

Society for American Baseball Research

BIBLIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

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Comments from the Chair

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Our biggest news this quarter is that Daniel Levine and his people at DMLCo have upgraded our system for adding and improving entries to **The Baseball Index (TBI)**. In fact, I just added 1242 entries. The system has allowed us to begin adding significantly to the TBI database.

This improvement would not have been possible without generous contributions from Committee members Steve Milman, newsletter editor Skip McAfee, Jim Lannen, and Joe Murphy. Again, this project has benefited from hours of work by volunteers as well as the financial contributions, now totaling more than \$16,000, from Committee members. It is a testament to all of you and your commitment to the work the Committee does.

Got a nice note from our founding chairman, Frank Phelps, along with an excellent historical piece Frank did for *Tennis Week*. Frank notes "the old man is still researching, even if not on baseball". Come back, Frank, we'll let you research baseball, too.

Speaking of Frank, I'm looking for a volunteer to do a lot of typing. One of Frank's last research projects was to compile the Index to *The Sporting News Registers*. This is the world's best reference for finding a person's most complete record in a *TSN Register*. It includes appearances as coaches or Hall of Fame honorees, which cover any records at the end of a career when the player may have returned to the minors. Frank did this reference at the end of the non-computer era, but it's the type of thing that lends itself to a database program. Jim Lannen and Ted Hathaway, and the folks at SABR HQ in Cleveland, have taken a crack at scanning the Index into a computer program, but the type on the original is simply too small and fuzzy. So, it looks like we need a typist, preferably with some experience with database programs; and someone dedicated enough to add the information since 1995, the last year in Frank's compilation.

Our Committee meeting in Denver has been scheduled for Saturday, July 12, at 5 p.m. Usually, we've gotten one of those early-morning time slots, so this is one nice time of day. I'm hoping we'll get good attendance this year and I urge all of you to join us. Activities will start Thursday, July 10, and run through Sunday the 13th. In addition, this year there will be two books made available to convention attendees: 1) the usual collection of SABR members' work focused on the area of the convention (in this case, the Rocky Mountains); and 2) a *Denver Post*-financed book about the *Denver Post* Tournament, once the largest and most competitive baseball tournament outside the World Series (many Negro Leaguers played significant roles at these games).

Again, I urge all of you to participate in Committee activities. We have not had an index to a baseball book in some time. And, of course, TBI needs all the help we can get. We are rapidly approaching 200,000 entries, which is pretty amazing. But there are many more to do. Also, please come up with your own projects.

And, last but not never least, please keep Rich Arpi and *Current Baseball Publications* in mind when scouring your local bookstores or the souvenir stands at ball games. Rich doesn't need any help with something from the big publishers, but there are lots of self-published books, or those sold in a local market, that don't make it onto his radar screen in Minnesota. It's the time of year when new baseball books pop up, so keep your eyes open. Rich can be contacted at rwaces@cs.com or 2209 Skilman Ave., North St. Paul, MN 55109-3996.

See you in Colorado.

The Baseball Index (TBI) First Quarter (2003) Report

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Daniel Levine and his staff at DMLCo – our Web-service provider – recently completed work on the administrative function of **The Baseball Index (TBI)**, so that we are now able to add new records directly to the online database and as well as download, edit, and upload records to be changed or updated. This very important step in the improvement and vitality of TBI has been working well. We have already added 10,000 new records. When TBI was launched in June 2002, it actually contained only those records that had been added as of December 2001. We have added the first two quarters of 2002 so far, along with source references to hundreds of new books and book sections. Thousands more remain to be added. The process of preparing the records to be added takes much time, but helps ensure the quality of our data. Work on integrating these remaining records should be finished well in advance of the SABR convention in July. Andy McCue and I thank Daniel Levine and his staff for their work on TBI, and we are most grateful to SABR members **Steve Milman** and **Skip McAfee** for their generous contributions, which made it possible for us to complete this stage of the project.

Indexing work has continued in the past quarter. **Joe Murphy** continues his excellent work on *Baseball Magazine* (1921-22) and several baseball annuals from the 1950s and 1960s. **Tim Cashion** has likewise continued his work on *USA Today Baseball Weekly* (now *USA Today Sports Weekly*); Tim also indexed nearly 150 profiles from the 1997 issue of *Scouting Notebook*. These new records will soon be added directly into the online TBI. A full report on additions of the past year will be described in the TBI Annual Report in the July 2003 issue of the newsletter.

When TBI was first proposed (as "Baseball Online") back in 1989, online databases were plentiful, but nearly always *bibliographic* databases. That is, they functioned much like indexes, referencing sources, but not containing the full text of those sources. By 2003, this has long since ceased to be the case. Online databases (which are nearly always Web-based now) usually contain full-text data, often full-image data as well. While there are some notable exceptions,

full-text databases are now the *expectation* for researchers. With its lack of full-text data, TBI might be considered something of a dinosaur now. This is not to imply that the usefulness of TBI has passed: subject-indexed databases are just as useful for data navigation as they ever were. Anyone who has tried searching a full-text database with no indexing knows only too well the endless number of blind alleys. But having the full text available is an enormous searching asset, in addition to the obvious advantage of having it linked to the indexing itself.

I had a conversation with a baseball journalist who started a subscription to TBI last January and, while he was enthusiastic about TBI, he felt that it was essentially a specialist's database and that the absence of full text would likely frustrate the amateur researcher and average fan. My experience with the user traffic on TBI over the years tells me otherwise, but I think his complaint is well taken: the potential market value of TBI has likely declined over the years. Indeed, despite an average of about 5500 visitors a month now to the TBI Web site, our receipts for paid search results and subscriptions are probably lower now than what they were before we went online.

