Society for American Baseball Research

BIBLIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

January 1998 (98–1)

Comments from the Chair

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I'm in the middle of reading Arnold Rampersad's biography of Jackie Robinson and, after 200 or so pages, I'm convinced it's the best we've had so far. As with David Falkner's excellent *Great Time Coming* (1995), Rampersad's book seeks to see Robinson beyond his baseball career. And, unlike Falkner, Rampersad had the full cooperation of Rachel Robinson. He thus has pictures I've never seen before, quotes from letters between Jackie and Rachel, access to Robinson's full military records, school report cards, and other materials. I understand the book doesn't spend a lot of time on his baseball career, but frankly that's fine with me. I've read all the Robinson biographies and heard probably all of the on-field stories. I'd like to see him off the field and Rampersad is showing me that.

That mini-review raises to my mind a project broached by Committee member Bobby Plapinger. Bobby is interested in shepherding a project to produce a pamphlet or something similar containing all of the excellent book reviews Terry Smith has produced over the years in this newsletter. Bobby reports Terry is willing to be involved. This idea is in the earliest stages and hurdles (such as production and financing) remain to be overcome. But I think it's an idea worth pursuing. Any comments?

On the indexing front, Joe Murphy checked in with his index to Warren Brown's *The Chicago Cubs* (1946), the last team history in the Putnam series to be indexed. Ron Kaplan volunteered to index *The Umpire Story* by James M. Kahn (1953), another Putnam book. Is there someone out there who might be interested in compiling all of these Putnam indexes into one master index? Then, a researcher interested, for example, in Bill McKechnie could find all the references in one place.

Terry Sloope took me up on one of my suggestions in the Oct. 1997 newsletter: he has volunteered to create an index for Red Barber's *1947: When All Hell Broke Loose in Baseball* (1982). Again, we're always looking for suggestions of books to be indexed, and for volunteers to do them.

I also pass along some information Paul Bauer gave me recently. For those of you hooked up to the Internet, there are two highly interesting sites: *www.interloc.com* and *www.bibliofind.com*. Both are networks of used book dealers. You can search for a title you are interested in and, if you are lucky, get multiple responses, allowing you to shop a bit without leaving your desk. I was able to knock 20 books off my baseball fiction want list, a list that I'd been trimming by about four books annually in recent years. I also found several non-baseball titles I'd been searching for for years. I must also say that the non-fiction baseball market seems very well served by existing dealers such as Paul, Bobby Plapinger, Wayne Greene, and others. There were very few times when I went fishing for a non-fiction baseball book when I didn't find that dealers were generally following baseball dealers' pricing.

I hope your winter goes well. Pitchers and catchers should be reporting only a few weeks away when you receive this. We'll talk again in the spring.

Research in Baseball Index (RBI)

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The Committee has purchased a CD-ROM recording device and hopes to begin distributing the disc by Spring 1998. There are still many corrections that need to be made to the database, although I have a good start on these. We have completed an update of the manual and plan to begin distributing it by the time you read this; if you would like a copy, please contact me.

I will have a more extensive report on RBI growth for the April 1998 issue of this newsletter. I would like to thank Brad Sullivan, Terry Sloope, Bob Boynton, and John McMurray for their hard work on cataloging for RBI.

Terry Sloope has agreed to convert the text of this newsletter to HTML format for the World Wide Web, so look for our "updated" Web page at: student-www.uchicago.edu/users/tmc5/bibcomm.htm. My thanks again to Tim Cashion for providing this space for us on the Web.

RBI Statistics

Level	Number	% change over last year
Books		
5	3,317	10.5%
4	1,472	2.5%
Other	10,708	-2.9%
Total	15,497	0.2%
Book Sections		
5	7,355	18.6%
4	1,782	38.0%
Other	57	46.2%
Total	9,194	22.1%
Magazine/newspaper articles		
5	42,178	40.4%
4	1,294	251.6%
Other	6,629	60.6%
Total	50,101	45.1%
Total		
5	52,850	34.7%
4	4,548	13.1%
Other	17,394	14.4%
Total	74,792	27.9%

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Book Review

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INDEPENDENCE DAY
Richard Ford. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.

