

BIBLIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

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Comments from the Chair

Andy McCue
Riverside, CA

Last quarter, I wrote you about the necessity for some new software for our TBI project. That need has become more acute in the past few months.

Over that time, work by Steve Milman and myself has resulted in approximately 1,000 new entries for TBI, including SABR publications, the journals *Base Ball*, *Black Ball*, *Nine*, and *Memories and Dreams*, plus lots of new books. None of these entries can be added to the on-line database because of problems with our current software.

Fortunately, the public portion of the site continues to function smoothly so searches can be made without problems. But the database that researchers are using has become stagnant. I have spoken with SABR's website expert, Peter Garver, but Peter has been preoccupied with the other problems the new website design and software have created. Knowing Peter, he will get to it when he can. This work also delays the identification of new website software and the customization that will be necessary for our situation. Peter will turn to that when he can, and then we will turn to raising the money for the upgrade.

I'm pleased to see some more book reviews in this issue from Terry Smith and I encourage all of you (who are presumably reading baseball books) to turn in your own reviews. The reviews do not need to be of current books. SABR, through various committees, is slowly building a library of book reviews that can be accessed at any time.

New Committee Project

At the suggestion of our newsletter editor, Ron Kaplan, we are beginning a project to catalog all *new* book projects by SABR members.

We will run 100-word synopses of the projects in this newsletter and keep a catalog of what we have received. Authors can update the information when they get a publisher and when a publication date is set. This should give the authors some nice advance publicity and create an archive members can use to find others working on similar material. Please see the format used in the entries below.

Send submissions to agmcue44@earthlink.net and RonK232@comcast.net.

Features and Reviews

Under Pallor, Under Shadow: The 1920 American League Pennant Race That Rattled and Rebuilt Baseball, by Bill Felber. University of Nebraska Press, 2011.

1921: The Yankees, the Giants, and the Battle for Baseball Supremacy in New York, by Lyle Spatz and Steven Steinberg. University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

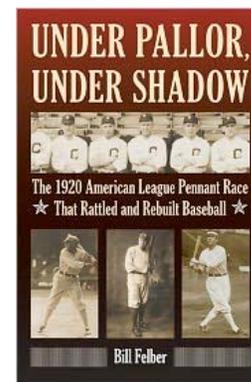
The House That Ruth Built: A New Stadium, The First Yankee Championship, and the Redemption of 1923, Robert Weintraub. Little, Brown and Company, 2011.

The early 1920s are among the most interesting times in baseball history, and here are three books that study the times through the three pennant races of the years 1920, 1921, and 1923. By the end of the 1923 World Series, the game and the business were both largely transformed, and these books detail that transformation. What is perhaps more fun for SABRites, each offers a detailed account of a particular season, just the thing for off-season reading.

One thing that connects the three books is that they both utilize the device of the massive subtitle to convey something of each book's focus. Felber gets a lot of mileage out of the fascinating title and subtitle of his book. Ray Chapman's death and the emerging Black Sox scandal are the dominating elements of the 1920 American League pennant race itself. His narrative reveals two other interconnected elements: the emergence of Babe Ruth in New York and the coming of Judge Landis and the commissionership.

It's a very complicated story. Felber sets a quotation from Albert Lasker's plan for reorganizing baseball's governing body before his narrative: "If baseball is to continue to exist as our national game...it must be with the recognition on the part of club owners and players, that the game itself belongs to the American people, and not to either owners or players."

This indicates an interest in how the business of baseball wanted itself understood by the public. The question is



— how, according to Felber, was baseball “rattled and rebuilt” by the 1920 American League pennant race? His account of the 1920 season is the center of this. The book begins with the first pitch of opening day. It ends not with the World Series, but with the signing of the new national Agreement in January of 1921. What happened?

Felber spends a good deal of his time on the politics of baseball. We learn lots about American League president Ban Johnson’s difficulties with three of his owners in the first part of the book, and then in the last part of the struggle that produced the commissionership. Felber concludes “the most profound outcome of the 1920 season was its role as a triggering device in reformation of the game’s governing structure.” What did this have to do with the 1920 pennant race?

The author acknowledges the presence of Babe Ruth in New York and of “the game’s shifting focus from pitching dominance to hitting dominance.” But for him, the real meaning of the 1920 pennant race is embodied in the other two contending American League clubs, the Cleveland Indians and the Chicago White Sox. Felber’s title for Chapter 7 — “The Last Three Weeks of Innocence and Purity in the History of Baseball” — suggests that the events to come will constitute a fall from innocence. Surely the sudden presence of death on the ballfield would be one ingredient in this fall, and the beaming of Ray Chapman of the Indians by Carl Mays of the Yankees and Chapman’s subsequent death provides this. Chapman, Felber points out, is eulogized in a particular way: as someone determined to win “within the boundaries of the rules,” which Felber notes is “an especially poignant characteristic in the context of the widespread suspicion of graft and corruption then encircling baseball.” As the race progressed, it was “one thing to envision losing the pennant under circumstances as tragic as those presented by the death of the popular Chapman. But losing to a team of crooks was beyond rational consideration.”

