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Comments from the Chair

Andy McCue
Riverside, CA

I wanted to give you an update of the project to obtain new software for our creaking Baseball Index project.

As I mentioned last newsletter, the basic search page continues to function, but the system for returning information to researchers is erratic and the system for updating the database is completely broken. Recently, the Yankees team archivist did a search for Babe Ruth. As you can imagine, the search brought a large number of hits, over 2,500. The system for providing copies of the citations would only produce half the documents despite quite a bit of tinkering. I finally produced the results he needed by going back to the basic Microsoft program where the data is stored because the TBI system just wouldn't do it. There are numerous other small problems with the software as well.

Using the SABR database and various SABR contacts, I have been able to find a handful of people who may be able to help. After consultations, I have determined that the best way to proceed is with a package of "Open Source" (or, public domain) software which we will then pay a consultant to customize to our needs and mount on the website. I am in talks with several possible consultants and hope to have a work plan developed before Thanksgiving. I'll then return to all of you seeking the donations that will be needed to complete this project.

I'd like to thank SABR members Larry Lester, Sean Forman, John Gregory, Pete Cottrell, Michael Westbay, David Smith, Sean Lahman, Mark Armour, Tom Ruane and Jacob Pomrenke, who've given advice in one form or another. I hope to keep calling on such people.

Again, if you know anyone who might be interested in helping on this project, and has some expertise in searchable databases, I'd be grateful for the name and the contact information.

My thanks to newsletter editor Ron Kaplan and to Terry Smith for continuing to produce excellent book reviews and to Rich Arpi for his stellar work on Current Baseball Publications. They are exactly the kind of thing the committee should be doing.

I'd encourage all of you to get involved in one of the committee's projects, whether it's producing entries that can be added to The Baseball Index once that's possible, or producing book reviews, doing indexes for important baseball books published without them or picking up some of the

other ideas that have been published in the newsletter over the past year.

Have a good fall.



Commentary

If this is the future of higher education, we're in big trouble

Making my regular Amazon run for new baseball e-books, I came across *The History of Baseball: The Definitive Learning Guide*, published by an outfit called [Course Hero](#) and via Charles River Editors. There is no single author or group of authors credited with this title.

I have no knowledge of Course Hero, nor have I seen any of their other products. But if they're anything like *this*, I fear for our young people.

Before the actual baseball material even starts, we have this from Charles River, which claims it was "founded by Harvard and MIT alumni to provide superior editing and original writing services with the expertise to create digital content for publishers across a vast range of subject matter." They encourage readers to "signup [sic] to receive up-dates about new books as they are published..."

There is no table of contents per se, so navigation, at least through my Kindle, is somewhat unwieldy; I had to jump back to the beginning of the book to skip over the brief lessons, which are divided into basically chronological "modules."

A few outtakes, reproduced exactly as it appears in the original:

- "Cobb described himself as a steel spring with a dangerous flaw, sure to un-spring without a seconds notice."
- "In fact, he once stated that he preferred to lose so that he could keep fanfare high without having to pay his players for winning."
- "Cobb Continues his Reign as Advertisers Cash-in

- “Like the Meckle Boner, four years earlier, Snodgrass’s mistake cost the Giants the game and the title.”
- “To try and appease players and keep them, the American and National league agreed to many of the players demands, including salary bumps and free uniforms.”

Again, I emphasize that these are not my usual typos. I guess part of the revolutionary approach by Course Hero is to skip such quaint ideas as punctuation, accuracy, and good writing. Factual errors compound the problems. Snodgrass’ muff came in a World Series, so technically, yes, it cost the Giants a world championship title. *Merkle’s Boner* costs them the NL title; not quite the same level of achievement. I stopped reading at this point but I’m willing to bet my house that there are more typos, editorial errors, missing punctuation, and so on.

Each chapter includes a group of questions, purportedly based on the contents of the lesson. Here’s one taken at random:

Question 2: Why did the reserve clause remain after Federal League and Fraternity of professional Base Ball Players disbanded?

- A) The players decided they needed the clause
- B) Apple Sauce
- C) Without a threat, the league presidents saw no reason to give in.
- D) The reserve clause was destroyed after the Federal League folded.

