

July 2012 (12—2)

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Comments from the Chair

Andy McCue
Riverside, CA

Our committee meeting at SABR 42 in Minneapolis featured an extended discussion of the fixes needed for The Baseball Index, the Bibliography Committee's signature project.

While the basic public search function at www.baseballindex.org continues to work, the functions that give searchers additional information are erratic. In addition, virtually all the administrative functions which allow us to add new entries, edit older ones, update the functions which ensure uniformity and analyze how people are using the index simply do not work. Furthermore, we have wanted to broaden the site's search capacity for several years and new software would allow us to do that.

Marlene Vogelsang suggested software used by research librarians may offer a solution and she has promised to look into that angle.

I have had long conversations, with the people who have worked on SABR's Encyclopedia and with SABR leadership and staff. I have drawn up a document that describes what we would like the software to do. There are several possibilities through working with SABR, but I am trying to look at all possible angles.

However, I use computers like I drive a car. I know how to work it, but I don't know how it works.

So, what I mostly discussed with SABR president Vince Gennaro and Executive Director Marc Appleman was how to find the expertise we need to identify an open-source database program. This program would then need to be customized to fit our needs. They have promised to search SABR's membership database for the proper expertise and also to pursue our growing ties with Arizona State University.

In addition, I talked with several SABR members, including committee member Pete Cottrell, whom I know are in the IT field, and asked them to identify people who might be able to help us. If any of you, like Marlene or Pete, have worked with this kind of software or know people who do, please get in touch with me.

Once we identify the right person and the cost, we will need to raise the money from the committee.

Minneapolis proved to be an enjoyable convention. John Thorn gave a memorable banquet address and Twins President Dave St. Peter proved an entertaining keynoter.

As usual, the conversations with SABR colleagues were the highlight of the week for me. It's amazing what my fellow members know and how willing they are to share it.

We'll be in Philadelphia next year and Houston in 2014 and I hope all of you will be able to attend those conventions.



All-Star Reading

Maybe it's just the sports new cycles, but it seems there was a lot of emphasis on how young many of this year's All-Stars were, compared with the Atlanta Braves' Chipper Jones, who is probably making his last appearance in the summer classic.

It occurred to me that Bryce Harper — at 19, the youngest player to appear in an ASG — is already the subject of a book. It got me to thinking: how many of these guys are in that position?

So here we go. Bear in mind that some of the players may be the subject of books written specifically for younger readers, which I have omitted from the following list. In no particular order, we have:

* [*The Last Natural: Bryce Harper's Big Gamble in Sin City and the Greatest Amateur Season Ever*](#), by Rob Miecch.

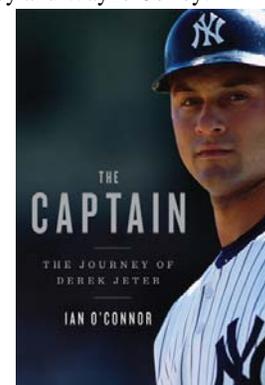
* [*Wherever I Wind Up: My Quest for Truth, Authenticity and the Perfect Knuckleball*](#), by R.A. Dickey and Wayne Coffey.

* Derek Jeter has his own shelf. Titles on and by him include [*The Captain: The Journey of Derek Jeter*](#), by Ian O'Connor; [*Derek Jeter: From the pages of The New York Times*](#); and [*The Life You Imagine: Life Lessons for Achieving Your Dreams*](#), by Jeter with Jack Curry.

* [*Beyond Belief: Finding the Strength to Come Back*](#), by Josh Hamilton with Tom Keown.

* [*Big Papi: My Story of Big Dreams and Big Hits*](#), by David Ortiz and Tony Massarotti.

* [*Chipper Jones: A Brave Legend in the Making*](#), by Beckett Publishing



* [*Arise: Live Out Your Faith and Dreams on Whatever Field You Find Yourself*](#), by Clayton Kershaw, Ellen Kershaw, and Ann Higginbottom.

