

Society for American Baseball Research

BIBLIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE

NEWSLETTER

April 1997 (97-2)

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Comments from the Chair

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The baseball book season is upon us. When I first saw the major publishers' catalogues early this year, I was struck by how few baseball books seemed to be in the works. I have since been heartened a bit, but don't see 1997 as a major year for baseball book production.

The fifth edition of *Total Baseball* is out from Viking. Jack Buck's *That's a Winner* (Sagamore) has become the third broadcaster bio published in the past few months, joining Chuck Thompson's *Ain't the Beer Cold!* (Diamond) and Bob Wolff's *It's Not Who Won or Lost the Game—It's How You Sold the Beer* (Diamond).

The Univ. of Toronto Press has produced Bob Harrigan's *The Detroit Tigers*, which looks like a very interesting history of the post-World War II Bengals. The book seems to be modelled on *The Baseball Business*, James Miller's excellent 1990 treatise on the Orioles in that it focuses on ownership and the team's relationship with the community as much as ballfield exploits. *The Tigers of '68* is also just out from Taylor Publishing, as George Cantor, who covered that season for one of the Detroit papers, recaps.

The more or less official Jackie Robinson biography is due later in the summer from Arnold Rampersad (Knopf). He was the first biographer to whom Rachel Robinson gave full access to Jackie's papers.

I have seen little fiction being advertised except for the fourth Troy Soos mystery (Kensington) called *Hunting a Detroit Tiger*.

All in all, while the major publishers apparently remained cautious, the more baseball-oriented publishers (Diamond, McFarland, Sagamore, and Taylor) have their usual strong lineups.

Book Indexing Project

Summarizing the Putnam baseball series indexing efforts: Howard Pollack has chimed in with his index to *The Philadelphia Phillies* (1953) by Fred Lieb & Stan Baumgartner. It is available from SABR's Research Library: contact Len Levin, 282 Doyle Ave., Providence, RI 02906 (phone 401/351-3278), who will quote you postage and photocopying costs. Team histories in progress include: Bob McConnell for Frank Graham's *The New York Yankees* (rev. 1948); Joe Murphy for Warren Brown's *The Chicago Cubs* (1946); Brad Sullivan for Harold Kaese & R.G. Lynch's *The Milwaukee Braves* (1954), an update of Bob Bailey's index to *The Boston Braves*; and John Spalding for Fred Lieb's *The Baltimore Orioles* (1955). Once these are compiled, we will have completed all of the Putnam team histories. We are still looking for a volunteer to index *The Umpire Story* by James Kahn (1953), also a part of the Putnam series.

We are always interested in expanding the book indexing project. There are many fine baseball books that SABR researchers keep returning to, but are frustrated because they lack indexes. Creating an index can be a time-consuming task, but very satisfying: witness those Committee members who have done multiple volumes (Bob Bailey, Jack Carlson, Tom Shieber, Bob Boynton, and Terry Smith). If I may make some suggestions for books to index: Red Barber's *1947: When All Hell Broke Loose in Baseball* (1982) and Jim Bouton's *Ball Four* (1970).

As it is baseball book season, I would ask that you keep Rich Arpi (3620 W. 32nd St., #105, Minneapolis, MN 55416) and *Current Baseball Publications* (CBP) in mind. You will find Rich's work included in this newsletter mailing. CBP is invaluable for keeping track of new baseball books and periodicals. Frankly, Rich doesn't need much help tracking books from major publishers or those that are going to show up in the bigger chains. He needs help with juveniles and especially with books of regional interest. You may find that somebody in your area self-published a book on some aspect of baseball that is available only near you. Please note the kind of information Rich lists and call it to his attention.

As always I commend to your attention the Research in Baseball Index (RBI). Ted Hathaway has a complete report below. Even if you don't want to become heavily involved in the project, I'm assuming that members of this Committee regularly read baseball literature. Filling out a form when you finish a book is a matter of a few minutes work.

The SABR convention will be in Louisville over the June 20-22 weekend. It is one of the joys of my year and I commend it to all of you, especially those who have never attended a convention before.

Also, SABR elections are coming up. Please vote!

Research in Baseball Index (RBI)

Ted Hathaway

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As mentioned in the Jan. 1997 Committee newsletter, we made RBI available for research requests in Nov. 1996. Our project co-director, Tim Cashion, generously offered World Wide Web space for us to advertise this search service. Called the "RBI Data Service", it was first advertised from our Web site [<http://student-www.uchicago.edu/users/tmc/dataserv.htm>], then was officially announced in the Jan. 1997 issue of *The SABR Bulletin*. This brought a flood of requests from SABR members. Subsequently, I sent press releases to a small number of magazines. I will continue to do this in the coming weeks.