“C” is the correct answer, but “Apple Sauce?” Is this an attempt at humor? Maybe I missed the whole thing and this is a project of The Onion or some such organization. You know the “Infinite Monkey” theory? Put a group of monkeys together with a bunch of typewriters and they’ll eventually come out with the works of Shakespeare? All due respect to the supposedly earnest writers behind *The History of Baseball: The Definitive Learning Guide*, but I think we’ve proven the concept.

Young people, if you really want to learn about the national pastime, there is plenty of great material out there. Make an effort. Don’t be an Eloi!

Ron Kaplan
Montclair, NJ



Terry Furst, an assistant professor in the Anthropology Department at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, is interested in finding an indexer for his book on The Sporting Press and the Public Image of Early Professional Baseball. If interested, please contact Dr. Furst at TFurst3334@aol.com.

Features & Reviews

The Might Have Been by Joseph M. Schuster. New York: Ballantine, 2012.

The Greatest Show on Dirt, by James Bailey. CreateSpace, 2012.

Regular followers of my blog know my aversion to discussing fiction. I don’t have enough of a creative writing background to pass critical judgment on the hard work of the novelist. All I can pass on is what I like or dislike.

But this summer I was fortunate enough to enjoy back-to-back hits: [The Might Have Been: A Novel](#), by Joseph M. Schuster and [The Greatest Show on Dirt](#), by James Bailey. Both carry a minor league theme.

I had been doing a bit of reading about Adam Greenberg lately, due in part to the [One At Bat](#) movement, coupled with his attempt to make the roster for the Israeli National Team as it plays in the World Baseball Classic qualifier (unfortunately, he didn’t make the cut). *TMHB* could have been his story, although Schuster told me in an email that he had been working on the book for a long time, well before Greenberg had his lone ill-fated appearance in the big league. It’s not giving away too much of the story to say that the protagonist, Edward Everett Yates falls into the category of the majority of athletes seeking a Major League career, regardless of the sport. It’s all the more agonizing in baseball because of the seemingly vast amount of opportunity, given the number of players in the minor leagues. But, truth be told, only a fraction will ever advance to the highest level for more than a cup of coffee. Yates falls into that category, the victim of a ML career-ending injury, although, God bless, him, he never wants to give up, regardless of the cost when it comes to relationships.



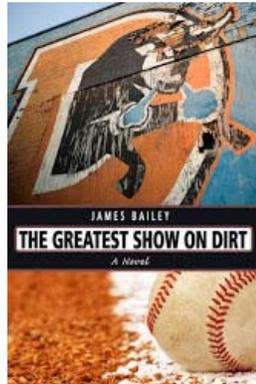
Eventually, he does have to give up playing, although not the game itself. He becomes a weathered bush league manager who now has to make the kinds of decisions that will affect the careers — and lives — of the young men in his charge. Like Yates, many of them believe baseball is what they were destined to do, only to discover their fate is not in their hands.

Schuster tells this sad story in a realistic voice for the most part. I found a couple of incidents towards the end a bit unnecessary. Yates’ story is intriguing enough without add a couple of scenes to increase the tension/drama. In a more just world, *The Might Have Been* would have enjoyed the buzz *The Art of Fielding* received. I found it a much more realistic story, free from the literary pretensions of *TAOF*. I guess Schuster’s mistake was not getting a huge advance.

The day-to-day lives of the minor league prospect and has-been is at the heart of the feature film, *Bull Durham*. At on point in the movie, the PA announcers welcomes fans to “the greatest show on dirt”; James Bailey use that sentiment

for his first novel which takes a look at the young men and women behind the scenes who make the game go. James — who has [his own blog that features reviews of baseball books](#) — makes heroes out of these folks, who have to deal with the tedium, the egos, the high demands, and the low salaries.

Despite the problems, he makes me wish I were Lane Hamilton, his “hero,” who has the guts to give up a comparatively lucrative job for a chance to work in the national pastime. I think many of us fantasize about a time in our lives when we might have taken a different turn, before family and expectations dug their mitts into us. (Which takes us back, in title and thoughts, to *The Might Have Been* for us.



