Society for American Baseball Research

BIBLIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE NEWSLETTER

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Comments from the Chair

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This issue of the newsletter is the first distributed electronically to all Committee members for whom we have e-mail addresses. In January, we plan to cease paper delivery to all people who receive this--except for those who have no e-mail address or specifically tell me that they want to continue receiving a paper copy. It is also possible that you have an e-mail address but did not receive an electronic copy, probably because we don't have a correct e-mail address for you. If you did not receive an electronic copy (which will arrive several weeks sooner) and wish to, then please send me your correct e-mail address. You might also want to go to www.sabr.org, click on the "My SABR" button on the upper right of the home page, and update your information there as well.

This switch to electronic delivery is being made by several SABR committees to reduce costs and to speed up delivery. If any of you have difficulty, either reading the newsletter or getting it to print out properly, please contact me. Same for *Current Baseball Publications* (*CBP*). If you have any suggestions about how the newsletter might be formatted to make reading and printing easier, please share them.

It's actually a pleasure for a committee chair to have so little else to say. That's because so many members work on projects steadily and well. The Baseball Index (TBI) continues to increase its audience and awareness; see Ted Hathaway's accompanying discussion of our growth plans and publicity aims for TBI. Rich Arpi continues to do such a good job with *CBP* each quarter that I don't have to say any more than "There it is, again." And Terry Sloope faithfully ensures that it gets posted on the Committee's Web site.

Skip McAfee produces our newsletter on time and full of such gems as Terry Smith's book reviews.

I am always interested in ideas for new projects that we can pursue and Ted and I are always looking for volunteers to find items and add them to TBI. You can do this online now.

The Baseball Index (TBI) Third Quarter Report

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While TBI online (http://www.baseballindex.org) continues to enjoy steady use--more than 1000 visits per week--I'd like to focus in this report on the contributions of our volunteers. We had one of the best quarters we've had in a while, with 3267 new articles indexed for the database. More than 1500 of these were contributed using our online data-entry forms. It's easy to contribute to The Baseball Index! You can index books and magazine articles online at: http://www.rationalpastimes.com/dataentry.html. Try something fairly simple, like a few magazine articles, and see how you like it. Try working with magazines to which you currently subscribe, or perhaps a book you've just finished reading. Please give the online forms a try and contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

As always, you can also index using paper forms or computer software. Please contact us if you'd like to help out!

Joe Murphy indexed 1548 articles this past quarter, nearly all of them from *Baseball Magazine* from the 1930s and 1940s. Brad Sullivan added 1037 articles from *The Sporting News* (1921, 1963, 1987, and 1989), *Broadcasting* (1954-1955), and *Sports Illustrated* (1994, 2000). Bill Ivimey has continued his work on issues of *Baseball Digest* from the 1950s, indexing 232 articles. Bob Timmermann renewed his indexing of *National Sports Daily*, adding 124 newly indexed articles. Terry Smith added another 112 articles from *Baseball Magazine* (keyed in by Terry Sloope) and has now completed indexing the first 10 years of this publication (1908-1917)! We now have well more than 6000 articles indexed from *Baseball Magazine* in TBI. Thank you to all those who contribute to TBI.

We have begun the next phase in developing the TBI database and the TBI Web site with Daniel Levine of DMLCo. We will first improve the search interface, then work on improving our ability to update the database itself. We will change the "People Search" to search by Last Name/First Name only, thereby enhacing the number of search results when researchers are looking for names. We will allow researchers to search by date ranges (e.g., 1906-1911, not just year by year). Other changes will allow researchers to view their paid search results more easily. We anticipate these changes will take only a few weeks to accomplish. For the "behind the scenes" part of the database, we will greatly improve our ability to add new records to the database and edit existing records to improve its detail and accuracy. This step, in particular, is of vital importance in the growth and development of TBI.

