

Society for American Baseball Research

BIBLIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

October 1994 (94-4)

Comments from a Co-Chair

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Baseball Online continues to make steady progress thanks to several Committee members. Joe Murphy has cataloged virtually all the articles in the various SABR publications over the years, and as soon as SABR Headquarters gets copies of the first three years of *Baseball Research Journal* to Joe, I'll be able to remove the "virtually" from this sentence.

The number of entries in the database has grown by 2202 in the three months since the SABR National Convention in Arlington, Texas. In addition, the number of fully cataloged items (level 5) has grown by 1354 (see accompanying table).

Ted Hathaway, who is jointly overseeing the project, and I approached the SABR board about approval to seek grant money (probably about \$60,000) to help fund a significant expansion of the project's database over the next couple of years. The money would be used to hire two (or three) catalogers who would work on periodicals, especially those of the past 12 to 15 years. The board granted that permission unanimously at its meeting in early October. Ted will continue to work on refining the proposal and seeking to identify foundations or other grant sources that might be interested in the project. If you have any ideas along these lines, please contact Ted (612/869-1420 home, 612/372-6662 work) or myself. We hope to have the grant in place by Summer 1995.

Ted and I feel that once we build up the bulk of the project, it will be much more attractive as a commercial enterprise. Once it reaches that stage, we can afford to keep the database constantly updated, make it widely available to SABR members, and perhaps even make some money for SABR.

The only Committee member I heard from concerning the bibliography to accompany Ken Burns' *Baseball* documentary that appeared in the July 1994 issue of this newsletter was Jack Kavanagh. Jack was disturbed by an implied endorsement of the Macmillan encyclopedia over *Total Baseball*, a dispute in which Jack noted that SABR should not be getting involved. I certainly did not mean to put any official SABR stamp on the Macmillan encyclopedia. It is simply the one I find easier to use, although I must say I refer to *Total Baseball* quite often.

Having seen Burns' documentary, I can see I was misled on the promotional materials into thinking Ted Williams would be dealt with extensively during the section on the 1930s. He didn't appear until the 1940s section (Burns' sixth inning) and I should have had the Cramer & Rucker book on Williams in that section.

I hope you all got as much enjoyment out of the documentary as I did. I enjoyed picking nits like Keith Olbermann did. But I must say overall I was very pleased with the production, especially some of the older film. It was fascinating to see people such as Mathewson, Walter Johnson, and Cobb actually in motion.

Please keep Baseball Online in your mind. If you simply filled out a form each time you finished a baseball book, it would be of

great value to the Committee. Those of you who do more, such as Ron Replogle, are greatly appreciated.

Level	Number	Percent increase
<i>Books</i>		
5	1,861	9.0% over last qrtr
4	1,019	2.3% "
Other	9,206	-0.5% "
Total	12,086	1.1% "
<i>Sections</i>		
5	3,057	35.6% over last qrtr
4	263	52.9% "
Other	7	0.0% "
Total	3,327	36.7% "
<i>Articles</i>		
5	5,162	10.8% over last qrtr
4	0	
Other	6,130	13.5% "
Total	11,292	12.3% "
<i>Total</i>		
5	10,080	16.9% over last qrtr
4	1,282	9.8% over year ago
Other	15,343	4.7% over year ago
Total	26,705	9.2% over year ago

Update: *Baseball Register* 1940-1994 Index

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The project moved forward—slowly but steadily. A month ago we completed a preliminary roster listing the more than 10,000 players, managers, coaches, umpires, and former stars whose biographical facts and baseball records have appeared in the *Register* during its 55-year existence. Subsequently, a dozen SABR volunteers, including a few of our Committee members, have engaged, separately, in checking the entries in the various parts of the roster and reporting the omissions, errors, and discrepancies to me.

At this writing about half of the roster has been checked thoroughly. Each man's entry shows which yearly editions of the *Register* included him as a subject person. An additional feature is the earmarking of each included active player who never appeared in a major league game (a feature developed by the industry of Rick Benner, a major contributor to our project).

Once the checking stage is finished, the roster and an introduction to it will be put on computer preparatory to determining the arrangement of contents, the size and shape of the physical product, the costs of reproduction, and a suitable means of distribution. I expect all this to be accomplished within 1994, but make no promises.

At this point I owe profound thanks to the SABR and Committee members who volunteered for their time-consuming, tedious checking assignments, for the carefully prepared results already received, and for those yet to come. Only in SABR could this be done and done so diligently and expertly.

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WANTED: BASEBALL BOOK REVIEWERS

Spitball, the sponsor of the annual Casey Award for the best baseball book of the year, needs a few good people with modest (or better) writing skills to review current books. While this is a nonpaying position, it is an opportunity to share your knowledge and love of baseball literature with others by having articles published in a national magazine. If you are interested, please contact Tom Eckel, 999 Wallace Avenue, Milford, OH 45150; phone/fax 513/831-8788.

Book Reviews

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BABE RUTH CAUGHT IN A SNOWSTORM

John Alexander Graham. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973. 280p.

I bought this book off a remainder table in the late 1970s for a dollar. So far as I know, it has never been reprinted, and it is its author's last published adult book (he had published four detective stories previous to *Babe Ruth*). That he hasn't kept publishing is too bad, for *Babe Ruth* is quite a good book and ought to be available. It's part fantasy (Kinsella fans, or those who like Nancy Willard's *Things Invisible to See*, will probably enjoy it), part satire, and 21 years after its publication, all prophecy.