Since the Service was described in the Jan. 1997 issue of *The SABR Bulletin*, I will not repeat it in detail here. However, I will reiterate that our main purpose with the Service is to *provide access* to RBI. We have been talking about RBI for years now—begging for volunteers, demonstrating it at SABR conventions—and we thought it was high time that members (and the general public) be allowed to make some use of it.

Since the first of the year, I have received hundreds of requests, many resulting in data delivery. Receipts from the Service have totaled \$370, all going to SABR. From the high level of requests (sometimes as many as six per day) after the announcement in the SABR newsletter, the rate has moderated to one or two requests a day. This is just as well as it is about all I can handle!

I am currently working on a questionnaire for those who have used the Service to obtain their opinion of the database. I hope to have the questionnaire out and returned in time for the SABR convention in June. In any event, I will have the results posted in the July 1997 issue of the Committee newsletter.

In addition to the new RBI Data Service, I have been spending much time on making corrections to the database, namely spelling errors and mistakes/variations in the subject headings used in the RBI catalog records. There are thousands of these and correcting them has been very time consuming. The Books and the Book Sections databases have been completed and I am about half way through the Articles database.

As for the "numbers" that we usually report with each newsletter, we are downplaying them this time because so much time was spent on the Service and making corrections to the database. However, we have made substantial additions to the Articles database. More than 4100 records were added and the total number of cataloged articles in RBI is now more than 38,000. The entire database has exceeded 60,000 records.

A summary:

<u>Periodical</u>	<u>No. articles</u>
<i>Vintage & Classic Baseball Collector</i> (8 issues):	87
<i>Sports Illustrated</i> (1954):	89
<i>The Sporting News</i> (1978):	178
<i>Scholastic Coach</i> (1955-1975):	450
<i>Baseball Digest</i> (1954 and 1990):	452
<i>USA Today</i> (1996):	614
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (1955-1996):	1154

More than 2500 of these articles were cataloged by the stalwart Brad Sullivan, now the assistant sports information director at Slippery Rock Univ. Brad's awesome output from last year was made possible by unemployment, but even now with regular work, Brad still has managed to contribute huge numbers to RBI. The cataloging of articles has been increasingly the main point of growth in the RBI database during the past couple years and we have mainly Brad to thank for that.

Another 200+ articles were added by Terry Sloope, who has cataloged several years of *Baseball Digest* during the past year. A new baby has understandably cut in considerably on Terry's RBI work, but his interest and production continue. Also, despite my work on the RBI Data Service and correcting the database, I was able to catalog more than a thousand articles from a variety of sources, such as *The Japan Chronicle* (1920s and 1930s), *Vintage & Classic Baseball Collector*, and a variety of non-sport publications from 1996.

I am most grateful to both Brad and Terry for the great work they have done on RBI.

Book Reviews

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THE MEN IN BLUE: Conversations with Umpires

Larry R. Gerlach. With a new afterward by the author. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1994. \$11.95

STANDING THE GAFF: The Life and Hard Times of a Minor League Umpire

Harry (Steamboat) Johnson. Introduction by Larry R. Gerlach. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1994. 148p. \$6.95 softcover

Though I may be the last member of SABR to have read Gerlach's *The Men in Blue* (originally published in 1980), it seems worthwhile to say something about it here, if only to remind readers that it's available in a paperback edition as part of a series of reprints of baseball books. The price is quite reasonable. Gerlach's brief afterward describes the experience of writing the book and why he wrote it. He says recent developments—such as standardization of umpiring styles in the majors and success of the Major League Umpires Association—have made the book "even more a history of a bygone era" (p.292). In this it resembles the book that is its prototype, Lawrence S. Ritter's *The Glory of Their Times*

(1966, 1984). Though to my mind Ritter's title still stands alone, in other respects Gerlach's "conversations with umpires" is a worthy peer.

The Men in Blue arranges the interviews with umpires in a chronology based on the year each umpire entered the major leagues. Thus, the book begins with Beans Reardon and ends with Emmett Ashford. Gerlach insists (p.xi): "It is not, however, merely a mélange of anecdotes and yarns. Accounts and remembrances were selected for inclusion because they illustrate specific themes or provide special perspective, not simply because they were amusing or entertaining." The interviews themselves are edited and condensed, so that each reads as an autobiographical monologue.