I bought this novel mainly because I remembered quite vividly a scene from Ford's 1986 novel *The Sportswriter* in which the sportswriter interviews a crazed former NFL linebacker. *Independence Day*, I'd heard, was a sequel to this novel. By the time I bought it in 1996, it'd won the Pulitzer Prize. As it turns out, I found it an engrossing read, and about a third of the way through, I realized it might be something other SABR members would want to read, or at least know about.

Not that there's much baseball action in it. The story follows Frank Bascombe, former sportswriter and currently (the book is set in 1988) a real-estate salesman, through a Fourth of July weekend, Friday through Monday, as he tries to cope with clients, his girl friend, his ex-wife, his children, various strangers along the way, including a half-brother he's not seen in 25 years, and himself. Bascombe's purpose, in the course of the weekend, is to pick up his son at his ex-wife's posh Connecticut home (she has remarried) and to travel with him to Cooperstown to visit the Baseball Hall of Fame. He's counting on Cooperstown "to be the *ur*-father–son meeting ground, offering the assurances of a spiritually neutral spectator sport made seemingly meaningful by its context in idealized male history" (p.18).

The preceding quotation may be the first indication that *Independence Day* may hold no *Field of Dreams* reverence for the national game. (In fact, Independence Day itself, and the theme of freedom, are subjected to rigorous redefinition in the course of the narrative.) In fact, while reading *Independence Day* I thought I remembered Ford's having published an article on baseball in *The New York Times Magazine*. Sure enough, it's in the 4 April 1993 issue, titled "It's Just a Game" (p.36–38, 40, 42). His point there is (p.42): "It's just a game—baseball—an amusement, a marginal thing, not an art, not a consequential metaphor for life, not a public trust. It may have broken Bart Giamatti's sentimental heart, but it will never break mine." This may sound disagreeable to some of us—for instance, I'm not sure I think baseball is any more, or less, marginal than any other human activity—but it also suggests the way Ford uses the trip to Cooperstown in his book.

The father–son relationship is certainly not idealized, although by the book's end I'd come to like both of them and to think that somehow they'd made important connections with each other. Paul Bascombe is the kind of 15-year-old we love to hate. His father is worried about him because he's recently been arrested for stealing condoms and trading racial epithets with others involved. He's often obtuse or incomprehensible in conversation and spends time barking like a dog. On the day before his father is to pick him up, he's created a crisis in his new family by whacking his stepfather in the face with an oar. Clearly, he's a young man under a lot of pressure.

Paul's catharsis—if it can be called that—comes in a baseball setting. Arriving at the Hall of Fame, they find pickets marching ("in support of a lovable Yankee shortstop from the forties", we learn later) and turn instead to Doubleday Field. There Frank Bascombe takes a turn at a batting machine and encourages Paul to do so too. Paul is hit in the eye by a 75-mph pitch (he appears to have invited this to happen) and must be rushed to a hospital and eventually to Yale Univ. where an eminent specialist will operate to save his eye. As Frank says, "this is the worst thing ever" (p.363).

It's not supposed to happen this way. Father and son are on the way to Cooperstown "not because either of us gives a particular shit about baseball, but because we simply have no properer place to go for our semi-sacred purposes" (p.284). It is a religious occasion; Cooperstown itself has a "pilgrim feel of things" (p.340); the Hall of Fame is "magical" (p.342). Alas, things are not as they seem in Cooperstown. Frank reminds his son that nobody really believes the myth that baseball was invented in Cooperstown (p.294), and the cook at the Deerslayer Inn pronounces the town (p.313) "just a little hick burg. It pretends different". After his son's injury, Frank himself wishes for more unreality, thinking Cooperstown is "not a *real* town for *real* injuries" (p.365). Ford's point: it is. The myths surrounding baseball can be downright lethal.