Since the earliest days of planning for TBI, it has always been our assumption, and that of SABR administrators, that TBI might potentially be a money-maker for SABR, or at least be able to pay for itself. When we went to the Web last year, we had hoped that would be our "big break". While it could be argued that our level of exposure has been quite limited and we have not given it a fair share, the amount of use we've seen is many times more than what we saw before the Web site went up, yet paid usage has not increased at all. Our main source of income has been the generosity of a small number of SABR members. I believe that donations, whether from members or other funding sources, are likely to continue to be TBI's principle funding source.

In view of all this, I've been rethinking the wisdom of charging anything for accessing TBI and simply opening up the database for unlimited searching for everyone. Obviously, this would greatly increase the usefulness and attractiveness of the database. Increased visibility and the lack of other funding sources might also increase our chances of getting funding for other future developments for TBI. I admit to some disappointment at the way things seem to be shaking out, but like everyone else associated with the project my main interest is and has always been seeing that TBI gets the most possible use. Whether free or fee, TBI will benefit SABR in the long run.

I'd appreciate hearing your thoughts on this matter. Please contact me at: sabrtbi@mn.rr.com. Unfortunately, I will not be attending the SABR convention in Denver this year. I will, however, be presenting on TBI at the North American Association of Sports History/North American Sports Library Information Network joint conference in Columbus, Ohio in late May. I hope to see some of you there.

Book Review

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THE WRITERS' GAME: Baseball Writing in America

Richard Orodnenker. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996. 248p. (United States Authors series, no.663)

A brave man, Orodnenker has attempted a history of non-fiction writing about baseball. It comes with the usual academic paraphernalia: lots of notes, a selected bibliography, and an index. Orodnenker seeks to bring order to an unusually miscellaneous group of texts; he optimistically notes that "all baseball writing can be brought together by exploring certain recurrent themes and myths" (p.xii).

Orodnenker defines his field as "baseball narrative outside the realm of fiction", admitting that it is "vast and uneven" (p.xiii, xiv). He asserts that the notion of the familiar essay can cover all this writing

and wonders, in conclusion "if baseball may prove to be a twentieth-century phenomenon only" (p.xvi).

The book's first three chapters develop concepts designed to reveal similarities and differences among these "familiar essays". In the first, Orodnenker characterizes all baseball non-fiction as a "Great Conversation" utilizing vernacular, simile, and anecdote. In the second chapter, he divides writers into "Matties" and "Rubes", after pitchers Mathewson and Waddell. "Matties are graceful, polished writers, baseball's elegant phrasemakers" (p.9). The Rubes had "an attraction to colorful stories that 'like their progenitor [Waddell],' Donald Honig writes, 'had a character uniquely their own, a zany charm, an impetuosity, a quality foreshadowing self-destruction'" (10-11).

The third chapter introduces six myths that have been recurrent themes in non-fiction baseball writing. The first he calls "The Myth of America", the association of baseball with the American ideals such as the common man, democratic action, or Yankee ingenuity. "The Myth of Memory" follows: baseball writing as a literature of reminiscence, of shared or borrowed memories. The third myth is the "Myth of Timelessness", the idea that baseball lives on in the mind, that it resurrects itself through the generations. The fourth is the myth of baseball's exceptionalism: it is "the best game" and has great powers of healing. Baseball's "most prevalent" myth is the "Myth of Heroes". Finally, there is the myth of baseball's special relation to writing itself, its "literariness".

Orodnenker uses these concepts informally in the nine historical chapters that follow. He begins with Henry Chadwick, and the four chapters (up to the 1950s) cover mostly writers who began, and often ended, their careers with newspapers: Finley Peter Dunne, Charles Dryden, Ring Lardner, W.O. McGeehan, Westbrook Pegler, John Kieran, Damon Runyan, Heywood Broun, Paul Gallico, Grantland Rice, Jimmy Cannon, Red Smith, and John Lardner. In subsequent chapters newspapermen are joined by writers from other backgrounds. Journalists such as Roger Angell, George Plimpton, and Roger Kahn are treated at some length and in different chapters (use the index). But more literary and scholarly folks turn up, among them Jacques Barzun, John Updike, and Donald Hall. The writing of three ballplayers is also examined: Jim Brosnan, Pat Jordan, and Jim Bouton. The last chapter ends with a consideration of the writing of Thomas Boswell.

Though Orodnenker is mostly interested in showing how the various myths are manifest in these works, there are occasional literary judgments. This reader was startled by the idea that Updike's "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu" was "beginning to wear thin with the years" (p.103). Kahn's *A Season in the Sun* is judged to be "a better baseball book than *The Boys of Summer*".

The "selected bibliography" is of special interest. The entries are often annotated and there are no fewer than eight sections, labeled as follows: "Primary Works"; "Anthologies"; "Other Important Books" (each of the 26 entries in this section is annotated); "Articles and Parts of Books"; "Secondary Works" (47 entries, all annotated); "Other Baseball Sources"; "Non-Baseball Works"; and "Memoirs and Other Books". The fact that it's so broken up makes it hard to use, but the annotations make it fun to read through. The breadth of subject makes it very much a "selected" bibliography, and everyone will be tempted to add to it. This writer's single addition would be James DeMuth's 1980 academic work *Small Town Chicago: The Comic Perspective of Finley Peter Dunne, George Ade, Ring Lardner* for background and analysis of these writers. It is surprising that Orodnenker didn't mention at least the first of the two volumes on American Sportswriters he has edited for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* series published in 1996 by Gale Research, but perhaps it had not yet appeared