* [*Rocks Across the Pond*](#), by Richard and Katherine Verlander, the parents of Justin Verlander.

* Bending the rules just a bit for Cole Hamels, who is prominently featured in Todd Zolecki's [*The Rotation: A Season with the Phillies and the Greatest Pitching Staff Ever Assembled*](#). (This is my blog; I can do that.)

* Also bending the rules for Curtis Granderson. He's written two books for kids, [*All You Can Be: Learning & Growing Through Sports*](#) and [*All You Can Be: Dream It, Draw It, Become It!*](#). Anything that can get young people on the road to reading is all right with me.

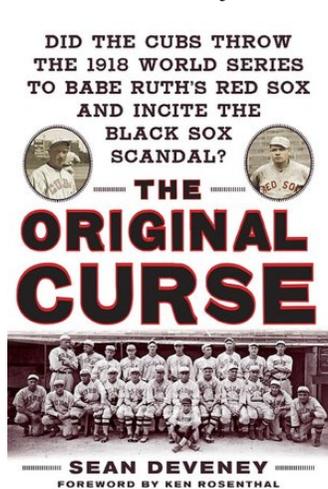
Ron Kaplan
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Reviews & Features

The Original Curse; Did the Cubs Throw the 1918 World Series to Babe Ruth's Red Sox and Incite the Black Sox Scandal? By Sean Deveney. Foreword by Ken Rosenthal. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009.

This book's subtitle is printed above the title on the dust jacket, somewhat in the manner of a "scare" headline. On the back of the dust jacket we are told that this is to be "the



untold story of baseball's original scandal." There follows another question: "did the Chicago Cubs throw the World Series in 1918 — and get away with it?" Sean Deveney's achievement in *The Original Curse* seems much more interesting than these claims make it seem. He has something to say about the whole season, and about the temper of the country and the game as well.

The phrase "the original curse" has a large application. Deveney doesn't get around to talking about it until the book's final chapter. There he reminds readers that both participants in the 1918 World Series have been supposed to be cursed, the Red Sox as a consequence of the sale of Babe Ruth to the Yankees, the Cubs having refused a ticket-holding goat admission to a 1945 World Series game. Then he points out that "both teams fell into inexplicable funks immediately after" they played each other in the 1918 world Series. Deveney con-

cludes that "there must be a different curse, an original curse . . . a curse spawned when the [Cubs and Red Sox] brought their way to pennants during the worst complete baseball season in history, a curse that not only crippled the two teams on the field but seeped into the lives of the players off the field."

The book is organized chronologically, beginning at the winter meetings in December 1917 and ending with the World Series in September 1918. Deveney tells the story of "the worst complete baseball season in history" from the perspective of the two pennant-winning teams. In addition, twelve of the book's eighteen chapters end with brief sections titled "The Original Curse" followed by an individual's name. The focus here is usually on "the curse...that seeped into the lives of players off the field." Phil Douglas, Carl Mays, Charley Hollocher, and Harry Frazee are among these.

What makes the 1918 season "the worst complete baseball season in history" Lots of things, but mainly the United States' entry into World War I. Both the country and the world were in a chaotic state. Deveney summarizes at the 1918 World Series begins. The importance of the World Series to Major League Baseball "had a farcical quality. Nearly every nation in the civilized world was taking part in the most destructive war in history, basic American rights were being trampled, the economy was in flux, a battle between labor and management was simmering, another battle between radical workers and capitalism itself was raging, domestic terrorism was on the rise, a wave of hypermorality was gaining force, women were fighting for suffrage." All these contributed to an air of uncertainty that affected the business of baseball and those involved in it as it did other institutions.

The affects of World War I were devastating for baseball. Ken Rosenthal in his foreword calls *The Original Curse* "A sweeping portrait of America at war in 1918, one that examines baseball's place in that unsettled society." Deveney shows us "how the world looked" to ballplayers and executives in 1918. There were two questions to be answered: "How could a league be run when its best players could be called to war at any moment? And how could the frivolity of sport be reconciled with the reality of war? Continuing inability to answer these questions satisfactorily created an atmosphere of uncertainty that eventually, along with other forces, affected the outcome of the season. The scheduling of the World Series was a particular problem, resolved just eight days before the series began.