If the argument of the book's action dramatizes what Ford's *Times Magazine* article exposes—our need to relinquish the myths surrounding baseball—it also does something more. As Paul recovers in the hospital from his eye operation, his mother reports to his father (p.410): "He just jabbered on and on about the Baseball Hall of Fame. All about the exhibits he's seen and the ... I guess they're statues. Right? He thought he'd had a splendid time."

Paul's "splendid time" had nothing to do with baseball or the Hall of Fame, but with the progress he'd made coming to terms with his father and himself. That he translates this into a visit to the Hall of Fame is Ford's acknowledgment of the power of baseball's myths.

Book Review

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THE LEAGUE: **The Rise and Decline of the NFL**
David Harris. New York: Bantam Books, 1986.

I learned a lot about current baseball organization and governance from a book I read recently, so I thought I'd review it here even if it is 12 years old and barely mentions the word "baseball".

The subject of *The League* is the rise and decline of the National Football League. The echoes are eerie and the foibles of the NFL owners are enough to make me wait for the same tales to be told about the current crop of the Lords of Baseball.

But, mostly, the book made me reflect on the role of the commissioner's office. And it made me realize that we are never going to get the "strong" commissioner so many are calling for these days unless baseball gets into really deep trouble. (Not that it isn't heading there, but enough of the owners don't appreciate it.)

Pete Rozelle was held up for two decades as the kind of sports leader baseball needed, but as this book amply demonstrates, his successes were extremely limited because he was, in the last instance, a creature of the owners.

There has been only one truly strong commissioner in American sports history—Kenesaw Mountain Landis. There have been two apparently strong commissioners—Rozelle and David Stern—who combined enormous personal talent with great timing, taking troubled leagues and using a changing zeitgeist and television revenues to ride them to the top.

Only Landis had real power. He couldn't be fired without provoking an unwanted barrage of criticism. And, despite his reputation as the bane of miscreant owners, Landis generally avoided confrontations on issues beyond his perception of the integrity of the game and the rise of farm systems.

Rozelle, as Harris shows, took television's growing hunger for football entertainment and used his success exploiting that to cement a group of supporters who thought more of the league than they did of their individual franchises.

When Carroll Rosenbloom, Al Davis, and others began to assert their own franchises' rights, Rozelle's coalition fell apart and he spent his last decade fighting brush fires and watching his league's popularity stagnate.

Today, we watch Jerry Jones (Dallas Cowboys) cut his own deals with Pepsi and damn any deal the league might have cut with Coca-Cola.

And, like a mirror, we see George Steinbrenner sue baseball because it wants to enforce its own merchandise marketing plans, which conflict with Steinbrenner's 10-year, $95 million contract with Adidas.

The League is a ripe case study of the differences among owners. Those who came from the old, struggling NFL and some from the scruffy AFL were imbued with what Rozelle like to call "League Think", putting group interests ahead of one franchise.

The Carroll Rosenblooms, Joe Robbies, and Al Davises weren't so imbued. And then when the pressure for new stadiums grew, the ball wobbled completely out of Rozelle's control. With most stadiums sold out, and television money shared evenly, the one area where football owners could make their real money was in luxury boxes and individual licensing. This money could either go to the owner's pocket (see Georgia Frontiere) or into buying the best talent (see Jerry Jones).

The League has a great deal of detail on how this state arose and how individual owners tried to maximize their leverage to get what they wanted from various cities. The parallels with baseball are all too obvious.

We can currently see the Twins and Reds poodle faking with their cities about new stadiums, after apparent recent successes by the Astros, Giants, and others.

The League is wonderful at detailing how owners will consistently put their own interests first, followed by those of their franchises, and only later by those of the sport as a whole. Sounds like a couple of leagues I know.