That would be the Chicago White Sox. They provide a second blow to the forces of “innocence and purity.” The meeting of the Chicago grand jury of baseball and gambling “within a few weeks would transcend and overwhelm the pennant race itself.” What Felber finds happening in the press is a shift from interest in the outcome of the pennant race to an interest in the meaning of the game itself. As Felber says, “In September 1920 all that was important involved protecting baseball’s virtue.”

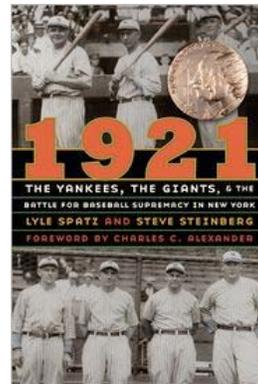
What the game meant in 1920 Felber addresses in his chapter “Losers Laugh, Winners Cry.” He begins with a quotation from the *Chicago Daily News* that ends “nothing could so undermine the average American’s confidence in society as the discovery of corruption in organized baseball.” Felber adds that “in 1920 people actually believed ballplayers lived by a code, and that the game was overseen by a benevolent structure.... It became important to the nation’s cultural well-being that the Indians, and not the White Sox, reap the reward of the pennant race.” Felber is surely right about this, but I am uneasy with the idea that this might signal the end of innocence about baseball on the fan’s part. Readers of Ring Lardner’s *You Know Me Al*, for instance, would have another view of both ballplayers and club owners. The Lasker Plan and the ascension of Judge

Landis have always struck me as a beginning, or reassertion, of “innocence and purity” rather than the opposite.

Felber has written a fine and austere study of a season that presented a complex set of problems. It’s important because it depicts the process of changes occurring in the game. His book includes notes and an index but most of his references are to newspaper accounts of the season. He does acknowledge the Chicago History Museum and the Lawrence Ritter tapes at Notre Dame. In general, though he occasionally refers to a secondary source, he sticks close to primary sources. There is no clutter.

Felber’s account of the 1920 season may be usefully contrasted with Spatz and Steinberg’s *1921*, worthy winner of the 2011 Seymour Medal. If Felber’s book is largely without clutter, Spatz and Steinberg’s has all kinds of clutter: It’s chock full of photographs; a foreword by a distinguished baseball historian; a 17-page bibliography; more than sixty pages of notes; monthly standings of the pennant races throughout the 1921 season; and many other statistics. In all, quite a majestic performance, with all the paraphernalia a fellow researcher could ask for.

The subtitle announces the central thesis of the book: that the chief significance of the 1921 season is “the Battle for Baseball Supremacy in New York.” It’s very New York oriented, and Yankee and even Giant fans like myself



should enjoy it especially. Spatz and Steinberg demonstrate that although the Giants win the battle of the 1921 World Series, the war for the hearts and minds of New York baseball fans is being won by the Yankees. As the authors say in their preface, the 1921 season “was one of the great tipping points in the history of our national pastime.”

For this reader, the book’s outstanding characteristic is its ability to acknowledge the complexities of this tipping. Let me give three examples: their treatments of the Black Sox scandal; of antagonists Babe Ruth and John McGraw; and of the 1921 World Series.

While Felber’s focus is on the rumors that precede the breaking of the Black Sox scandal in 1920, Spatz and Steinberg wonder if 1921, not 1920, is the more important year, asserting that “the year that tested the loyalty of baseball fans was 1921 not 1920.” They credit judge Landis’ treatment of the scandal as “an aberration” in securing fan loyalty. But they also describe instances of continuing fan suspicion, notably the accusations of drugging following the Giants’ sweep of the Pirates in August and Fred Lieb’s conviction that Carl May threw the fourth game of the World Series.

Among the allies Landis had in minimizing the effect of the Black Sox scandal was “Babe Ruth, whose power game had been thrilling the nation even before the scandal broke.” Ruth’s arrival as a power-hitting outfielder “could not have been better for the national pastime. As the Black Sox affair unfolded, Ruth’s surging popularity drowned out the negative news. He was not only changing the way the game was being played, he was becoming the face of the game and its

savior in the minds of many.” Ruth’s game Spatz and Steinberg describe as having “almost single-handedly begun changing the game from the old-style inside baseball practiced by McGraw to one that featured power hitting and home runs.” The authors point out that this sort of baseball was in tune with the culture of the 1920s. Ruth had “much more” than a home run bat; he had “an exuberant joie de vivre and behavior that pushed conventional boundaries. Both were made to order for the early 1920s, a time of breaking free from constraints and having a good time.”

