

Society for American Baseball Research

BIBLIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

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Comments from the Chair

Andy McCue

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I'd like to welcome six new members of the Committee:

Walt Patterson joins us from England, where he is a researcher at the Royal Institute of International Affairs and a St. Louis Cardinals fan.

Gail Rowe is a retired professor of history at the Univ. of Colorado. His second baseball mystery novel, *Squeeze Play in Beantown*, is out this spring from Committee member Tom Hetrick's Pocol Press. I haven't had a chance to read it yet, but it promises both Arthur Soden (who I've always found fascinating) and Honey Fitz Fitzgerald, JFK's grandfather. Gail's first mystery, *Best Bet in Beantown* (2003), was a good read.

Bill Johnson joins us from Chesapeake, Va. with a strong interest in the 1930s and 1940s, especially the Cleveland Indians.

Joel Sternberg is a writer/editor at St. Xavier College who has an interest in that Chicago institution, 16-inch softball.

Matt Kochan, of Orchard Park, N.Y., has volunteered to help Ted Hathaway on the periodicals side of The Baseball Index (TBI).

Tom Zocco, and his outstanding collection of baseball books, also has joined. Tom has helped fill in several TBI gaps from his collection and I'm looking forward to more.

Contact information for all of these folks is available from the SABR online membership directory.

Jim Lannen, aided by **Rich Arpi** and **Terry Sloope**, has started to update the information on the Committee's SABR Web site. We're adding all the old newsletters and *Current Baseball Publications* (CBP) that we have in electronic format. Once I get better organized, I'll be forwarding to Jim copies of all the newsletters, CBP, and the Committee's Research Guides that exist only in paper format. We're also working to get a complete collection of our excellent book reviews from the newsletter up on the Web.

Our annual Committee meeting has been scheduled for Saturday, July 17, at 9:30 a.m. during the SABR National Convention in Cincinnati. I hope to see many of you there. For those of you who have not attended a SABR convention, I highly recommend it. After more than 20 years in SABR, I can safely say that the best thing about the organization is the contacts and friendships you can make with a compatible group who will amaze you with their collective knowledge. There's no better place to expand that network of friendships than at the convention.

I would still very much like to find a volunteer to put Frank Phelps' *The Index to The Sporting News Baseball Registers, 1940-1995* into a database program, to make it easier to update and to place it on the Web. Please contact me if you are interested.

Several committees have set up e-mail mailing lists (they operate the same as SABR-L, distributing e-mail among a self-selecting group). If there is enough interest in such a thing for the Bibliography Committee, I can get it established. It would allow us to com-

ment on a) the quality and availability of books, b) collecting and dealers, and c) needs or interests in various projects.

Wayne McElreavy has prepared a name index to SABR's new publication, *Deadball Stars of the National League*, written by SABR's Deadball Era Committee and edited by Tom Simon, and published by Brassey's (2004). It is available from Len Levin's SABR Research Library (282 Doyle Ave., Providence, RI 02906-3355; phone 401-351-3278). A volunteer is needed to prepare a subject index to *Deadball Stars*; contact me if you are interested.

I urge Committee members to undertake more of these indexing projects, which make classic baseball works published without indexes more accessible to researchers.

Trey Strecker has edited two recently published fiction anthologies: 1) *Dead Balls and Double Curves; an Anthology of Early Baseball Fiction*, with a foreword by Arnold Hano, collects 22 stories published between 1838 and 1923 (published by Southern Illinois University Press); and 2) *The Collected Baseball Stories of Charles Van Loan* compiles 40 stories originally published between 1909 and 1919 (published by McFarland).

As always, please make your contributions to The Baseball Index (www.baseballindex.org). Contact Ted Hathaway [3536 Orchard Lane, Minnetonka, MN 55305; 612-908-0299 (home), 952-250-0152 (work); sabrtbi@mn.rr.com (e-mail)] if you'd like to help with periodicals. Contact me if you're interested in helping with books. Thanks.