Book Reviews

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THE END OF BASEBALL AS WE KNEW IT: The Players Union, 1960-81
Charles P. Korr. Champaign (Ill.): Univ. of Illinois Press, 2002. 336p. ISBN 0-252-02752-3. $34.95

As August wound down this year, and baseball fans were all focused on the question of whether we'd see yet another work stoppage, it was timely to be reading *The End of Baseball as We Knew It.*

A history professor at the Univ. of Missouri, St. Louis, Korr traces the Major League Baseball Players Association (MLBPA) from its feeble birth in the 1950s, through the hiring of Marvin Miller, to the grievance procedures, arbitration proceedings, and confrontations with management that established the players union as the most potent force in the game.

The book ends with the 1981 strike because it confirmed what everyone but a group of hard-line owners had already perceived: the players union had not only taken the roof off salaries, it had released the players from a system that constricted their economic rights at every turn.

From his initial moves to stabilize the union's financial position, Miller had impressed the players with his ability to use labor laws to protect their pension plan, their playing conditions, and other rights. He got the owners to agree to arbitration, the first necessary step in his long-range run at the reserve clause. Curt Flood, whose case was a failure in every legal sense, allowed Miller to educate the players about the possibilities and methods of overturning the reserve clause. Catfish Hunter, who became a free agent after Charlie Finley failed to honor his contract, educated the players about the possible money within free agency.

After aborted runs (by players such as Ted Simmons and Bobby Tolan), Andy Messersmith and Dave McNally in 1975 eventually provided the test case Miller had been looking for. An arbitrator made the decision Miller had long expected: freeing the players from the reserve clause. The next negotiations actually found Miller giving away some of the freedoms the Messersmith/McNally decision allowed by restricting free agency for players early in their careers. Miller believed a market flooded with too many players each winter could well depress salaries.

That set the stage for the 1981 strike. Hard-line executives such as Gussie Busch and Bob Howsam had read the last negotiations as union weakness. They set out to break it. And, they failed, cementing the union's potency. In effect, although the details of arbitration, free-agent compensation, salary caps, and luxury taxes have changed over the years, none of the intervening negotiations or work stoppages has changed the fundamental relationship confirmed by the 1981 strike, which makes it an excellent place to stop the book. It was, notes Korr quoting Paul Richards, "the end of baseball as we knew it."

The book is blessed by Korr's unparalleled access to materials from the MLBPA archives. He can quote from letters written to and from the players association years before Miller even came on the scene. He can use the union's written summaries of bargaining sessions to assess both the positions of players and owners and the union negotiators' analysis of what was happening. He makes excellent use of Miller's clever letters to journalists, revealing Miller's sly sense of humor and the way the union executive was constantly conscious of how the baseball battles were being interpreted (or often misinterpreted in Miller's view) to the general public.

Korr backs up the documentary evidence with a wide range of interviews with Miller, other union officials, owners' negotiator John Gaherin, players active in the union, and journalists who covered the events. It's interesting to note how many of today's managers (e.g., Joe Torre, Bob Boone, and Don Baylor) were actively involved in the union.

There are, unfortunately, limits to Korr's sources. And, to no one's surprise, these came from the owners' side. Gaherin was available, but he was fired in 1976 for being too realistic about what the owners could do. His successor, hard-liner Ray Grebey, was not. Bowie Kuhn appears through quotations from his book and from news stories, but there was no interview. Some owners and executives (Bud Selig, Buzzie Bavasi, Ewing Kauffman) were interviewed but they are not the major players of the time.

There were also no documents equivalent to the MLBPA's memos on the state of negotiations, the shifts in the owners' positions, and the union side's analysis of what this all meant.

Thus, the book is somewhat skewed to the side of the players union. Korr works very hard at being balanced, but he doesn't have the same depth of analysis, anecdote, and reflection coming from owners as he does from the union. It also may have contributed to Korr's emphasis on what happened and why, rather than analysis of what didn't happen.

These do lead to a couple of distinctions that I think would have been important to make, but Korr passes over.