On the other hand, “McGraw had been the embodiment of that old style of play — a low-scoring scientific game that had prevailed in baseball since the turn of the century, a game dominated by pitchers, many of whom threw ‘trick’ pitches, a game when a walk, a stolen base, and a couple of sacrifices would scratch out a precious run.” For the most part, the authors treat McGraw as an embodiment of the past, remarking that “not only did McGraw represent an old-fashioned style of baseball,...he was also part of the pre-World War I New York that was rapidly changing.” “With the growth of New York City and the corresponding expansion of the subway system, the Bronx was evolving and growing. ‘As a demographer, McGraw was stuck at the turn of the century.’” At the same time, though he represented the past, his practices as a manager resembled those of the power game. “He believed in scoring runs in clusters, as reflected in his general disdain of the sacrifice and decreasing emphasis on the stolen base.” And his team went on to win three more National League pennants in a row.

Spatz and Steinberg’s treatment of the 1921 World Series also illustrates their commitment to marking the complexities of changes taking place on the field. In the first two games, for instance, “the Yankees had surprised the Giants with a style of play that the Giants had not expected.” They won through excellent pitching and baserunning, the Dead-ball style. In fact, because pitching dominated the series so much that “the season-long talk of a new slugging-dominated game was getting a second look.... Some observers wondered about the extent to which the game really was entering a new era of slugging.” That Spatz and Steinberg are able to describe that tipping (and the book has many other dimensions than those I’ve commented on here) is what makes it stand out for this reader.

Like our other authors, Weintraub is a member of SABR and a serious researcher. While he provides a good deal of information about his sources in his text, in the notes and sources he provides, and in his bibliography, his book seems primarily aimed at general readers who will not be as concerned as researchers with the sources of particular stories. There are no footnotes, and Weintraub’s “Notes” only occasionally refer to specific sources. This is not to suggest that Weintraub has not done a good deal of research; he has. But it will be difficult for other researchers to use.

In focusing on the 1923 major league season, Weintraub chronicles the ascension of the New York Yankees to the pinnacle of the baseball world, both on and off the field. If, as Spatz and Steinberg say, 1921 was the “tipping point,” 1923 was the year the Yankees assumed their position at the head of the baseball business. Weintraub singles out three elements: the opening of Yankee Stadium, the play of Babe Ruth, and the battle between Ruth and McGraw (the power

game vs. Scientific ball) for the hearts and minds of New York baseball fans.

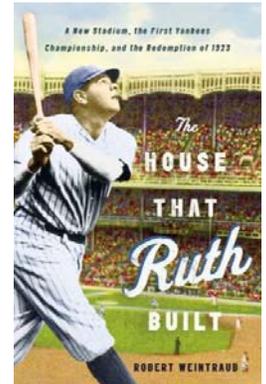
Initially the focus is on the building and opening of Yankee Stadium. Weintraub is surely right to emphasize the importance of this, its role in Yankee ascendancy. He is also very good about connecting the three elements. The Stadium is so much grander than the Polo Grounds that Weintraub concludes that “this was a stadium built for grandeur and maximum profit, not necessarily for Ruth home runs.” He calls 1923 Ruth’s “greatest overall season, one well shy of his most prodigious home run totals but compensated for with outstanding all-around play — at the plate, in the field, on the base paths, and in the locker room.”

Weintraub also shows how Yankee Stadium was “a major engine of change and development in” New York. “The Stadium personified ‘big’ and ‘rich,’ two of New York’s elemental traits.” In Weintraub’s view, Yankee Stadium represented the future, the Polo Grounds of John McGraw’s Giants the past. As Weintraub looks over the twenty-first century landscape, he notes “the greatest change, at least from a baseball perspective, is that the Polo Grounds no longer exists...and the entire area is in thrall to the great new Yankee Stadium across the river.”

After the Stadium itself, Babe Ruth becomes the center of the action. After his poor performance in the 1922 world series, many concluded that “the Babe was overrated, and his brand of power baseball was finished, a passing fad.” Additionally, Ruth had experienced a difficult winter off the field and a poor spring on it. But in the 1923 regular season, “Ruth had proved to the doubters that he was the game’s greatest player and that there was much more to him than merely crushing balls over distant fences. He had come through for his team in games large and small. He had shown one and all that he could stay clean and relatively sober throughout a season and had won back the ‘dirty-faced’ kids he had apparently lost the year before.”

Weintraub also focuses on the struggle between Ruth and Giants manager John McGraw for the hearts and minds of New Yorkers. McGraw is presented as having a managerial style in which “control was of primary importance.” He was also a great innovator, a fact the author acknowledges in an impressive list of his various innovations. Several of these are in play in the first game of the 1923 World Series, as Weintraub details. Off the field, McGraw was “the undisputed prince of [New York].” On the field, he was “the Messiah of Scientific Baseball.”