What Deveney shows about culture of baseball itself in 1918 is the pervasiveness of a culture of gambling. "Gamblers were never far from players," and the uncertainties imposed by the war made players more interested in what they could earn now. Chapter 11 — "Money: Recollections of Boston Gambler James Costello" — is of particular interest. What we learn from this chapter is that "neither the player nor the gambler seemed to find this circumstance [the attempt to fix a game] all that unusual" (125). Turning from the example of Costello, Deveney considers the career of Hal Chase, "not the only gambler in baseball in 1918. He was just the only one who got caught." Deveney's picture of the pervasiveness of gambling in baseball is convincing, even though the fixing to the 1918 World Series remains a mystery.

According to Deveney, the response of baseball administrators to the presence of gambling only compounded the problem. In discussing the sale by the Philadelphia Phillies of Grover Cleveland Alexander to the Chicago Cubs, Deveney points out the Phillies owner William F. Baker traded him because he suspected Alexander of “crooked” behavior. Deveney concludes “that pattern — moving players suspected of gambling rather than exposing them — seems to have repeated itself endlessly in the 1910s.” This was, as Deveney says later, “the baseball way.” He’s hard on Ban Johnson for his dealings with the gambling problem. “Johnson’s brief crusade, readily abandoned, was typical of [baseball’s response to its] hard-to-solve problems: talk big, take minimal action.” Gene Carney’s *Burying the Black Sox* seems to suggest that this was baseball’s approach to the Black Sox scandal itself. It’s no wonder Judge Landis refused to consider ruling on uncovered fixing schemes before 1920.

Deveney’s book suffers a bit because it’s aimed both at the serious researcher and the general reader. His account is lively and full of references to contemporary scandalous behavior. I did not see any significant omissions in his bibliography. But it’s hard to understand what uses he may have made of this material. Many of his footnotes refer to contemporary newspaper accounts. Further, the back flap of the dust jacket speaks of “shocking new evidence from the Chicago History Museum” and Deveney himself speaks of “Black Sox documents purchased by the Chicago History Museum and shared to direct quotation for the first time in this book.” I was disappointed to find only three references to the Chicago History Museum in the Notes. Nevertheless, *The Original Curse* is a vivid, thoughtful, and thought-provoking portrait of a very strange time in the history of Major League baseball.

Leverett T. (Terry) Smith

North Carolina Wesleyan College, Rocky Mount, NC



Lefty: An American Odyssey, by Vernona Gomez and Lawrence Goldstone. Ballantine Books, 2012.

Vernon “Lefty” Gomez, one of the greatest pitchers in New York Yankees history, came on the scene at roughly the same time as Dizzy Dean; statistically speaking, he was even better. But the Arkansas-born Dean had an extra bit of folksy charm that made him the darling of the media. Gomez, although certainly a colorful character and one any ballplayer would love to have as a teammate, never seemed to get his due. His daughter, Vernona, and co-author Lawrence Goldstone seek to correct that oversight with this charming, lighthearted and overdue biography.

Like many of his contemporaries who played in the first third of the 20th century, Gomez grew up in relative, if not

abject, poverty and made good money plying his trade during the Depression. He wooed and won the love of June O’Dea, a chorus girl/actress, and they enjoyed the kind of lifestyle you might see in the slapstick movies of the era (including a more serious time when divorce was a fleeting possibility because of his alleged philandering).