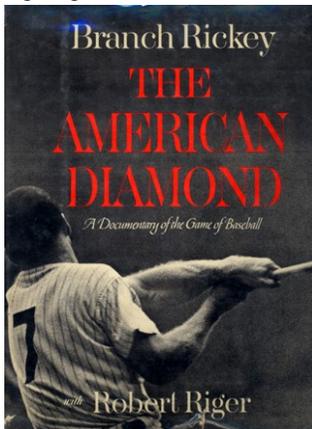
Hamilton and his cronies have the thankless jobs of placating disgruntled fans as well as players, trying to be accommodating, but having to deal with differing levels of douchery, for lack of a better word. Can they make a career out of the minors? Will they advance or will they have to “grow up” at some point? Whatever they decide, *TGSOD* makes for a good distraction from the heaviness of the daily grind.

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A Documentary of the Game of Baseball, by Branch Rickey with Robert Riger. Simon and Schuster, 1965.

Rickey, who served in high-level administrative capacities for the St. Louis Cardinals, Brooklyn Dodgers, and Pittsburgh Pirates, was one of the true visionaries of the game. In addition to his most important accomplishment — signing Jackie Robinson to break baseball’s color line — he



helped develop the farm system, incorporated statistics into the Dodgers’ decision-making processes, and introduced such items as batting helmets into the game.

Add to those *The American Diamond*, a marvelous treatise about baseball, from the time a young boy (yes, this is a bit sexist here, as it pertains exclusively to the male of the species) puts on his first mitt through Little League, Pony League, college, and, if one is lucky, professional baseball.

Before getting to that, however, Rickey picks his favorite players to form an all-time All-Star squad. Riger’s contributions are the handsome drawings that supplement the photographs — an essential part of the publication — which accompany the text.

The last of the three sections, which includes “The Heritage” and “The Game,” is “The Future of the Game” in which Rickey’s prescient sensibilities shine. Way back in the mid-1960s, he was already aware of the encroachment of football as a major threat to the National Pastime and what the powers-that-be should do to maintain baseball’s place in American culture. Rickey was concerned about the continued dominance of teams like the NY Yankees, a situation which spoiled the fun of a lot of teams (and their fans), who recognized they were at a disadvantage, so he advocated some sort of parity including doing away with outlandish signing bonuses (what would he think now?).

Rickey was also ahead of the curve when it came to expansion. After the Dodgers and Giants abandoned the New York area to move to California, he had been one of the early adapters in challenging established Leagues by attempting to create the Continental League. Of course, that never transpired for a variety of reasons, but it did league to two rounds of expansion in 1961 and 1969.

Finally, Rickey was concerned about the role of television in reducing attendance at the ballparks. He advocated some sort of pay-TV scheme that, thankfully, never amounted to much, although it did throw a scare into the broadcasting industry. He also deemed necessary the role of the “Lords of Baseball” in promoting the game globally through public relations campaigns and other means.

The American Diamond is available through Amazon from about \$12-\$20 for used and up to \$75 for “collectible,” which I assume would be in better condition. This is a must-have for the student of the game and admirers of Mr. Rickey (and Mr. Riger).

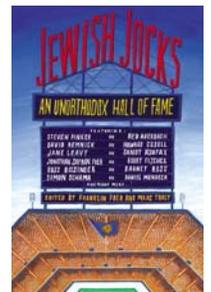
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‘Freaking’ out over Adam Greenberg in *Jewish Jocks*

Raise your hand if you, like me, are tired to the cliché about the thinnest publication being a treatise on Jewish sports heroes (or some riff thereon).

It is therefore with an understandable sense of pride that I recommend [Jewish Jocks: An Unorthodox Hall of Fame](#). While this collection of 50 essays isn’t just about baseball, there are several entries, both consisting of “the usual suspects” and a few surprises about the national pastime. I corresponded with some of the contributors, who were nice enough to share their thoughts about their subjects.