Book Review

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WAIT TILL NEXT YEAR; A Memoir
Doris Kearns Goodwin. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997. 263p. $25

Wait Till Next Year. I couldn't wait. I finished this delightful memoir on Christmas day. And if you're of similar vintage (growing up in the New York City area during the late 40s and early 50s), there is much in this little book to identify with, whether you're an imperialist Yankee fan, a country-club Giant fan (as I was), or a blue-collar Dodger fan (as Goodwin was).

Although not truly a baseball book, per se, *Wait Till Next Year* is a gentle, humorous, graceful vision of an era and suburban Long Island town in which baseball was an undercurrent theme interwoven among the pleasures and problems that life brings.

Goodwin looks back on a childhood enriched by "the holy trinity" of her father (who introduced baseball to her), Catholicism (and wondering if praying that bad things befall Alvin Dark and Sal Maglie is sinful), and the Brooklyn Dodgers. The memoir is an indelible portrait of a young woman who learns to watch and care about the world around her. And throughout, the world of Ebbets Field is never far away. The seasonal imperatives of baseball, combined with the great religious festivals of the Catholic church, produce "a passionate love of history, ceremony, and ritual".

The seemingly innocent era is recalled as one characterized by the terror of polio, A-bomb drills, the McCarthy hearings, the ugly face of racial prejudice, the death of James Dean, and Sputnik. Also, Gil Hodges' batting slumps, Jackie integrating the grand old game, Campy's accident, the shot heard 'round the world ("the worst day of my life as a fan"), and the annual heartbreaks of Dodger losses until 1955.

Although I am male, non-Catholic, Westchester-born, five years older than Goodwin, and a long-time Giants fan, I found myself pleasantly reliving much of my childhood as Goodwin related places and incidents that resonated with my own: Jones Beach, "Stinky" Stanky, walking to school, burning leaves at curbside, *You Are There*, St. Christopher medals, washing your hands to fend off polio, impatience when the other team was at bat, parents unwinding with Manhattans before supper, Ping-Pong in the basement, Rockettes at Christmas time, riding bikes everywhere, autograph books, "Sh-Boom!", the "impossibly green grass" of a major league ballpark, and mothers obsessed with cleanliness. What a way to reexamine one's childhood!

I highly recommend this book, written by the most genuine of the "talking heads" in Ken Burns' error-filled epic.

Book Review

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BASEBALL TIDBITS
Victor Debs, Jr. Indianapolis: Masters Press, 1997. 344p. $16.95.

Victor Debs spans the history of baseball in 60-plus anecdotal chapters, regaling the exploits of heroes and pretenders, presenting the milestones and the mundane.

To name just a few, stories include the search for the "real father" of baseball, Johnny Vander Meer's double no-hitter, Taft Wright's record of driving in a run in 13 consecutive games in 1941 (a mark that was overlooked because of a more notable streak that year), players who overcame handicaps (Bert Shepard, Pete Gray, Monty Stratton, Jim Abbott), celebrities and baseball, and famous brawls.

Debs' many and far-ranging topics are, for the most part, interesting and amusing, although many of them have been written about already. In fact, the more interesting stories are those of lesser-known players such as: Benny Kauff, called "the Ty Cobb of the Federal League" but eventually banished from baseball by Commissioner Landis; Tuffy Rhodes, who cracked three Opening Day home runs off Doc Gooden in 1994; Dean Chance, a fireballer for the California Angels who never quite lived up to his potential; and Cesar Tovar, "the spoilsport" who had the distinction of breaking up five no-hitters.

There are also laments and conjectures on what might have been: "They Could Have Been Greater", which poses what-ifs for the likes of Williams, DiMaggio, Greenberg, Musial, and Feller, all of whom lost time to World War II. Other examples: "The Giants Rob the Dodgers—Again!", "Mick's Missed MVPs", "Roger's 62nd Home Run", and "Babe's 715th Home Run".