What “Scientific Baseball” is, is defined negatively. Weintraub neatly juxtaposes quotations from Ty Cobb and Ruth that describe what it is not. Says Cobb “given the proper physical equipment — which consists solely in the strength to knock a ball forty feet further than the average man can do it — anybody can play big-league ball today. In other words, science is out the window.” “The Babe didn’t argue,” Weintraub continues, “that his way lacked refined technique. ‘Pick a good one and sock it’ was his method. ‘I



get back to the dugout and they ask me what I hit and I tell them I don't know except it looked good."

McGraw himself "referred to Ruth with studied derision...based...upon the brute simian approach to baseball that Ruth embodied." And he was, going into the 1923 World Series, the conqueror of Ruth, who was "certainly no match for the mental mastery of Scientific Baseball as practiced by John J. McGraw." Scientific baseball comprises what we call "small ball" today, but Weintraub adds an interesting twist to this definition. He contrasts Ruth with the Giants' outfielder Ross "Pep" Youngs: "Just as the Babe personified youthful exuberance and desire, Pep represented passion and vinegar." Weintraub continues: "when complaints arose about the power game supplanting Scientific Baseball, often the underlying sentiment was about *effort*. The home run just seemed too easy in the sense that something as precious as a run should be earned over the course of several batters, not merely in one quick jolt." He concludes that to those who favored scientific baseball "the home runs may have been exciting, but they weren't all out, hustling baseball."

But for Weintraub the 1923 World Series establishes, not just the primacy of the Yankee franchise in New York, but the primacy of the power game over scientific baseball. He connects this to the new spirit of the 1920s when he summarizes "by dethroning the Giants, the Yankees and their bashing style vaulted past Scientific Baseball and accelerated its decline. It was a game more and more for the 'moneyed class,' and these weren't baseball purists. The new breed of fan cared little for Scientific Baseball and its cutthroat style and were thrilled by the power game. The notion that runs could come quickly and in great number mirrored their expectations in business, in the markets, in life."

These three books can be read happily just for their descriptions of the pennant races. This New York Giant fan was most interested in these years as a playing out of the tragedy of John McGraw, but it's clear that, although McGraw's hubris is a factor, the most important elements are the reorganization of the business Felber describes and the rise of the Yankees detailed by Spatz and Steinberg and Weintraub.

Leverett T. Smith, Jr.
Rocky Mountain, NC



Fear Strikes Out, by Jimmy Piersall with Al Hirshberg. Atlantic Monthly Press/Little, Brown and Company, 1955.

Jimmy Piersall was a two-time All-Star who sent 17 seasons in the Majors — and one summer in a mental institution.

That's the crux of this underrated autobiography from the mid-50s, well ahead of its time in discussing the issue of mental illness. Piersall's frank rendering of his childhood,

his overbearing (but always beloved) father, his mother, who was in and out of hospitals herself for "nervous exhaustion," all came a time when such intimate problems were never discussed outside the house (or inside, in many cases).

Piersall recalls his struggles to maintain a sense of balance while striving to become the best, pushed by his dad, who wanted his son to be a major leaguer (and not just for any team, but for the Red Sox, as befits a resident of Waterbury, CT) and would allow nothing to deter that goal. When a teenaged Jimmy was injured in a pick-up football game, his dad nearly had a heart attack. This drive — and perhaps genetics — went a long way in explaining the son's behavior. He obviously loved his parents very much, wanting to please them at the expense of his own desires and well-being.

The ballplayer takes the reader on a journey from his formative years through his first cautious seasons in the majors. An all-star outfielder as on the schoolboy level, he became downright paranoid when the Sox decided to convert him into a shortstop. Piersall just knew they were out to destroy him and his future.

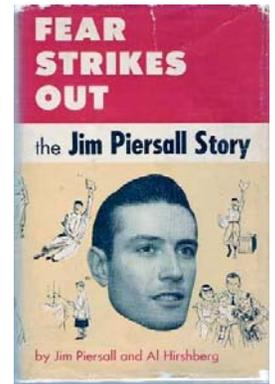
The next thing you know, it's months later and Piersall tells the story — of which he has no personal knowledge — through scrapbooks and the accounts of his patient wife and their friends. Of how he finally relented and went to see a doctor. Of how he was admitted to a mental hospital where he turned violent and had to be confined to a more secure facility. Of electric shock treatments. Of being "cured," yet anxious about returning to society and baseball. And of how he ultimately succeeded and returned to enjoy a steady career, even if he did have the occasional bout of eccentricity.

Fear Strikes Out is an 'as-told-to,' in this case to the very capable Al Hirshberg but I can't help thinking that if this book was written now, it would have all sorts of diagnoses (was he a paranoid schizophrenic? Bipolar?), lurid details, and more. As it is, *Fear Strikes Out* is a sensitive account of a deeply personal odyssey.