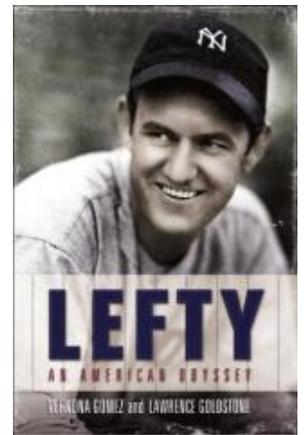
Gomez — who was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame by the Veterans Committee in 1972 — was only 34 when he pitched in his final game (for the Washington Senators in 1943), which means Vernona was only three years old. She never got to see her famous father pitch. According to the authors, “To the reporters, Lefty was all good copy and buoyant optimism.” In that regard, there is as much — if not more — of Gomez’s relationship with teammates and celebrities than the usual on-field stories and statistics.

Since you’re an ex-professional athlete more years than an active one, a good deal of the book deals with Gomez in retirement. He kept his hand in baseball for a few years as a coach, then worked as a representative/speaker for Wilson Sporting Goods. In one of the more intimate — if very brief — moments, the reader learns of his battle with alcoholism. Of course, no one is immune to the foibles of life, so the Gomez family had their share of health crises and other setbacks.

Given that his daughter gets top billing as author, one would expect more in the way of personal anecdotes. But there is amazingly little by way of information about her relationship with her father and almost nothing written in the first person: no “my mom and dad...” or “we.” (One incident has a man, unaware of her identity, trying to impress Vernona by “introducing” her to Gomez at a formal function; she went along with the ruse, greeting Gomez with a “Hi, dad.”)

Despite this somewhat important omission, *Lefty* is a charming story about one of the long-forgotten stars of the game.

Ron Kaplan
Montclair, NJ



A Day in the Bleachers, by Arnold Hano. Da Capo Press, 2004.



po Press, 2004.

This is one of those things you always figure you’ll get to, like a New Yorker visiting the Empire State Building or The Statue of Liberty. It will always be there, so you figure you have time. Well, Hano was slated to receive the Hilda Chester Award, which “recognizes distinguished service to the game by a baseball fan,” from The Baseball Reliquary at a ceremony earlier this month. (The award was established

in 2001 in memory of Hilda Chester, the legendary Brooklyn Dodgers fan).

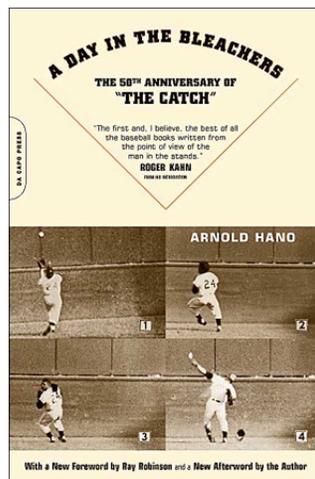
One of those services undoubtedly was his classic [A Day In The Bleachers](#), originally published in 1954, in which he offers his observations about the first game of that season's Fall Classic between the New York Giants and the Cleveland Indians. So I figured now is the time.

While arranging for an [interview with Hano](#) for a podcast episode of my Baseball Bookshelf blog — which will be posted prior to the Reliquary's Shrine of the Eternals 2012 Induction Day on Sunday, July 15, at the Donald R. Wright Auditorium in the Pasadena Central Library, Pasadena, California — I read the book on the way to Friday's Mets-Yankees game. Because of the long rush-hour bus ride into the city (coupled with a sudden deluge) and having to wait an extra hour for the ride back to NJ after the game, I was able to finish the book in a matter of hours.

I went to the Interleague contest alone and the seat next to me was empty, so I had time to "channel" Hano, wondering what his book would be like had it been written now, with all the distractions, blaring music, and other events that teams seem to build into "the ballpark experience" that have ticketholders — I hesitate to use the word "fans" — constantly moving around, rather than watching what's transpiring on the field.

Hano went to that 1954 opener at the Polo Grounds on basically a whim and actually got in; can you imagine finding a walk-up ticket for a World Series game these days? He discusses the back and forth contest of the game which increased in tension as it dragged on (won by the Giants on a three-run pinch-hit homer by Dusty Rhodes in the tenth inning). But he also notes the people in his immediate area, particularly a female Dodgers fan (was she there to root for the National League entry or against the Bums' hated rival?) as well as an Indians fans. Juxtapose with the chuckleheads sitting behind me on Friday who were yelling at Derek Jeter and Andy Pettitte ("Hey, old man, the syringe fell out of your back pocket!") in between admiring their recent trip to Las Vegas, various golf outings, and numerous business ventures; they left after the sixth inning.