Book Reviews

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A SHORT HISTORY OF THE LONG BALL

Justin Cronin. Tulsa (Okla.): Council Oak Books, 1990. 90p.

This is not a history of the home run but a work of fiction. I ran across its intriguing title while getting ready to read Cronin's *Mary and O'Neil*, a book that has won several best first-novel awards. The *Short History* is a prize winner too, having received the National Novella Award, as a consequence of which it was published in 1990. It's a small book, about the size of a relatively thin mass-market paperback, and a short one.

The story follows the lives of two off-again, on-again friends—Jake Conklin (the narrator) and Donny Flanagan—from ages ten to 34. The book opens with an account of the long ball Jake remembers hitting when he was ten (p.2): "When we met, that ball and I, the world went crack and I felt a rightness, a stupendous rectitude that, in hindsight, I believe is reserved to revolutionaries, charismatics, some new parents and all hitters of the long ball." During the course of the first chapter, Jake describes the shape taken by their childhood games, based on baseball. At the end of the chapter, he recalls the circumstances of his long ball (an unusual occurrence; he describes himself as a different kind of hitter). Donny, pitching, had been mocking and taunting him.

After this, baseball disappears from the narrative until the fourth chapter, titled "Poison". Both boys are teenagers now, and Jake is traveling to New York City "to stay with [Donny] and take in a twilight doubleheader at Shea, a spectacle I still enjoyed, though I'd long since lost track of the players and their statistics and was more interested in the prospect of Mr. Flanagan buying us beer, which he loved to do" (p.43). The trip to the ballpark never comes off, and Donny instead introduces Jake to marijuana. Thereafter, drugs become both boys' main interest. Jake shakes the habit, but Donny doesn't, and he is eventually hospitalized for heroin addiction. By the book's end, at age 34, he is accepting rehabilitation and earning an associate arts degree at the local community college. Perhaps his life is back on track.

Cronin uses baseball in both the penultimate and last chapters. The former chapter concerns Jake's romantic relationship with Donny's sister Martha. Finding them kissing upon arriving home, Donny attacks Jake, first with his fists, then with a baseball bat. Donny, high on drugs, clearly has murderous intentions, but Jake is able to disarm him. The final chapter takes place 17 years later, and involves baseball again, Donny, Jake, and Jake's father and son. The relation among the generations has long been a favorite subject with baseball writers.

Earlier, Jake's son Seamus had been introduced, and with a reference to baseball. As an infant, Seamus grabs hold of Jake's finger, and Jake, full of love for his son, says "'Bat,' I said, not knowing why. 'Hey slugger: bat, ball.'" The story of Donny's attack with a bat follows immediately.

In the final chapter, Jake and Seamus, visiting Jake's father, are playing a sort of catch (p.82): "His hands were still too small for a glove, but he liked to field grounders, which I bunted across the grass to him from a distance of about ten feet." Soon after, Donny, whom Jake hasn't seen in a long time, emerges from his house, and they manage a halting conversation. Jake finally goes inside, and his father upbraids him for leaving Seamus alone with Donny, clearly to his father an unsavory character. Jake is unworried though, even when Donny picks up a bat. Telling Seamus "Your father could never do this", Donny launches the ball into the distant trees; from inside the house, Jake admires "the dimensional majesty of its arc" (p.89). Thus, Cronin manages to complicate the conventional "fathers playing catch with sons" scene.

And *A Short History of the Long Ball* doesn't seem to be particularly concerned with the fathers and sons theme. Baseball, within the narrative, acts as a vehicle of both love and hate; it operates as a part of "the whole weather of our lives", as Thomas Wolfe wrote in 1938. As such, it is particularly appropriate to a book about how memory (what we remember and what we forget) shapes our lives.

EXTRA BASES: Reflections on Jackie Robinson, Race, and Baseball History

Jules Tygiel. Lincoln (Neb.): Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2002. \$18 softcover.

Extra Bases is a well-organized gathering of essays, introductions, book reviews, and newspaper and magazine articles that enhance Tygiel's reputation, built on *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (1983) and *Past Time: Baseball as History* (2000), as the best academic historian of baseball currently practicing.