The Men in Blue is a highly organized book, one of whose subjects is race, particularly the reintegration of baseball in the late 1940s. At least five of the umpires—Reardon, Lee Ballanfant, Joe Rue, Joe Paparella, and Jim Honochick—comment directly on it. While Larry Doby and Roy Campanella are praised, there is a certain uneasiness about Jackie Robinson. Paparella, for instance, concludes a paragraph in praise of Doby by saying "he was just the opposite of Jackie Robinson" (p.146). The subject of race is underlined by the presence of Ashford's interview as the concluding one. Ashford himself wonders about his difficulties as the first black major league umpire as compared to those faced by Robinson (p.275): "Branch Rickey took Jackie and put him out there on *his* team. ... Now here I come along, some twenty years later, and I'm *running* things. I'm the *boss*." This is not just an accident of chronology, nor is the fact that the fullest interview in the book (that of Bill Kinnamon) immediately precedes it.

All the umpires are particularly vivid men, and their opinions generally are expressed vividly. They liked particular ballplayers: both Paparella and Honochick spoke highly of Ted Williams (Paparella called him a "perfect gentlemen" [p.139]).

Kinnamon's interview stands out because he is particularly good at describing pitchers and catchers from an umpire's perspective. Here he is on knuckleballer Hoyt Wilhelm (p.240-241):

"He was so difficult to call because there wasn't any way his ball couldn't go. You never saw everything he had because the ball never did the same thing twice. When he released the ball, only the Good Lord knew where it was going. He never tried to finesse you—throw it low or high, inside or outside. He just threw it right at the center of the plate, and the ball did whatever it did. You had to wait until after the catcher caught the ball before making the call. I've seen him throw balls that were head high and then all of a sudden drop down for a strike. ... I've seen him throw one right down the pipe and have it wind up three feet outside."

And Kinnamon on catcher Paul Casanova (p.243): "Casanova ... gave me the best look at the plate of any catcher I worked behind. He was a big, tall, lanky guy, but he absolutely *laid on the ground*. He would give the signal and then disappear; you wondered where in the hell he went, that's how low he stayed. If the pitch was a little high, he never came up with his body; just the glove would come up and pick off that pitch."

Umpires could be pithily dismissive. Here is Bill McKinley on Roger Maris (p.166): "The problem with Roger Maris was his personality. He had none." Here is Ballanfant on his former boss, Warren Giles (p.47): "I don't want to bad-mouth the man, but he was half-crooked all the time." And here is Reardon on umpiring schools (p.4): "I don't know what the hell they tell them."

Traditionally, umpires have been the objects of fan violence: it's always been all right to want "to kill the umpire". Rue's interview begins with these words (p.51): "I've been mobbed, cussed, booed, kicked in the ass, punched in the face, hit with mud balls and whiskey bottles, and had everything from shoes to fruits and vegetables thrown at me. I've been hospitalized with a concussion and broken ribs. I've been spit on and soaked with lime and water."

After a minor league game, George Pipgras "found out that a bunch of fans had put a pile of newspapers underneath my Chevy coupe and set it on fire" (p.79). McKinley specifically equates bad fan behavior with the minor leagues (p.154-155), which brings us

to Steamboat Johnson's *Standing the Gaff* (originally published in 1935).

This book is full of violence. Johnson speaks of "a six-inch snap-blade knife" which he began carrying "during the stormy days in the Western League" (p.29). Later he tells a story of pretending to have a gun in his pocket, concluding that "the fans scattered in every direction, not knowing that I have never carried a gun, only that long snap-blade knife" (p.88). If Johnson actually used that knife, he never tells us. On the other hand, fans are not reluctant to use such weapons as come to hand, and Johnson was constantly showered with pop bottles (p.48, 69, 82, 99, 103, 111).

Standing the Gaff is actually a slight book, but the Univ. of Nebraska reprint contains a substantial introduction by Gerlach, who calls the book "especially valuable as a period piece, an intimate look at the inglorious life of an umpire during the glory days of baseball—the techniques and equipment, the travel and loneliness, the routines and rhubarbs" (p.xvi). He speculates that Johnson spent almost all of his career in the minors not because he wasn't good enough for the majors, but because of his umpiring style, which Gerlach describes as "flamboyant" (p.xxi). "A thespian at heart, he made sure no one could overlook his presence on the field" (p.xxviii). Gerlach believes that Johnson's "showmanship was partly a calculated attempt to defuse tense situations with humor and partly a natural expression of his personality" (p.xxviii). Johnson's voice was perhaps his most notable quality. He quotes an Atlanta sports editor (p.50) who wrote that Johnson "has a voice like a Mississippi River steamboat. From now he is 'Steamboat' Johnson to Atlantans."