Piersall, who became an outspoken broadcaster for the White Sox, also wrote *The Truth Hurts* (1985).

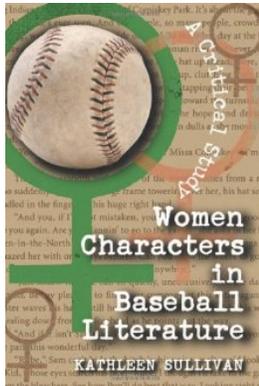
Fear Strikes Out was turned into a feature film starring Anthony Perkins as Piersall (perhaps the worst imitation of a baseball player since William Bendix) and Karl Malden as his father.

Ron Kaplan
Montclair, NJ



Women Characters in Baseball Literature: A Critical Study, by Kathleen Sullivan. McFarland, 2005.

Novels and feature films tend to find comfort in stock characters. Stories about celebrities in particular focus on two or three types of women. You have your temptress who, for various reasons, wants to keep the protagonist from succeeding at his mission. For baseball materials you have the likes of Memo Paris and Harriet Bird in *The Natural* and Lola in *Damned Yankees/The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*. In addition you have the character who's just down-right evil like Rachel Phelps, the owner of the Indians who wants her team to finish dead-last so she can move the team to Florida. There's the nurturer, like Iris Lemon in *The Natural*, Eleanor Twitchell-



Gehrig in *The Pride of the Yankees*, Aimee Alexander in *The Winning Team*, and whatever character June Allyson plays in any movie she's in. These strong women serve as the voice of reason and unabashed supporters of the man's cause. And, of course, there are the skeptical mothers like Ma Gehrig in *TPOTY* and Ma Stratton in *The Stratton Story*, who think their sons are idiots and worry that the world will take advantage of them.

Focusing solely on the written word, Sullivan, a lecturer at the University of Texas at Arlington, further classifies them in terms of the goddesses of mythologies, primarily those who nurture others and those who exert their own personalities and desires. In addition to the classic baseball literature such as *The Natural* and the works of Mark Harris, she digs deep to introduce readers to an exciting variety of novels that may have slipped under the "popular" radar, including *She's on First* by Barbara Gregorich; *Rachel, the Rabbi's Wife*, by Sylvia Tennenbaum; *The Sweetheart Season: A Novel*, by Kern Joy Fowler; and *Things Invisible to See*, by Nancy Willard.

While Sullivan does make some very interesting and thought-provoking points — which, after all is the purpose of literary analysis — the issue I have with such books is that sometimes that runs tends to run *too* deep. Do the writers really sit and figure out that scenario X represents concept A? If they do, fine. After all, critics and teachers need something to talk and write about. But sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

Of course, some might say that since I'm a man, the fact that I'm being less than glowing serves as proof that a) books like Sullivan's are necessary, and b) I'm an ignorant dolt. I argue neither point. Thankfully, *Women Characters in Baseball Literature* has made me a bit more sensitive to such considerations heretofore unimagined.

**Ron Kaplan
Montclair, NJ**

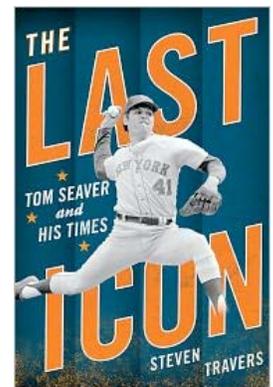
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The Last Icon: Tom Seaver and His Times, by Steven Travers. Taylor Trade, 2011.

I have very mixed feelings about this latest effort by Travers (*A Tale of Three Cities: The 1962 Baseball Season in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco*; *The 1969 Miracle Mets: The Improbable Story of the World's Greatest Underdog Team*; and *Dodgers Past & Present*, among others). On the one hand, a good, solid biography for the Mets legend is long overdue. On the other hand, despite what the author writes somewhat immodestly — "Curiously, the 'quintessential Seaver book' was never written...until, finally, this one!" — this still might, in fact, not be it.

Oh, there's certainly enough information about Seaver and his exploits on the field, how he helped propel the New York team from a bunch of losers in spectacular and surprisingly winners just two years after his debut, and how he continued to excel from that point, even while his teammates failed to provide decent offensive support, thus depriving him from being a multiple 30-game winner (according to Travers). But there are also enough mistakes, redundancies, hyperbole, and a questionable writing style to make the effort unworthy of its subject.

With all due respect to Travers, truth be told, I only finished the book because I wanted to see how deep these issues went. First and foremost, there is no attribution for the vast majority of the quotes the author uses, which might lead the reader to believe Travers actually interviewed the former ballplayer. There is no introduction or epilogue that suggests otherwise.