One is the players' association's decision to support Flood's suit. Korr goes to great length to examine the meeting between the union board and Flood, and board members' concerns about the issue of race and how this would be perceived. Korr doesn't spend much time analyzing what arguments Miller made about the situation and, in other circumstances, Miller has noted that one strong argument he put forward to support Flood was concerns about Flood's legal representation. Miller expected Flood to lose his case and was concerned that too strong a decision against Flood might make the players' legal position worse. That legal strategy was successful. The Supreme Court upheld an earlier ruling, but suggested to Congress that this was an area that should be looked into.

Another is the difference between the roles played by Messersmith and McNally in the case that overturned the reserve clause. This case started, you will recall, when the Dodgers refused to overturn a long-standing policy and give Messersmith a no-trade clause. As 1975 went on, pressure built on the Dodgers to give Messersmith the clause, but McNally's entry into the grievance made the Dodgers' position moot and led Walter O'Malley to cease efforts to sign Messersmith. Messersmith, and his subsequent contract with the Braves, certainly showed the economic possibilities of free agency, but McNally provided the legal leverage that allowed the case to go ahead.

Korr's handling of each of these situations is a quibble compared to the strengths he brings to the book. The sources are excellent; his treatment judicious. The writing is clear. And, not least, he tells the story economically. There is no blow-by-blow recounting of each negotiation. Instead, he keeps his focus on the broader story of the growth and changes in the union, and how that changed baseball as we knew it.

Book Reviews

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THE NEW BILL JAMES HISTORICAL BASEBALL ABSTRACT

Bill James. New York: The Free Press (a division of Simon and Schuster), 2001. 998p. ISBN 0-684-80697-5. $45

Eric Enders' review in these pages (January 2002 newsletter) detailed the unhappinesses with this book that have been expressed by various SABRites. I share these, and will be adding some, but thought it might be appropriate to mention in more detail than Enders did, some of the virtues of the book. I have no mathematical skills, and so I expect that James' further explanation of the concept of Win Shares will leave me no wiser than I am now. I read the original *The Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract* when it came out in 1986 but never saw the paperback revision.

First, some complaints. At the proofreading level, James never spells David Quentin Voigt's name correctly. Looking back at the first *Historical Baseball Abstract*, I find he didn't spell it correctly in 1986 either. More substantially, James doesn't have a whole lot to say about 19th-century baseball, but the 1870s get especially short shrift. James spends most of this section on the Union Association of 1884. Finally, in his section on the 1950s, James writes about "the fifties nobody talks about: baseball in trouble". He speaks there of attendance problems caused by television, urban decay, and deteriorating stadiums. These subjects (and this section is unchanged from the 1986 edition), says James, always get "left out of those nostalgic books about how great baseball was in the golden fifties" (p.240). James is still correct, but surely he should have added that Neil J. Sullivan's *The Dodgers Move West* (1987) and other academic histories have focused on just these aspects of the 1950s.

I could go on. Expressions of irritation at these sorts of errors are useful and important. The errors shouldn't occur. I notice, though, that my complaints here concern the first part of the book, largely unrevised. James says in his introduction that he "didn't like a lot of" the 1986 *Historical Baseball Abstract* when he reread it and warns us (p.1, 2): "This book is not intended to be studied; it is intended to be enjoyed. It is intended that you pick it up, leaf through, find something that looks interesting, read it, react to it, decide that I'm right, decide that I'm wrong, put it down, pick it up some other time."

I'm afraid I read the book right through, 40 or 50 pages at a sitting. Here are some of the things that looked interesting to me from the newer parts of the book: the section on the decade of the 1990s, the discussion of the concept of Win Shares, and the player ratings.