I bought a scorecard and in addition to keeping the tally (note to publishers: the way managers replace their starters, you need more lines to accommodate the extra players), I jotted down my own observations, a la Hano. One thing that's definitely changed: in those days, you had to pay attention. A play is over amazingly quickly and if you missed something, you had only the guy next to you to ask. Just think of experiencing "The Catch" made by Willie Mays. How many times have you seen it since then? It's a staple of any book or film/TV compilation of the game's greatest plays. Back then, you only had one shot. I pity the fool who



was in the bathroom or buying a hot dog while that bit of history was being made. Now, you have constant instant replay (unless it's a controversial call; umps don't like to see that on the jumbotron). That chapter alone makes reading Hano's book worthwhile.

A Day in the Bleachers was the first of the genre of "deep inside" baseball books, which includes Daniel Okrent's [Nine Innings: The Anatomy of Baseball As Seen Through the Playing of a Single Game](#); Charles Euchner's [The Last Nine Innings: Inside the Real Game Fans Never See](#); Buzz Bissinger's [Three Nights in August: Strategy, Heartbreak, and Joy Inside the Mind of a Manager](#), which covered an entire three-game series between the Cardinals and Cubs; and Ron Darling's [The Complete Game: Reflections on Baseball and the Art of Pitching \(Vintage\)](#), which pieces together individual innings from nine different games.

A Day, though, is not a behind-the-scenes deconstruction. It's a gentle reminder of the fun and stress of being at the game. It is free from the extraneous gossip one would expect (demand?) to find these days and the glowing introduction by Roger (Boys of Summer) Kahn puts Hano's contribution in even more perspective and is probably one of the best I've ever read.

So congratulations to Arnold Hano for this well-deserved recognition and to the reliquary for paying tribute to the distinguished gentleman.

Ron Kaplan
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My 'Day in the Bleachers': An homage to Arnold Hano

Actually, it should be "My night in the Excelsior section."

As per a previous entry, I experienced the June 22 Mets-Yankees game at CitiField in a different way, trying to take it in fresh from reading Arnold Hano's classic title.

In the margins of my Mets program (still a bargain at \$5, by the way), I made these notes:

* Soda is \$5.50 but water is \$6.50? No wonder people don't make better dietary choices.

* Uni-watch: The Mets' Ronny Cedeno and the Yankees Curtis Granderson and Alex Rodriguez were the only starters to wear high socks. So much for tradition.



* When you're actually at the game, you wonder why it takes the players so long to meander out to their position for their pre-inning warm-ups. Then it hits you: commercials for the television/radio audience.

- * When the breeze blows just right, you can smell the water from Flushing Bay.
- * When did “booing” come to represent peoples’ displeasure over an artistic or athletic performance?
- * With every at bat (or batter faced for the pitchers), the statistics are updated on the scoreboard. Reminded me of watching the stocks tickers glide by on the bottom of the TV screen.
- * Jeter takes so much time getting into the batters box. I realize players have their rituals, but his is ridiculous and I’m surprised umpires let him get away with it. Of course, now he’s a future Hall of Famer, so no one is going to challenge him on it, but it’s like watching him do the “Hokey Pokey.” He puts his right foot in, he puts his left foot in, he holds up his right hand to signal the umpire he’s still getting ready....
- * Another “time” issues: why do some pitchers take...so...long to get the signal from the catcher? It’s like being stuck behind someone at McDonalds. It’s basically just hamburgers? What’s the problem? Didn’t you know what you wanted before you came in? Make a decision!
- * No one makes two-handed catches anymore; seems dangerous, especially on towering infield pop-ups that seem to sway in the wind. Luis Castillo.
- * With two Yankees on base and one out in the ninth, there’s a meeting on the mound. What is the pitching coach talking about? Is he reminding everyone of the scouting reports they discussed prior to the game? Sometimes I really wonder about some of the players’ ability to concentrate. This must also drive the umpires nuts, not to mention the fans who want the game to move along *so they don’t miss their train home!*
- * This pull-out poster of Kirk Nieuwenhuis in the program is nice, but I would have preferred Ike Davis.