Gerlach notes that Johnson spent most of his time umpiring in a league (Southern Association) that would be sympathetic to his flamboyance (p.xxvi): "The Steamer and the Southern were made for each other. ... Ironically, the style of umpiring that kept Steamer from the majors was his ticket to success in the minors."

The Univ. of Nebraska Press provided an index to this edition of *Standing the Gaff*. One can only wonder why they didn't do the same for *The Men in Blue*. Perhaps one of our Bibliography Committee members will undertake the task.

CAN'T BE WRONG: Poems

Michael Lally. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1996.

AVALANCHE: Poems

Quincy Troupe. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1996.

THE OLD LIFE: New Poems

Donald Hall. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1996.

There is a single poem concerned with baseball in each of these three books of poems.

Lally's "Sports Heroes, Cops, and Lace" (p.22-27) is a poem about fathers and sons that features Jackie Robinson (p.25):

*Jackie Robinson was the guide to the
outside world for me, his example let me see
that what I was taught was not necessarily true, and what I
always suspected I knew might be.*

Lally's conversational style makes this poem, and the others in the book, a joy to read.

The Quincy Troupe of *Avalanche* is not the Negro League ballplayer and manager but his son, a poet and biographer of jazz trumpeter Miles Davis. His "Poem for My Father" (p.80-82) balances images of baseball, tales from the black leagues, jazz, the American South, and Africa:

*but you there, father, through it all, a yardbird solo
riffing on bat and ball glory, breaking down all fabricated
myths*

of white major-league legends, of who was better than who

Hall's book contains "The Thirteenth Inning" (p.15-24), a continuation of the poems "Baseball" and "Extra Innings" in *The Museum of Clear Ideas* (Ticknor & Fields, 1993). This poem is a col-

lage of memories, of baseball, of Carlton Fisk (whose 12th inning home run in the sixth game of the 1975 World Series ended the game and the poem "Extra Innings"), of suffering, cancer, and hospitals, of aging, Kurt Switters, Hall's father, a painting by John Singer Sargent, and much else. It is a somber enterprise: "In darkness and silence the game continues itself". In a note at the end of *The Old Life*, Hall composes a mock review of *The Museum of Clear Ideas*, ending: "Blessedly, Hall's game ends with a home run in the twelfth inning; no fan—of poetry or baseball—would wish for a thirteenth."

Book Reviews

Ron Kaplan

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BASEBALL'S BEST SHORT STORIES

Paul D. Staudohar, ed. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1995. 390p. \$16.95 paper

TALES OF THE DIAMOND: Selected Gems of Baseball Fiction

Laurence J. Hyman and Laura Thorpe, eds. Introduction by Ron Fimrite. Forward by Francis T. Vincent. Illustrated by Miles Hyman. San Francisco: Woodford Press, 1991. 152p. \$29.95; \$16.95 cloth

Gathered together in these two collections are some of the most prominent writers of the 20th century, both inside baseball circles and out. Thomas Wolfe, Zane Grey, Ring Lardner, Damon Runyon, James Thurber, P.G. Wodehouse, W.P. Kinsella, Roger Angell, and Garrison Keillor, among others, bring together more than 100 years of baseball fiction, giving us a taste not only of the changing times of the great game but of society in general.

In his introduction to *Tales of the Diamond*, Fimrite notes (p.8) that baseball fiction has come a long way from its early works: "... for the better part of this century, the national game was merely the stuff of boys' books, fairy tales in which absurdly virtuous heroes clouted game-winning ninth-inning homers or fanned sinister sluggers with the bases loaded. ... These chaste books, harmless certainly and often entertaining, basically had no more to do with baseball as it really was than *Cinderella* had to do with podiatry."

Fimrite credits Lardner with breaking that pattern with *You Know Me Al* and "Alibi Ike". These were more realistic characterizations: players who bragged, roughhoused, drank too much, cheated at cards and on the diamond (or if not cheated, at least bent the rules), wooed women clumsily, and *despite* these failings often produced heroic results.

According to Staudohar, "some of the best short stories are about baseball, either the game itself or as a backstop to morality, greed, love, envy, aging and other literary themes."

There is much in common between *Baseball's Best* and the earlier *Tales*. Indeed, offerings by Runyon, Thurber, Wodehouse, Keillor, and T. Coraghessan Boyle are duplicated in both collections.