Right away in the section on the 1990s we get James' take on the home run explosion. Here he resists popular explanations: a livelier ball, a shortage of good pitching, expansion. Then he lists six factors he believes account for the home run explosion. It's interesting here to note a revision from the 1970s section of the 1986 *Historical Baseball Abstract*. In 1986, James wrote: "Stadium architecture ... is the one largest dynamic of change in baseball" (p.250). *The New Historical Baseball Abstract* says: "Stadium architecture and game equipment are the two largest dynamics of change in baseball" (p.276). And, in fact, three of the six factors are new ballparks, use of aluminum bats in amateur baseball, and the evolution of bat design (p.307).

James is optimistic about the future of major-league baseball but gloomy about its present condition. In this he may be overestimating the principals' potential for rational behavior, but I suspect we all hope he is right. For James, baseball is a mess because no one is in charge, free agency (for the first time) is destroying competitive balance, and there is too much wasted time within games. For this last, James proposes six specific rules changes (p.317-324). He proposes solutions to the first two also, but these require a level of rationality neither owners nor players have attained. Perhaps the recent Basic Agreement is a step in the right direction.

The concept of Win Shares is the most important part of the book (p.331-358). This reader was unable to follow the mathematics of the concept but found the following intelligible: "The Win Shares system is essentially a method of attributing team wins to individual players --to individual hitters, to individual pitchers, and to individual fielders" (p.350). This quotation appears at the beginning of the section on fielding statistics, must reading for everyone. James, who elsewhere in the book enjoys poking fun at himself, is very serious here, saying (p.351): "You will have to be the judge of this, but I feel, having worked on this for a year or more, that I have broken the code of fielding statistics--that I have produced, for the first time, a systematic fielding analysis that actually rates good fielders as good fielders and poor fielders as poor fielders at least 90% of the time. Nothing like it has ever existed before. It is a radical re-thinking of fielding evaluation--and it woks." He also concludes with this caveat: "I am not claiming we have a perfect system; I am not claiming that this method puts the analysis of Fielding Statistics on the same level as the analysis of Batting Statistics. It doesn't." I am betting readers will find James's exposition fascinating in any case.

The rest of the book--some 600 pages--is devoted to player ratings. These can be disappointing, witness Enders' dismay at James' unwillingness to discuss Jeff Bagwell's virtues. I, too, was disappointed to discover no discussion of Dale Murphy, James' 12th-best center fielder. But there are many entries that are superb. My own favorites were Hal Chase, Phil Rizzuto, and especially Ernie Lombardi (a 10-page entry!).

And speaking of center field, James has reversed himself on the relative merits of Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays. As one who grew up a great fan of Mays, I was both dismayed and convinced by James' 1986 analysis of their relative merits. In 1986 there is no comparison: Mantle is the greater player (see p.390-393 of the 1986 *Historical Baseball Abstract)*. In *The New Historical Baseball Abstract*, Mays is rated the best center fielder of all time, the third-best player of all time, in both cases ahead (but not by much) of Mantle. In fact, at one point he says (p.257): "I still do not really know whether Willie Mays or Mickey Mantle was a greater ballplayer." Two things seem to have convinced James to rate Mays slightly higher (p.721): Mays looks stronger when analyzed by the Win Shares method, and he played more years at a higher level than Mantle did. But James does not address the question as extensively as he did in 1986.

One could go on practically forever about his book. James is still uneasy about rating pitchers. He says (p.893) that "the difference between the 100th and 200th best pitchers of all time [as he's rated them] is thin enough that good arguments exist for players who didn't make the top 200, let alone the top 100". Though it's full of errors of various sorts, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract* remains an essential book for anyone seriously interested in the game.

EARLY BASEBALL AND THE RISE OF THE NATIONAL LEAGUE

Tom Melville. Jefferson (N.C.): McFarland & Company, 2001. 168p. ISBN 0-7864-0962-2

The 2002 winner of SABR's Seymour Medal, this book is not for the faint of heart. Melville juxtaposes his "analytic" study to much other baseball history writing, including Harold Seymour's *Baseball: The Early Years* (1960), which he describes as "descriptive" (p.161). Melville warns us (p.7): "This is not a history of baseball in the traditional sense. Readers won't find here the story of early ballclubs, famous players or historic games. ... This work represents, instead, an attempt to explain the historical and social forces that determined organized baseball's cultural character."