- In 1968, Bob Gibson posted "a record earned run average of 1.12, a mark that may never be broken." But that is not the mark; the modern record belongs to Dutch Leonard, who posted a 0.96 ERA in 1914. Mordecai "Three Finger" Brown holds the second spot at 1.04. If you want to claim that Gibson's ERA was the best for the expansion or post-war era, that's fine, but identify it as such. To do otherwise is deceiving.
- Travers identifies Seaver's teammate Jerry Koosman as Rookie of the Year in 1968. In fact, the honors went to Johnny Bench that year. Koosman was named *The Sporting News* rookie pitcher, but, again, if that's what the author meant, he should have stated it clearly, since it is obviously not the "official" award and does not carry the same gravitas.
- He states "A crowd of 58,436 came out to see Seaver versus Jenkins in a game that defined why baseball still was and remains to this day our national pastime" (more hyperbole). I don't know what source he used, since there are no notes in his book, but according to Baseball-Reference.com, the highest attendance that year was 55,901 for a non-Seaver Mets-Pirates game in September.

- There is more to the book than just baseball. There's also social commentary. In referring to Seaver's comfortable California childhood, Travers writes: "Eventually, he was allowed to leave the house on his own, to venture into a street past sprinklers watering lawns. The music of the era was Pat Boone, not Nirvana. It was the age of innocence, the last vestiges of a bygone era before drugs, the antiwar protests of the 1960s, pornography, and the bone-chilling fear of child molestation." Goodness, how did the last generation ever survive to reach adulthood?
- In referring to a poor outfield play by Ron Swoboda in the 1969 World Series, Travers writes: "He had bumbled around, letting [Don] Buford's fly land for a homer, Jose Canseco-style, in Baltimore." Sorry, but I don't recall Swoboda taking a ball on the noggin and having it bounce over the fence. I don't know what else Travers could have meant by referring to it as "Canseco-style."
- Travers often goes on tangents in trying to make a point. To quote at length:
- "What's going on here?" was Seaver's best Slim Pickens imitation of the light-hitting Mets scoring 27 runs in three playoff games." Unless you're a movie buff, I don't expect you'd know Mr. Pickens' work. The same goes for the line "The Mets were surrounded like British soldiers in *Zulu*," a 1964 feature film.
- The author waxes poetic about Seaver's near-perfect game in 1969 to an extravagant extent: "Just 29 hours and 45 minutes after Lindsey Nelson announced, 'It's absolute bedlam. You could not believe it. It's absolute bedlam,' when Ed Kranepool drove in Cleon Jones to beat Chicago 4-3, another event occurred that utterly eclipsed that one [Editor's note: I had to check what the "event" was, since the Mets were merely in second place, 4.5 games back]. It was at 9:55 p.m. on Wednesday, July 9, the Year of our Lord 1969. In the pantheon of greatness reserved only for that most heroic of all heroes, the New York sports superstar, beyond that the *American* [emphasis original] hero — 'in the arena' as Theodore Roosevelt liked to call it, the bright lights of Broadway, the Great White Way...and Shea Stadium illuminating him in all his splendor; well, he is rare indeed and rarer still is his debut."

What? Never mind that this was simply a failed no-hitter, which happens frequently enough. I'll even go so far as to say it was certainly one of the greatest games in team history, but am I alone in thinking this is a wee bit overdone? Is it even a complete thought?

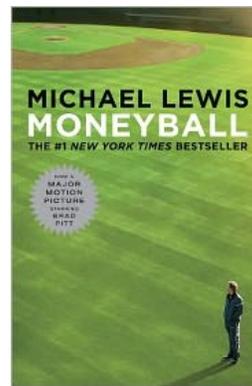
- In discussing Seaver's excellent 1971 campaign, Travers opines that "upon closer examination, [it is] one of the greatest in history **without question**." [emphasis added]. The author likes to make definitive statements such as this one, whereas other writers might try to be a bit more circumspect.

- If you read, "In a rematch with the Dodgers Seaver pitched his heart out until almost collapsing in a game that ended up going 19 innings," how many frames would you think he actually pitched? I'm guessing more than the six he contributed to that particular contest. Maybe he wasn't feeling well that day. It's this style that actually serves to diminish the Hall of Famer's accomplishments: if everything is great, then nothing is great.
- When he does refer to outside sources, Travers can be a bit confusing. In his "1973" chapter, he writes, "In a modern statistic called 'earned run average adjusted to the layer's ballpark,' Seaver's was 175 (according to BaseballReference.com)," as if that's sufficient to readers who don't understand the significance of the stat. It turns out that Seaver led the NL in that department in '73, but Travers doesn't explain that.
- I dog-eared dozens of pages with questionable references, but I'll finish with this one regarding the 1973 playoffs against the Reds: "[Pete] Rose was the first hitter. The crowd was in bad form. The future Hall of Famer's homer the previous day was a poke in the eye to the Shea faithful...." Do I even need to add any emphasis here?

I don't mean to come across as mean-spirited here and dog-pile on Travers, but truth be told, a player of Seaver's stature deserves a better accounting.