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The ‘waiting room’ to the Hall

The 2012 Hall of Fame inductions are just around the corner and this is the time of year the sportswriters and fans jump on their soapboxes to rail against the perceived injustices against those players who just fall outside the voters’ foul lines. Organizations such as [The Baseball Reliquary](#) thumb their collective noses by host their own annual “Shrine of the Immortals” events. Similarly, [The Hall of Very Good](#) share their opinions on the Internet.

Well now there’s a new kid in town: [The Hall of Nearly Great](#), an ebook about “players you love by authors you love.” Indeed the players include such stars as Bret Saberhagen, Keith Hernandez, Dick Allen, Bobby Bonds, Don Mattingly, Will Clark, Dwight Evans, and David Cone, among others. And the writers include such familiar names as Grant Brisbee, Cliff Corcoran, Steven Goldman, Jay Jaffe, Christina Kahrl, King Kaufman, Jonah Keri, [Will Leitch](#), Rob Neyer, Eric Nusbaum, Joe Posnanski, Emma Span, Cecilia Tan, and [Josh Wilker](#), a few of whom have been interviewed on the Bookshelf.

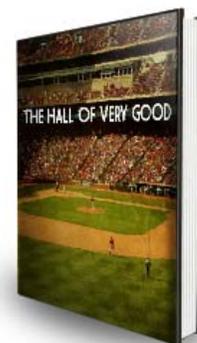
Now to be blunt, some of these players are borderline HoF material while some clearly not (Moises Alou? Brad Radke? Larry Hisle?), but the writers are passionate about their choices, and everyone is entitled to an opinion.

From the publisher:

The Hall of Nearly Great is an ebook meant to celebrate the careers of those who are not celebrated. It’s not a book meant to reopen arguments about who does and does not deserve Hall of Fame enshrinement. Rather, it remembers those who, failing entrance into Cooperstown, may unfairly be lost to history. It’s for the players we grew up rooting for, the ones whose best years led to flags and memories that will fly together forever. Players like David Cone, Will Clark, Dwight Evans, Norm Cash, Kenny Lofton, Brad Radke, and many others.

This is not a numbers-driven project (although our contributors lean analytical in their views). Our plan isn’t to be overbearing with stats and spreadsheets to convince you that these players are worth remembering. What we want to do, instead, is accomplish that same task

through **stories**. Think of your favorite players growing up: they have their moments, games, seasons, quirks, personalities, and legends worth remembering and sharing. Now, combine the best of everyone’s forgotten favorites, and you’ve got a Hall of Nearly Great. Ask the people who have those memories and love for these players to write essays about them, and you have The Hall of Nearly Great ebook.



It takes a talented writer to give these players their due honors, and we’ve collected **forty-three talented writers** to do just that. These are All-Star writers, some of our favorite must-reads in today’s expansive baseball coverage landscape. They have diverse voices, diverse backgrounds and diverse interests, but they all love baseball and have a passion for the players they’re writing about.

This is an ebook, available in both PDF and EPUB formats, suitable for reading on a **computer, iPad, eReader, or smart phone**. It is DRM-free, not because we want people to steal it, but because we’d rather put our efforts into making better products than limiting their convenience.

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Commentary: Who’s getting the money here?

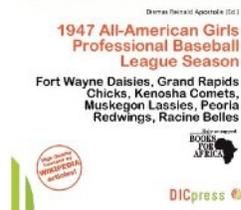
I was doing one of my regular searches to see what’s coming down the pike vis-à-vis baseball titles. One thing that stood out because the covers were very similar was a

number of books that look like this. — The artwork looks like it comes right out of a generic stock photo site.