The juxtaposition of "analytic" and "descriptive" histories is initially puzzling, at least it was for me. Here's the way I've come to understand it. One of the impulses to write history is to discover how we got to where we are. These historians are "descriptive" or "linear". They might also be called "progressive". Another kind of impulse is to find out what it was like back then. These folks tend to be evolutionists, and they tend to complicate assertions by linear historians. Thus, for instance, Melville says, of the expulsion of the New York and Philadelphia teams from the early National League (p.85): "Scholars have traditionally interpreted this bold and unprecedented move to expell [sic] clubs from the League's two largest markets as proof the National League was committed to putting principle before profits. Such an interpretation, however, is far too simplistic, overlooking a complex of factors, from economic opportunism to personality clashes." Notice that Melville doesn't deny the presence, or even the importance, of the motive. He asserts that the situation had many other elements.

Melville's thesis, which I must run the risk of simplifying, is stated as follows (p.8): " ... early baseball, due to the peculiar circumstances of its rapid development in a single city--New York--organized itself overwhelmingly in response to the American sporting public's demand for achievement. It was only able to do this, however, by opposing, thwarting, and distorting the American sporting public's equally pervasive demand that baseball's highest achievement level retain an obligation to, and accessibility from, locality." Instead of describing a movement from amateurism to professionalism, early baseball history is, for Melville, primarily a dialectic between "achievement" and "locality". Professional baseball achieves its unusual form from the domination of the former.

At one point in his narrative, Melville mentions in passing how different the developments of basketball and football have been in this country, the college game in each case achieving broad popularity before the professional game. The success of Melville's narrative comes, in part, from this comparative perspective. He is the author of a book (*The Tented Field*, 1998) on the development of American cricket, and sees English cricket as being more "firmly rooted in a competitive obligation to locality" (p.139). As one who has some interest in the history of association football in England, I'm aware of how cultures of locality, occupation, religion, and race still emerge in

what is now an overwhelmingly achievement-oriented culture. A comparative approach to baseball history will continue to yield new insights.

A second especially praiseworthy dimension of Melville's book is his commitment to the use of primary sources. In his "A Note on Sources" (p.161-163) he asserts the importance to his book of "the correspondence of Harry Wright and William Hulbert". Wright's papers, he feels, have been in part neglected. Hulbert's, housed in the Chicago Historical Society, is "the most valuable source" for his book; these, too, have been neglected, but he hopes for publication. In addition, he urges researchers to consult the "numerous, smaller, little known" pre-1880 newspapers: "they remain an untapped, yet possibly valuable, source for constructing a complete understanding of baseball's development during this period" (p.163).

Early Baseball and the Rise of the National League will have its greatest appeal among specialists of the period. Still, it is a worthy Seymour Medal winner.

Book Reviews

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HAL CHASE: The Defiant Life and Turbulent Times of Baseball's Biggest Crook
Martin Daniel Kohout. Jefferson (N.C.): McFarland & Company, 2001. 339p. $29.95 soft cover

A PRINCE AT FIRST: The Fictional Autobiography of Baseball's Hal Chase
Ed Dinger. Jefferson (N.C.): McFarland & Company, 2002. 224p. ISBN 0-7864-1330-1. $21 soft cover

Somewhere in the editorial offices of McFarland & Company, someone said, "You know, we need to have a book about Hal Chase." And that person looked about, likely saw two manuscripts sitting around about Chase, one a biography and the other a novel, and thought, "What the heck. You can't have too many Hal Chase books, can you?

And so in 2001, McFarland released Kohout's thorough biography of Chase. In the following year, Dinger was able to see his novel about Chase published. But do we really need two books about one of the most infamous characters in baseball history?

