

Society for American Baseball Research

BIBLIOGRAPHY COMMITTEE

NEWSLETTER

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Comments from the Chair

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Well, imagine my embarrassment!

For the last two quarters, I've been crowing about getting the Hall of Fame to recommend books that it felt would greatly benefit from our Committee's project to create indexes for much-referred-to baseball books that don't have them. Both times, I mentioned *Judge Landis and 25 Years of Baseball* (1947) by J.G. Taylor Spink and *The Old Ball Game* (1971) by Tristram P. Coffin.

In October, I received a letter from Committee member Wayne McElreavy saying his copy of the Landis book (a 1974 reprint) had an index! So I took the radical step of actually double-checking for myself and my copy of the original edition also had an index—and it was more complete than the 1974 index Wayne had sent.

Then I got the idea to actually look at my copy of Coffin's book. Lo and behold. That had an index, too. Although, frankly, this index is not too good and it wouldn't be a bad idea at all for some Committee member to do a better one.

Anyway, my apologies for not taking the obvious step of double-checking. I hope to scare some more suggestions out of the Hall one of these days and pass them along to you.

Along the lines of the indexing project, John Spalding has volunteered to index Fred Lieb's *The Baltimore Orioles* (1955), which will complete the indexes for the Putnam team history series. However, we still need an index to James M. Kahn's *The Umpire Story* (1953), also of the Putnam series.

Baseball Online has now officially become Research in Baseball Index (RBI). I urge you to read Ted Hathaway's fuller report below. Due to some remarkable work, mostly by Ted's volunteers on the periodical side, the volume of the project more than doubled in 1996 and the quality improved substantially as well. We can always use fresh volunteers for what is clearly the project closest to the purpose of this Committee.

Research in Baseball Index (RBI)

Ted Hathaway

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RBI is available for research! We started accepting requests from anyone who wanted to look up information on the RBI database. This announcement was placed on the SABR-L discussion list and on our expanded pages on the World Wide Web (WWW).

The January 1997 issue of *The SABR Bulletin* also contains a large announcement of this new service.

Basically, what this means is that SABR members (or anyone else) can send me requests for baseball literature. Some examples so far are: any material on Charles Byrne (the Dodgers' first manager), books about Connie Mack, articles on baseball in wartime, information on the Federal League, publications on how players are used in marketing for teams or baseball, and books on how to coach. I will search the database and tell you the results for free. But there is a charge for the data itself. See *The SABR Bulletin* article for more information, or look up the WWW sites listed below.

Requests have been gradually increasing over time as more people find our announcement on the Web and we are now up to one or two per day. So far, seven requests have resulted in payments (all to SABR, of course). I expect the number to grow even faster with our announcement in the SABR newsletter. I won't go into the details of the service and the data pricing, since that is all detailed in the SABR newsletter. However, I would like to emphasize that volunteers for RBI enjoy a substantial discount.

As I mentioned in the Oct. 1996 Committee newsletter, we have greatly expanded our presence on the World Wide Web. We now have about a half dozen "pages": one for the research service for RBI, one to describe the project and ask for volunteers and/or donations, one for the Bibliography Committee, one for *Current Baseball Publications* (CBP) (updated from the old one), and one that is a bibliography to book reviews of 1996 baseball books. There are links to RBI and CBP from the SABR home page. If you have access to the WWW, please be sure to take a look:

student-www.uchicago.edu/users/tmc5/dataserv.htm

student-www.uchicago.edu/users/tmc5/rbi.htm

student-www.uchicago.edu/users/tmc5/bibliog.htm

student-www.uchicago.edu/users/tmc5/cbp.htm

student-www.uchicago.edu/users/tmc5/bkreview.htm

All of this, by the way, was made possible through the assistance and donation of computer space by our RBI co-director, Tim Cashion.