**Ron Kaplan
Montclair, NJ**

Commentary: Who Should Review?



I've been working on my own forthcoming baseball book, so I've been in a cave for the last several months, so it's just now dawning on me: When it comes to movies and books like *Moneyball* and *The Art of Fielding* (which you just know is going to be turned into a feature film before too long), who should be considered the more credible reviewers? Should it be the person who is more knowledgeable about the game but not an "English major," for lack of a better phrase? Or should it be someone who knows all about literary and film criticism but little about the sport?

A piece by David Wade on The Hardball Times blog is the one that got me going on this search. To quote at length:

"The fact that this effort is based on the use of statistics in baseball means most readers of sites like The Hardball Times will likely go to see it. Certainly, it means those who liked the book probably will check it out. That actually poses a few problems for the movie.

“Since so many viewers will bring a tremendous amount of subject material knowledge into the theater with them—sort of like a professor specializing in colonial American history sitting down to watch *The Patriot*—they’re going to have some issues with the film.

“*The Patriot* could have been a meticulous, in-depth study of the Revolutionary War. Instead, it banked on the popularity of a previous (and very popular) Mel Gibson vehicle called *Braveheart* and more or less made a similar movie with a different setting. That way, it actually had a chance to make money at the box office.

“Appealing to the masses doesn’t necessarily mean a particular movie fails, however. If the filmmakers had to appeal only to viewers with extensive prior knowledge of the subject, they may have made a different movie. But they need to entertain what they hope will be a large number of viewers who just want to watch a good story, and that means we inevitably will find oversimplifications.”

I guess another analogy would be to have NASA people screen a space movie such as *Apollo 13* (as opposed to a *Star Trek* product) to see what holds up to actual science and what doesn’t. I’m sure there’s more non-baseball material in the *Moneyball* movie than the book so the whole thing isn’t just stats and arguments with front office personnel entrenched in the old way of doing things.

Personally, and at the risk of committing blogocide, I don’t have much use for critics. I think a lot of the time I use them to reinforce my opinion for a movie my wife wants to see but in I have no interest. Conversely, if there’s something I do want to watch, I’ll do it regardless of the review. Crazy, huh?

Ron Kaplan
Montclair, NJ

Upcoming Projects

Title: *Nine Aces and a Joker: The Defining Seasons of Standout Pitchers from British Baseball History* (tentative)
Author: Joe Gray (Editor)

Summary: This book will provide synopses of the defining seasons of some of the outstanding pitchers from British baseball history. Beginning with the first season of domestic competition, in 1890, and running through to the 2010 season, ten star pitchers — including some British Baseball Hall of Famers — will be highlighted. Other pitchers' tales will be collated in a “Short stories” section.

Publisher: Fineleaf
Release Date: TBA

Title: *Milwaukee's First American Association Champions* (tentative)

Author: Dennis Pajot

Summary: Brewers' first A. A. pennant was won in 1913. Part One details the 1912 season when Hugh Duffy put team together. In this season the owner died and his wife ran the team, unusual in baseball. Part Two details the 1913 season with Harry Clark running team after Duffy's departure,

while Part Three details second championship with essentially same team as 1913.

Publisher: None yet.

Release Date: TBA

Title: *An Unsung American Hero*

Author: Richard A. Danko

Summary: A historical novel about the life of Floyd M. (Rube) Kroh. Carefully researched facts are blended with life experiences as they might have been, to appeal to a variety of readers. A boy from a small town in Upstate New York lived out his dream as a professional baseball player. When his country called, he left baseball to enlist in the Army during World War One. Upon returning in 1919, he pitched minor league baseball in spite of chronic pain from wounds suffered in France. When no longer able to pitch, he became an umpire in the Southern League until his death in 1944.

Publisher: None yet.

Release Date: TBA

Title: *The Might Have Been*

Author: Joseph M. Schuster

Summary: (Fiction) *The Might Have Been* centers on Edward Everett Yates who perseveres for ten years in the minors before the St. Louis Cardinals call him up. Scant weeks into his major league career, during the game of his life, he suffers a devastating injury. Thirty years later, after sacrificing a lucrative job and the chance for a family, he is barely hanging on as a minor league manager, grappling with regret. Then he encounters two players — one brilliant, the other not — and the intersection has significant consequences for them all.

Publisher: Ballantine Books

Release Date: March 2012

Title: *John Tortes “Chief” Meyers: A Baseball Biography*

Author: William A. Young

Summary: One of the first Native Americans to become a star in major league baseball, John Tortes “Chief” Meyers was the hard-hitting, award-winning catcher for John McGraw’s New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers. He appeared in four World Series and remains heralded for his role as the trusted battery mate of Christy Mathewson. A member of the Santa Rosa Band of the Cahuilla Tribe of California, Meyers returned to his homeland after his major league career and became a tribal leader. This first full biography explores John Tortes Meyers’s early life and Cahuilla roots, his year at Dartmouth College, his outstanding baseball career, his life after baseball, and his legacy.