Debs profiles such diverse characters as Grover Cleveland Alexander, Rabbit Maranville, Satchel Paige, George Kell, Yogi Berra, Reggie Jackson, Don Mattingly, and Mickey Mantle. (The author shows a decided favoritism for the Yankees, with ten articles solely devoted to their players, not to mention their inclusion in other chapters.)

Nor is Debs afraid to impart his sense of morality on certain issues, a technique some might find somewhat annoying. In "Ball Four Was Foul", he has no doubt as to why the national pastime has taken a turn for the worse: "America lost its innocence during the sixties. With the publication of *Ball Four*, baseball has lost its innocence as well, for which we have Jim Bouton to thank." Did Debs think that the game would remain in a vacuum had that watershed book never come to pass?

On fighting on the field: "Baseball offers enough entertainment for the fans. Knockdowns and fistfights aren't needed."

On the death of Eddie Grant, the only major leaguer to die fighting for his country in World War I: "Governments are formed to serve the people. Governments start wars. Wars kill people. Why doesn't that make sense?"

And on the banishment of Pete Rose, Debs compares the relative wickedness of drugs versus gambling: "Perhaps it's a reflection on

today's society that drug offenders like Steve Howe and Doc Gooden are treated as victims, not criminals. Presidents talk tough about solving the drug problem in America, but results might improve if buyers became as equal a target as sellers. ... For one of baseball's most prolific, durable and fierce competitors to be forever barred from any association with the game is a harsh sentence for an unproven crime. For purposes of fairness, baseball officials have two choices—lighten up on Rose or toughen up on drug offenders. Common sense dictates doing both." (Since Debs' book was published, such evidence against Rose has ostensibly been produced, according to a recent issue of *Baseball Weekly*.)

These few off-hand remarks, however, don't detract from the overall enjoyment of *Baseball Tidbits*. It's a fun, leisurely trip through some of baseball's high and low points.

Book Review

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THE BILL JAMES GUIDE TO BASEBALL MANAGERS FROM 1870 TO TODAY
Bill James. New York: Scribners, 1997. 352p. indexed. $30

When I first heard of this book, I had the happy anticipation of another *Historical Baseball Abstract*, but this time written about managers. That work, written more than 10 years ago, is one of my favorites and I have re-read it two or three times. While neither elegant nor poetic, James' unadorned style of writing is highly informative. Yet, this does not make it merely analytical. Its directness gives the reader the full flavor of the narrative without unnecessary detail. His lengthy entry on Ernie Lombardi, for example, is concise, yet moving. The many profiles and anecdotes in *Baseball Managers* are considerably shorter, for the most part, but James still demonstrates this skill for storytelling, such as in his bit on Bill Meyer.

Indeed, the anecdotes and brief biographies are the principal strengths of this book. Happily, they constitute the bulk of it. There are really too many to list here, but a few noteworthy ones are: praise for Frank Selee, Connie Mack, and Joe McCarthy; the stories of several "player rebellions"; the story of Charlie Dressen's downfall; and the stories of several career men who devoted their lives to baseball, only to fail to make it in the majors, or who made it too late. James is at his best and most enthusiastic in these stories.

James also profiles several of the most famous managers, giving a detailed analysis of their managerial styles and philosophies. This aspect of the book is somewhat less successful. Sometimes James' assessments are most illuminating and readers can learn much from them. Other times he doesn't adequately explain his conclusions. He is also fond of trying to demonstrate a theory of managerial "genealogy", which he explains early on (p.34):

"All major league managers, essentially, come from one of three families—the Connie Mack family, the Branch Rickey family, and the Ned Hanlon family. The Hanlon family is the largest of the three; most major league managers today can be traced back to Ned Hanlon."

This theory works for a while, but rapidly begins to fall apart not long after World War II. Since much of this genealogy centers on personality types, I think James would have been better served approaching this issue more from a sociological and psychological viewpoint, rather than a teacher–pupil model.