The publishers carry names such as Dign Press, Cel Publishing, Cede Publishing, and Lect Publishing to name just a few. The prices seem to be mostly in the mid \$30-\$40 range, although a 232-page biography of Carlos Valderrama, who had seven plate appearances for the San Francisco Giants in 2003, goes for \$80.

The topics may differ — international baseball teams, “Congressional Baseball,” baseball and the Olympics — but they all seem to carry a “caveat” like this the one for the Valderrama book

Please note that the content of this book primarily consists of articles available from Wikipedia or other free sources online. Carlos Alberto Valderrama (born November 30, 1977 in Bachaquero, Zulia State, Venezuela) was a Major League Baseball outfielder and right-handed batter who



played in seven games for the San Francisco Giants in 2003. During his brief time with the big club, Valderrama had one single in seven at bats, one stolen base, and fielded six chances flawlessly. A former outfield prospect, Valderrama was hampered by injuries

throughout a nine-year minor league career, playing in over 100 games only four times. He had a career average of .298 with 57 home runs, 334 RBI, 427 runs and 203 stolen bases in 729 games.

How on earth do you get 200+ pages on someone like *this*? ([Here's the book cover](#), by the way. It was like the publisher couldn't even be bothered to come up with a decent image.)

Does anyone out there know anything about these books? Without coming off as a xenophobe, it seems to me this is not coming from American presses, perhaps written/compiled by an outsourcing outfit and designed for non-American readers. How do they have the chutzpa to piece together stories from free sources and charge for it? On the other side of the coin, who would buy this stuff?

Ron Kaplan
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What once was lost, now is found

Came across an interesting website recently: Forgottenbooks.com. I think it's worth it to reproduce their mission statement in its entirety:

1,000,000+ Free Books by Forgotten Books! You have reached the world's largest online library of high-quality eBooks. Forgot-

ten Books is an independent book publisher, boasting over 1,000,000 different titles, and offering all of our titles for free from our online library.

In addition to offering free eBook downloads, Forgotten Books is a traditional publisher, all of our books being available in print paperback through Amazon.com and their international sites.

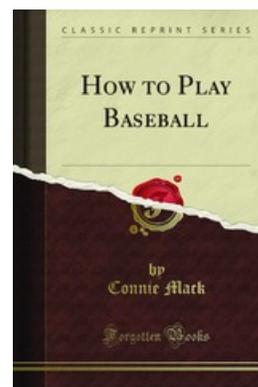
All of our eBooks are available for free download, but each computer is limited to a maximum of 50 downloads for free. Heavy users who exceed their maximum of 50 downloads are required to purchase membership, with prices as low as \$0.02 per eBook.

We are in the process of adding all our 1,000,000 books onto the site at a rate of 5,000 per day. The total for today is 287,978.

A keyword search for baseball pulled up more than 230 results. Naturally, some are spurious, perhaps containing the word in the document in passing, but there are several great old titles to be had, including, among many other classics,

- [Touching Second: The Science of Baseball](#) by John J. Evers
- [Scientific Baseball](#), by John McGraw
- [How to Play Baseball](#), by Connie Mack
- [Pitching in a Pinch: Or Baseball from the Inside](#), by Christy Mathewson
- [Out of My League](#), by George Plimpton
- baseball fiction by Lester Chadwick and Zane Grey, among others.

It's certainly worth a few minutes to see what's available and you can't beat the price.



Visit The Bookshelf

For news, interviews, reviews, and previews, visit RonKaplansBaseballBookshelf.com. And check out the podcast edition as well, available on iTunes. Recent interviews include Arnold Hano, [Marty Appel](#) (*Pinstripe Empire*), and [Dave Anderson](#) (*The New York Times Story of the Yankees: 382 Articles, Profiles and Essays from 1903 to Present*).

Please send articles, reviews, and suggestions to: Ron Kaplan at Ronk232@comcast.net (Note the new address). Appropriate topics include books, magazines, blogs, etc. Please put “For SABR Newsletter” in the subject line.