Kohout's biography was definitely needed. While one would think that a man banned from baseball, accused of being part of the conspiracy to fix the 1919 World Series, publicly accused of throwing games by Christy Mathewson, and lambasted by baseball historians for his crookedness, would have merited a full-length book, but Chase had not.

Kohout delves into just about any source of information he can obtain about Chase and even interviews one of Chase's grandsons. Despite the fact that Chase had nothing to do with his own children and even less with his grandchildren, his descendants still defend him staunchly.

One of the most vexing questions about Chase is why? Why did he become such a crooked player? Why did he feel the need to throw baseball games? Why, despite his seemingly vast amount of talent, did he squander it to pick up a few thousand dollars from gamblers?

Kohout does not point to any one reason or event that changed Chase. Instead, the author paints a picture of widespread corruption, not only in baseball during the Deadball Era, but in American society as a whole. To Kohout, Chase is just an extreme example of what was wrong with many other baseball players of his time, such as Heinie Zimmerman and Chick Gandil.

The more Kohout turns over about Chase's personal life, the harder it seems to figure out just what made Chase tick. Chase grew up in stable family in the San Francisco Bay Area. He played baseball for Santa Clara College, but it appears that he never attended a class and was just kept around for his baseball abilities.

Dinger's novel and Kohout's biography intersect at one key point. After Chase had finished a sensational rookie year for the Los Angeles Angels in the Pacific Coast League in 1904, the New York Highlanders and the Angels engaged in a fierce bidding war for Chase's services. Chase was soon exposed to the harshness of baseball's economics as his services were bargained for and eventually acquired by New York through some fairly unscrupulous practices.

Aside from this one matter, Dinger's novel follows a much different narrative than Kohout's biography. Dinger calls his work "a fictional autobiography" and the word "fictional" should be emphasized. This particular Hal Chase, while carefully following the career path of the real Hal Chase, is full of psychological demons. He has a beloved older brother who dies young. He has an alcoholic father who resents his son's success in baseball. While growing up, he is picked on by other kids in town. Did any of this happen? Judging from Kohout's research, the answer is no, but it does make for a somewhat interesting narrative.

Dinger's Chase is most assuredly not a nice man. He physically abuses prostitutes. He psychologically abuses his wives. He will not touch his own children. He feels like an outcast on the East Coast. He cannot deal with fame and soon falls prey to gamblers. He even goes as far to claim that Christy Mathewson intentionally inflicted his poison gas explosion to burnish his own reputation as a hero.

The novel about Chase should really be judged as a work of fiction. While this is a novel that has some fairly obscure baseball players as characters, such as New York Highlanders manager Harry Wolverton, it is still more fanciful than factual.

But when you read Kohout's book, you realize that perhaps the best treatment of Chase is fictional. Kohout concludes with a passage from Eric Rolfe Greenberg's novel *The Celebrant* (1983), in which Greenberg portrays Chase as the evil antithesis to the virtuousness of Mathewson.

You could read Kohout's biography and Dinger's novel about "Prince Hal" from cover to cover twice and you will likely still not know just who Hal Chase truly was.

Baseball Literature

" ... baseball—with its lore and legends, its cultural power, its seasonal associations, its native authenticity, its simple rules and transparent strategies, its longueurs and thrills, its spaciousness, its suspensefulness, its heroics, its nuances, its lingo, its 'characters', its peculiarly hypnotic tedium, its mythic transformation of the immediate—was the literature of my boyhood."

Philip Roth, "My Baseball Years", *New York Times*, Opening Day 1973

"I'm going to be a writer like Ring Lardner or somebody—that's if things don't work out first with the Yankees, or the Cubs, or the Red Sox, or maybe possibly the Tigers. ... If I get down to the St. Louis Browns, then I'll definitely be a writer.".

15-year-old Eugene Jerome, aspiring ballplayer, in Neil Simon's *Brighton Beach Memoirs* (1982)