Babe Ruth Caught in a Snowstorm tells the story of the Wichita Wraiths baseball team, which plays its home games in Braintree, Mass. The team was put together by an independently wealthy man, named Slezak, for the purest of motives (p.12): "Players ... must love the game. Ability not necessary—only desire counts." Slezak's ambitions are thoroughly altruistic (p.15):

"What made me do it? A love of the game, the challenge of the whole thing, certainly, but mainly a burning desire to make a worthwhile contribution for once in my life, to create something, to change things for the better."

Slezak tells the players (p.24) that the team is "a public-service organization like a hospital or a school, existing only for the public good. Everyone stands to benefit. No one stands to lose." He doesn't want the players to focus on winning (p.26): "playing is the only thing that counts". After the team's first season, Slezak tells Mr. Silverfish, who offers the Wraiths a franchise in the National League, that this team is "a democracy" (p.128): "the players do what they want".

The team joins the National League, with disastrous results, and the second half of the book describes the team's downfall. The problem is the bureaucratic structures that evolve as the team's management becomes more complex. These, along with the continuing idealism of the team's founder and the original players, result in the gradual but eventually complete alienation of players and management, which is dramatized in a final exhibition game between players and management (the players are exhorted to "win this one for all the little guys of America"). The game ends in mayhem. The book begins as well as ends with a description of this lethal brawl. Two of the players are already dead when it begins; there is fist fighting, but also the sound of machine-gun fire. In its aftermath, the players get the blame.

It's pretty clear that Graham intends all this to be an allegory of the state of America in the early 1970s. Gerund, one of the bureaucrats hired during the team's second year, urges Slezak (p. 183) to emulate "some of our country's greatest companies", such as Penn Central and Lockheed. The villain of the story, though, is as much the naivete of Slezak and his players as it is the presence of bureaucrats. Perhaps the key is in the team's name: the Wraiths are only wraiths.

The book turns out to be a pretty accurate prophecy of the state of major league baseball in the 1990s. Graham was writing in the innocent days before the Messersmith/McNally decision—or maybe, depending on your reading of baseball history, in the early days before the effect of the apple that snake Marvin Miller offered the ballplayers became clear—but his vision of a final player-management apocalyptic showdown rings particularly in the last days of Summer 1994. Both sides in Graham's story are terribly handicapped by self-deception, which also seems a principal difficulty today. If you're looking for some reading matter after August 12 (or whenever the next strike begins), *Babe Ruth Caught in a Snowstorm* is not only fun, but appropriate.

MATTY: AN AMERICAN HERO

Ray Robinson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Never judge a book by its title, or by the press which publishes it. In this case I expected a scholarly work from a university press, and the subtitle suggested a work that places its subject in a cultural context. *Matty* is neither. It is a lively, well-written journalistic account of Christy Mathewson's life, which, while focusing on his major league baseball career, also includes accountings of his life and times before, after, and outside that career.

Robinson devotes the first chapter to the idea of Mathewson as an American hero. It's an odd chapter. He announces (p.4) that before Mathewson, "athletes had not won much acclaim as role models". He then runs through a list of possible competitors to Mathewson, concluding that each is "no hero". Robinson confuses being a hero and being a role model here. Ty Cobb was a hero, but not a role model. The same thing could be said for Babe Ruth. Mathewson may have been both heroic and a role model, but Robinson succeeds in convincing us only that Matty was instrumental in bringing middle-class respectability to the sport (p.8): "he defined baseball in a new, acceptable way for millions".

This in itself is of considerable interest, and makes his treatment of Mathewson both interesting and perplexing. He includes a variety of responses to Mathewson's gentlemanliness, which was often perceived as smugness and stand-offishness. He cites the unflattering opinions of Mathewson of Joe Wood (p.149–150) and Walter St. Denis (p.219–220) at length, and refuses to dismiss their points of view. He cites Matty's relationship to John McGraw (p.41) as "implausible". His chapters on Mathewson as Reds manager and Giants coach, when Matty had to deal with Hal Chase, and Mathewson's coverage of the 1919 World Series, when fixing games was in the air, make us wonder about Matty as a role model.

Role model, hero, or what not, Mathewson fit a splendid career in major league baseball into a life in which too many people (his brothers, he himself, finally his son) died young. Robinson's longest chapters chronicle Mathewson's best major league years: 1905 (when his three shutouts made the Giants world champions), 1908 (the year the Cubs beat him in the playoff after the Merkle incident), and 1912 (when the Red Sox beat him in extra innings of the seventh game of the World Series). The various stories of the origin of Mathewson's nickname, "Big Six", are rehearsed, along with those of his famous "fadeaway" pitch. Robinson includes accounts of the 1910 Giants–Highlanders postseason series and, more briefly, the 1914 series after the Highlanders had become the Yankees.

There is also a brief portrait of Mathewson's ghost writer, John N. Wheeler (p.127). Ring Lardner makes occasional appearances, too. Robinson quotes from Lardner's admiring treatment of Mathewson in *American* magazine, though he does not cite it. He also quotes a poem Lardner once wrote upon Mathewson's trade to Cincinnati during the 1916 season, and which seems a good way to end this review:

My eyes are very misty, as I pen these lines to Christy
Oh, my heart is full of heaviness today.

May the flowers ne'er wither, Matty, on your grave at Cincinnati
Which you've chosen for your final fadeaway.