As you can see from the RBI statistics (next page), RBI continues to grow at a rapid pace. I'm afraid it will likely slow a bit in the coming months, though, as our stalwart cataloger, Brad Sullivan, has recently found work in the Sports Information Dept. at Slippery Rock University. Brad's contributions to RBI have been remarkable, to say the least. Although he has contributed to all parts of the database, his main work has been on periodical articles, principally from *The Sporting News*. To date, Brad has cataloged 13,516 articles, or about 25% of the entire database! Much of this effort has come in just the last year. Frankly, we were benefiting from Brad's unemployment. He has said he will continue to work on RBI, although at a less feverish pace, obviously. Congratulations to Brad, both for his new employment and the invaluable work he had performed for RBI.

Hats off also to: Bernie Esser (129 articles from *Baseball Digest*), John McMurray (135 articles from *Sports, Inc.*, now fully cataloged), and Terry Sloope (736 articles from *Baseball Digest*).

Other periodicals recently cataloged include: *Sports Illustrated for Kids* (105 articles, 1992-1995); *Baseball Digest* (862 articles, 1974-75 and 1988-89); *Outing* (132 articles, 1886-1915); *The New York Times* (705 articles, various years between 1870 and 1992); and *The Sporting News* (5612 articles, 1978-1982).

As always, we continue to need volunteers to catalog baseball literature for RBI. Please contact me or Andy McCue if you are interested in participating.

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RBI Statistics

<u>Level</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>% change over last year</u>
<i>Books</i>		
5	3,001	17.7%
4	1,436	11.8%
<u>Other</u>	<u>11,032</u>	<u>14.0%</u>
Total	15,469	14.5%
<i>Book Sections</i>		
5	6,200	21.3%
4	1,291	55.2%
<u>Other</u>	<u>39</u>	<u>5.4%</u>
Total	7,530	25.9%
<i>Magazine/newspaper articles</i>		
5	30,039	227.5%
4	368	36,700.0%
<u>Other</u>	<u>4,127</u>	<u>-44.8%</u>
Total	34,534	107.3%
<i>Total</i>		
5	39,240	133.1%
4	3,095	46.1%
<u>Other</u>	<u>15,198</u>	<u>-11.6%</u>
Total	57,533	59.1%

Book Review

Leverett T. (Terry) Smith

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COBB: A Biography

Al Stump. Chapel Hill (N.C.): Algonquin Books, 1994. 436p. \$24.95

I was excited to see this book—"the life and times of the meanest man who ever played baseball"—published in 1994. There'd been Charles Alexander's 1984 scholarly biography, other biographies including Cobb's own 1961 *My Life in Baseball* (with Al Stump), Ken Burns' treatment of Cobb in *Baseball*, the coming movie with Tommy Lee Jones as Cobb, Stump's famous article "Ty Cobb's Wild Ten-Month Fight for Life", and some research of my own, done nearly 30 years ago. I looked forward to reviewing all this stuff and then reading Stump's *Cobb*. Alas, I'm still looking forward to reviewing it. Meanwhile, here are a few thoughts on *Cobb*, which I finally plunged into without any preliminaries.

Stump's "Ty Cobb's Wild Ten-Month Fight for Life" has always seemed to me to have made the most sense out of Cobb, mainly because of the breathless way it's written rather than its relation to what actually happened. Stump can't keep that up over the course of a whole book, and in fact he doesn't try. He does say that he wants his book to be "a biography centered on Cobb's own memories" (p.3), a sort of autobiography, but that doesn't seem to describe well what we get either. Stump presents Cobb in unequivocal terms; Cobb "had his good side, which he tried his best to conceal" (p.12). "Was Ty Cobb psychotic throughout his baseball career?" he asks (p.12). "The answer is yes." Stump, like many others who have studied Cobb, points to the sudden death of Cobb's father as the defining moment of his life. That event, according to Stump, resulted in "the most violent, successful, thoroughly maladjusted personality ever to pass across American sports" (p.27).

