomas: "How could you have omitted Henry W. Thomas's *Walter Johnson: Baseball's Big Train*? I take it personally: It is the definitive biography of my father, superbly researched and written by my son."