Among the essayists:

- Jane Leavy on Sandy Koufax
- Ira Berkow on Hank Greenberg
- David Margolick on Al Rosen
- Jonathan Mahler on Daniel Okrent
- Robert Weintraub on Mose Solomon
- Dahlia Litwick on Marvin Miller
- Mark Leibovich on Theo Epstein
- Ron Rosenbaum on Arnold Rothstein
- David Leonhardt on Bud Selig

Stephen J. Dubner, coauthor of one of my favorite book series and its companion website/blog, wrote an essay on Adam Greenberg. At the time he submitted the profile, he couldn't have known that the never-give-up, never-surrender ballplayer was about to get his second act. Dubner was kind enough to share his thoughts on why Greenberg should be included in the pantheon of notable Jewish athletes.

The following is a transcript of an e-mail exchange I had with Dubner for my other blog, Kaplan's Korner on Jews and Sports.

KK: *Did you pick Adam Greenberg or was he assigned to you?*

Stephen Dubner: Oh, I picked him, all right. While there were a lot of fascinating people to choose from -- as evidenced by the final roster in the book -- I've always been drawn to quieter and undertold stories. And to his credit, Frank Foer was enthusiastic about having Adam in the book even though he didn't know anything about him at that point.



KK: *Why did you choose him then?*

Dubner: A few summers ago, my family (wife and two young kids) were spending some time out in Connecticut, and we started going to Bridgeport Bluefish games. They're an unaffiliated professional baseball team — in other words, not part of the minor-league system that typically feeds the majors. So while most of the players were very good, they weren't your typical minor leaguers. A lot were older — late 20s, early 30s. Many of them had already played in the majors and were hoping to claw their way back up. We first noticed Adam because he was such a dynamic player — great center fielder, smart batter, aggressive baserunner.

Also, he was Jewish, as are we, so of course that made us pay a little extra attention. Then we read a thumbnail bio in the Bluefish program and were very taken with the poignancy of his story, which of course made us root for him extra hard. Then, at a Bluefish fan-appreciation day, where the kids get to run the bases and get autographs from players, my kids gravitated toward Adam, so we did meet him quickly then.

I hadn't planned to write about him — Barry Bearak had already written an excellent profile in the *Times Maga-*

zine, where I used to work — but fortunately *Jewish Jocks* gave me an opportunity to do so.

KK: *Did you have to do a lot of research? Was there anything that surprised you on your project?*

Dubner: I spent some time with Adam in Connecticut and then we stayed in touch through the months. The biggest surprise was his attitude, which I essentially used as the through-line in my chapter: his indomitable optimism.

KK: *Was your initial opinion of Greenberg altered by the time you finished?*

Dubner: Well, I found him to be an impressive human being, but I can't say I walked into it thinking he *wouldn't* be.

KK: *Of course, when you submitted the essay, you had no way of knowing the turn his life would take at the end of the season. What are your thoughts about that? (I wonder, given the deal the Marlins just made, if they might consider inviting him to spring training.)*

Dubner: His salary requirements would certainly seem to fit the Marlins' absurd new payroll plans. In any case, no, the "[One At-Bat](#)" campaign took me totally by surprise, and while I e-mailed with Adam throughout it, I'm not sure either of us thought it would turn out as dramatically as it did. In a way it would have been better had he gotten his at-bat with his original team, the Cubs. On the other hand, there was something sweeter about it happening as a member of the team whose pitcher hit him in the head. By the way, one of the strangest parts of the story is that Adam *did* face that pitcher one more time, in 2011, while Adam was playing for the Bluefish and the pitcher, Valerio de los Santos, was playing for the Long Island Ducks. Adam got a base hit.

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For news, interviews, reviews, and previews, visit **RonKaplansBaseballBookshelf.com**. And check out the podcast edition as well, available on iTunes. Recent interviews include Joseph Schuster (*The Might Have Been*), Ray Robinson (*High and Tight: Hank Greenberg Confronts Anti-Semitism in Baseball*), and Neal McCabe (*Baseball's Golden Age: The Photographs of Charles M. Conlon* and *The Big Show: Charles M. Conlon's Golden Age Baseball Photographs*).

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.