Leading off *Best* is Ernest L. Thayer's classic, "Casey at the Bat", which along with "Take Me Out to the Ball Game", is one of the artistic icons of baseball. Frank Deford's expanded narrative about the circumstances surrounding Casey's battle against Mudville follows the original poem, and there's another variation on the theme in Chet Williamson's "Gandhi at the Bat", which considers what might happen if the Mahatma ever took a turn against Lefty Grove. It would have been interesting to have Keillor's biting rendition of the famed verse as well. Keillor's affection for the game is evident with two pieces: one about the first female, but definitely unladylike, major leaguer, and "Three New Twins Join Club in Spring", which displays his Minnesota chauvinism.

Also in *Best* is Lardner's "Alibi Ike". The story of a talented newcomer who is nonetheless a legend in his own mind, it is as hilarious now as when it was written in 1915. The title has become an idiom of the American language. Lardner's similar tale, "My Roomy", also appears in this collection.

Thurber's "You Could Look It Up" foreshadows the uproarious appearance of the midget Eddie Gaedel for the St. Louis Browns by ten years. Could Bill Veeck have used this story as his inspiration?

Harkening to Fimrite's comments of more mature themes, one notices the selections penned primarily during the first half of the century seem to use women, alcohol, and eccentric behavior as the focal points for the hero's success or failure. In the years following World War II, the darker side of humanity comes out: a player's physical decline and subsequent disappointments, destructive character flaws, and even death. Examples of this genre include: Michael Chabon's "Smoke", a 1990 narrative about a pitcher on the downside of his career, attending the funeral of his all-star batterymate; Eliot Asinof's "The Rookie", concerning a veteran minor leaguer's chance after languishing for years in the bushes; "Death of a Right Fielder", by Stuart Dybeck; and Edward L. McKenna's enigmatic and disturbing "Fielder's Choice".

Just about every view of the game is represented in *Best*: the fan ("Brooklyn's Lose"), the manager ("Joe, The Great McWhiff"), the man in blue ("The Umpire Was a Rookie"), the minor league prodigy ("One Throw"), the bench-warmer ("Horseshoes", another Lardner contribution), and the Latino player ("The Hector Quesadilla Story"). There's even a rare science-fiction slant on the game, a 1960 offering by Lloyd Biggle, Jr. entitled "Who's on First?", about some really out-of-this-world ballplayers, which is perhaps the most intriguing submission in *Best*. One missing element, interestingly, is a piece from a female author's perspective.

While many of these stories are entertaining, especially the older, lighter tales, I question the inclusion of others as among "baseball's best". One thing is certain: there's definitely a wide variety, something-for-everyone style to Staudohar's edition.

What distinguishes *Tales* most from *Best* is its artful layout. Hyman's poignant illustrations have a bittersweet quality as they depict the humor and/or anguish for each story. Kinsella (conspicuously absent in *Best*) reminds us of one of the most evocative renderings of a true fan's love for the game in his "The Thrill of the Grass". Angell, another all-time baseball literary cornerstone, spins a yarn about a door-to-door salesman who fortunately bears the name of a beloved Giants hurler in "A Killing". And Paul Gallico, who covered the likes of Ruth and Gehrig for the sports pages and found time to pen *The Poseidon Adventure*, raises the question of whether umpires need to dress in their customarily somber colors in "The Umpire's Revolt".

Thomas Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again* is excerpted here (*Best* prides itself in that only purely short stories are included) with "Nebraska Crane", about a chance encounter between two old friends, one a star ballplayer pondering retirement. And Sergio Ramírez, former vice president of Nicaragua, spins a tender and tense account of a father as he watches his son try to spin "The Perfect Game".

According to another Grey spiel, "Old Well-Well", the greatest baseball fan in the nation revels in his passion even in the face of imminent death. In "My Kingdom for Jones", Wilbur Schramm puts new meaning to the term "horse sense" as the Brooklyn Dodgers pin their hopes on an equine infielder. And in "Leroy Jeffcoat", a house painter is turned into a lousy semipro baseball nut thanks to a fall from a ladder in William Price Fox' whimsical tale.

Shirley Jackson, the only female writer included in the two volumes, renders a very emphatic offering on the traumas of being the mother of a Little Leaguer in "braves 10, giants 9".

Both *Best* and *Tales* offer hours of entertaining, thought-provoking, and moving reading, though I would give *Tales* the nod for the inclusion of Hyman's eloquent illustrations.

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