Publisher: McFarland and Company

Release Date: 2012

Title: *Hippodrome: Ty Cobb, Napoleon Lajoie and the Controversial 1910 Batting Race* (tentative)

Author: Rick Huhn

Summary: In October 1910 baseball fans across the nation were focused on the batting race for a Chalmers automobile, not the forthcoming World Series. The prize was so coveted that Cobb was willing to quit the season early to protect his lead and Lajoie to unflinchingly accept assistance from his opponents to finish 8-8. *Hippodrome* covers that race, analyzing the season-ending Naps-Browns doubleheader and its steamy aftermath.

Included in the mix is Ban Johnson's self-serving investigation, the lawsuit filed by Jack O'Connor following his dismissal as Browns manager, allegations of favoritism in official scoring, and the handling of errors discovered in Cobb's 1910 batting statistics by SABR's Pete Palmer.

Publisher : None yet.

Release Date: NA

Title: *Sabbatarians: The Fight Against Sunday Baseball and Why It Failed* (tentative)

Author: Richard McBane

Summary: Beginning with a definition of Sabbatarians, this combination of baseball history with social history, church history and theology, examines early conflicts over secular Sunday activities, moves on to British-Scottish political and religious problems which were exported to the American colonies, and continues with the cultural war over Sunday baseball as it developed.

Publisher: none yet

Release Date: TBA

Title: *Double No-Hit: Johnny Vander Meer's Historic Night under the Lights*

Author: James W. Johnson

Summary: In the spring of 1938, Cincinnati Reds rookie pitcher Johnny Vander Meer pitched two no-hitters back-to-back. *Double No-Hit* offers an inning-by-inning account of that historic second consecutive no-hitter accomplished during the first night game in New York City, with the Reds facing the Brooklyn Dodgers in Ebbets Field. *Double No-Hit* brings to life a bygone era of the national pastime and one shining spring night, June 15, 1938, when a 22-year-old fireballing lefthander with lousy control pitched his way into the baseball's record book.

Publisher: Bison Books

Release Date: April 2012

Title: *Detroit Tigers 1984: What a Start! What a Finish!*

Authors/Editors: Mark Pattison and David Raglin

Summary: A SABR BioProject book with profiles of each member of the 1984 Tigers, plus the manager and coaches, the owners and key front-office personnel — even the stadium and the city — including a game-by-game recap for the entire season and postseason

Publisher: McFarland

Release Date: TBA, but likely spring 2012

Title: *Deadball, A Metaphysical Baseball Novel*

Author: David B. Stinson

Summary: Former minor-league baseball player Byron Bennett has a deep and spiritual connection to the game of baseball. He sees things in a way others cannot and believes in things others would not. Part pilgrimage and part road trip, Byron visits vanished ballparks in an attempt to bring the past back to life. As visions of baseball's golden era appear around him he must question everything he believes about life, himself, and the game he loves.

Publisher: Huntington Park Publications, Inc.

Release Date: Nov. 23, 2011

Spitball Magazine announces Casey Award nominees

The editors of Spitball released their list of finalists for the 2011 CASEY Award for Best Baseball Book of the Year:

- *The Art of Fielding: A Novel* by Chad Harbach
- *Baseball in the Garden of Eden: The Secret History of the Early Game* by John Thorn
- *The Big Show: Charles M. Conlon's Golden Age Baseball Photographs* by Neal McCabe & Constance McCabe
- *Bottom of the 33rd: Hope, Redemption, and Baseball's Longest Game* by Dan Barry
- *Campy: The Two Lives of Roy Campanella* by Neil Lanctot
- *Fenway 1912: The Birth of a Ballpark, a Championship Season, and Fenway's Remarkable First Year* by Glenn Stout
- *The Greatest Minor League: A History of the Pacific Coast League, 1903-1957* by Dennis Snelling
- *The Kings of Casino Park: Black Baseball in the Lost Season of 1932* by Thomas Aiello
- *21: The Story of Roberto Clemente* by Wilfred Santiago
- *56: Joe DiMaggio and the Last Magic Number in Sports* by Kostya Kennedy

The award will be presented at a program in March.

* * * * *

Year-end accolades for *The Art of Fielding*

Amazon.com has named Chad Harbach's *The Art of Fielding* as its Number One book of 2011. In addition, *New York Times*' book critic Michiko Kakutani includes it in her Top Ten list in the paper's holiday gift guide, calling it "not only a baseball classic — right up there in the pantheon with "The Natural"... — but it's also an effecting story about friendship and coming of age, tracing the intertwined lives of five engaging characters...."

The *Times*' also includes *Fielding* in its list of "100 Notable Books of the Year."

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