In his introduction to *Extra Bases*, Tygiel describes himself, not as a baseball historian, but "as an American historian who writes, among other things, about baseball" (p.x). "My primary contribution," he adds (p.xii), "has been to apply the tools of the professional historian to the study of baseball, taking it seriously as a manifestation of American culture and treating it as a powerful window into the nation's past." In a later essay regarding Harold Seymour's contributions to the history of the sport, Tygiel speaks of "three critical distinctions between popular and scholarly history": the use of "a more stringent research methodology", placement of baseball history

"in the context of American history", and use of "analysis and interpretation", not simply "facts and chronology" (p.122).

All of the pieces in *Extra Bases*, whatever their original venue (the essay quoted above appeared as a review of baseball histories in the journal *Baseball History* in 1986), are written from this perspective. Tygiel has organized them, thematically rather than chronologically, into three sections:

The first focuses on Jackie Robinson and contains essays ancillary to *Baseball's Great Experiment*. To my mind, the best of these four essays is the 1997 "Afterword" to that book. The essay concerns this "legacy", or the meanings of Robinson's life in the years between 1972 and 1997. The essay reads even better in its present context than it did when appended to *Baseball's Great Experiment* in 1997.

The second section of the book deals more generally with the history of African-Americans in baseball. Tygiel here has split his essay on the subject from *Total Baseball* into two parts, one beginning, the other ending the section. In between are his essay on the Negro leagues from *Past Time* and his introduction to Roy Campanella's *It's Good To Be Alive* (1959).

The book's final section, "Reflections on Baseball History", is the most miscellaneous, containing book reviews, a review of the Jackie Robinson segment of Ken Burns's *Baseball* (1994), a brief history of the Polo Grounds, and a meditation on baseball salaries.

Tygiel issues another warning (p.x-xi) in his introduction, describing "the fundamental strategy I employ when writing about sports. I always, in effect, take my eye off the ball. As a fan, I focus primarily on what is happening on the field. As a historian, however, I am more interested in the broader cultural milieu that surrounds the game—how developments in the game of baseball reflect American society and the ways in which our nation has changed over time."

In view of this approach, I was especially interested when Tygiel did comment on the game on the field, as in the following observation of the Negro leagues (p.64-65): "Black baseball offered a more freewheeling and, in many respects, more exciting brand of baseball than the major leagues. Since the 1920s, when Babe Ruth had revolutionized the game, the majors had pursued power strategies, emphasizing the home run above all else. Although the great sluggers of the Negro leagues rivaled those in the National and American leagues, they comprised but one element in the speed-dominated universe of 'tricky baseball'. Black teams emphasized the bunt, the stolen base, and the hit and run." Here is Tygiel on the game in the majors after integration (p.111): "Robinson and other early black players introduced new elements of speed and 'tricky baseball' into the major leagues, transforming and improving the quality of play. ... Nor did this injection of speed come at the expense of power. ... By the 1960s the national pastime more closely resembled the well-balanced offensive structure of the Negro leagues than the unidimensional power-oriented attack that had typified the all-white majors." These are not unusual comments nowadays; they point to an integration of styles that presage the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision and parallel events in, for example, popular music in the 1950s.

I wonder if Tygiel is uneasy that so much of the material gathered in *Extra Bases* is still readily available elsewhere. He shouldn't be. *Extra Bases*, as organized, makes the material new, and the book is a worthy companion to *Baseball's Great Experiment* and *Past Time*. In addition, Tygiel writes with great clarity, thus achieving what he calls "the final goal of the academic historian: to create a readily accessible and readable literature that not only adheres to the standards of our profession, but that introduces the craft and relevance of history to those not normally exposed to the discipline" (p.123).

"It's nothing that I don't think you don't really feel or realize isn't going to happen." (New York Mets manager Frank Howard, concerning ballplayers being traded; quoted in *Sports Illustrated*, June 20, 1983).