Since James is most closely associated with statistical analysis, or "sabermetrics", many readers will be looking for a numerical assessment of managers. While most of the book is nonstatistical, these readers will still find many numbers to digest. As I find this subject generally dull, I feel unqualified to comment on this aspect of the book. However, his analysis of various managerial strategies over the years is fascinating and thought-provoking, particularly his look at the usefulness of the bunt and the evolution of relief pitching.

I have only two serious misgivings about this book: the glaring omission of Billy Martin from in-depth analysis and the way the book unravels in the last chapter. While I would question a Hall of Fame induction for Martin, it is undeniable that he is one of the most significant managers of the past 30 years. His successful and highly controversial managerial (and life) style make him a natural for a book such as this.

James stops giving in-depth analysis to any one manager (why not Bobby Cox?) in the last chapter and meanders on for another 30 pages before petering out with no summary or conclusion whatsoever. This chapter seems to consist of whatever James had left over. The fine article on the evolution of relief pitching could have gone anywhere in the book. He also sees fit to include an appalling five-page non-sequitur pleading tolerance for Marge Schott! James freely admits throughout that various articles in the book have appeared in different forms elsewhere, but the careless construction of the final chapter underlines this fact and leaves the reader feeling that James has presented us with a collection of snippets and tag-ends about managers, rather than a "guide to baseball managers from 1870 to today".

Yet despite these shortcomings, this is undeniably a valuable and entertaining book and I strongly recommend it. Perhaps James can be persuaded to improve and augment its contents at some later date, but there is much meat in it now and no one should feel cheated after reading it.

Book Indexing Project

Here is the status of the Bibliography Committee's project to prepare indexes for books which were published without them (an asterisk * indicates a book in the Putnam series):

Book title, author, and publication date	Indexer
Ball Four, by Jim Bouton (1970)	Tom Hetrick
A Ball Player's Career, by Cap Anson (1900)	Tom Shieber
The Baltimore Orioles, by Fred Lieb(*) (1955)	John Spalding
The Boston Braves, by Harold Kaese(*) (1948)	Bob Bailey
The Boston Red Sox, by Fred Lieb(*) (1947)	Jack Carlson
The Boys of Summer, by Roger Kahn (1971)	Bob Boynton
The Brooklyn Dodgers, by Frank Graham(*) (1948)	Rick Johnson
The Chicago Cubs, by Warren Brown(*) (1946)	Joe Murphy
The Chicago White Sox, by Warren Brown(*) (1952)	B. McConnell
The Cincinnati Reds, by Lee Allen(*) (1948)	Bill Hugo
The Cleveland Indians, by Franklin Lewis(*) (1949)	Bob Boynton
Connie Mack, by Fred Lieb(*) (1945)	Bob Boynton
The Detroit Tigers, by Fred Lieb(*) (1946)	Bob Bailey
McGraw of the Giants, by Frank Graham(*) (1944)	Terry Smith
The Milwaukee Braves, by Kaese & Lynch(*) (1954)	Brad Sullivan
The New York Giants, by Frank Graham(*) (1952)	Terry Smith
The New York Yankees, by Frank Graham(*) (1948)	B. McConnell
The Philadelphia Phillies, by Fred Lieb & Stan Baumgartner(*) (1953)	Howard Pollack
Pitching in a Pinch, by Christy Mathewson (1912)	Tom Shieber
The Pittsburgh Pirates, by Fred Lieb(*) (1948)	Jack Carlson
The St. Louis Cardinals, by Fred Lieb(*) (1944)	Bob Boynton
Veeck ... as in Wreck, by Bill Veeck (1962)	Bob Boynton
The Washington Senators, by S. Povich(*) (1954)	Jim O'Donnell

Copies of these indexes are available from the SABR Research Library. Contact Len Levin, 282 Doyle Ave., Providence, RI 02906-3355 (phone 401/351-3278), who will quote you postage and photocopying costs.