What distinguishes Stump's book? First of all, his own unusual relationship with Cobb himself. The book will remain valuable for

the material it contains about Cobb's last year of life, which Stump spent with him composing *My Life in Baseball*. He also cites Cobb as "a busy memorialist, preserving events on paper in the form of memos, annotations, and recorded dialogue" (p.180). This sounds like interesting material; I wonder where it is. Stump's *Cobb* has its inaccuracies, as David Pietrusza points out in his review in *Nine* (Spring 1996, p.306-309; see also Doug Roberts' article in *The National Pastime*, 1996, no.16, p.25-28), but his relationship to Cobb is so unusual the book will remain important.

The dimension of Stump's story which most interested me was its account of labor relations during Cobb's major league career. These are the years during which owners are supposed to be pretty much in control, but during which there was much player unrest. Cobb, loner that he was, was often at the forefront of such unrest. Stump's treatment of the 1912 strike of Detroit players on Cobb's behalf is particularly interesting in this respect. Why, Stump asks, was there such immediate and wholehearted support for a player his teammates uniformly despised? (p.207). Stump presents Cobb as a lifelong opponent of the reserve clause.

There's a good deal of material on Cobb's investments, a particularly close look at the notorious Cobb-Speaker affair, some treatment of his marriage, and of course, in some detail, his record-setting 24 major league seasons. It's a good read. There's an index, a list of Cobb's steals of home, 16 pages of illustrations, and a foreword by Jimmie Reese, who says of Cobb, "what a wildcat he was" (p.xiii).

Book Review

Ron Kaplan

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THE PERFECT YANKEE: The Incredible Story of the Greatest Miracle in Baseball History

Don Larsen with Mark Shaw. Champaign (Ill.): Sagamore Publishing, 1996. 250p. illus. \$22.95

Webster defines "perfect" as "being in a state of undiminished or highest excellence". It defines "miraclic" as "an event that seems impossible to explain by natural law and so is regarded as supernatural in origin or as an act of God". So Larsen's title is half correct: it was perfect, but an act of higher power? Some theologians might reserve such a term for walking on water or splitting the Red Sea.

The former Yankee, St. Louis Brown, Oriole (twice), K.C. Athletic, White Sox, Astro, Giant, and Cub builds his narrative around the singular event in his life, which has indelibly linked his name to one of the most historic individual performances in baseball history.

Known for his hard-living, hard-drinking, and erratic on-field performances, Larsen didn't have that poor a career if you subtract his 3-21 mark with the Orioles in 1954 and his 1-10 record with K.C. in 1960 (81-91 with those two forgettable years, 77-60 without). Despite periodic bouts of arm trouble, he pitched well for the Yankees and later the White Sox. But for all practical purposes you can throw out just about every game except for the one he authored on Oct. 8, 1956.

Co-authored by Mark Shaw, a criminal defense attorney cum author, Larsen's book takes the reader through his watershed battle, pitch by pitch, explaining the strategies concocted with batterymate Yogi Berra (who also wrote the book's foreword). Larsen introduces his teammates and opponents (and even the umpires), describing them as players and friends. The respect he displays for his associates is evident and moving.

Larsen adequately builds suspense, taking the reader along each inning, peppering his story, perhaps too much at times, with reactions from others who witnessed the game, including broadcasters and sportswriters. The strain of the radio and TV commentators to

honor the taboo of mentioning a no-hitter in progress is almost as nerve-wracking as the pitching itself.

The Perfect Yankee tosses a few too many "waste pitches" with his copious use of newspaper, radio, and TV accounts and interviews with other participants in the game. Evidently a lot of research has gone into this book, but it nevertheless detracts from the sense of spontaneity of listening to reminiscences around the cracker barrel. One can almost see Shaw taking over, unless Larsen is *that* much of a student of the game.

And, granted, this was a spectacular game, the only one of its kind accomplished in the World Series and one of only a handful of perfectos, but Larsen takes great pain to remind the reader (unnecessarily) how rare a feat this was. As the early innings turn to middle, then tense closing frames, Larsen reminds us how, at any moment, anything could happen to derail the no-hitter, how a call could go another way, how long balls down the line were barely foul, how a step too far by a fielder could have resulted in a safe call, ad nauseam.

Shaw pens a nice postscript, comparing the magnitude of Larsen's game with some of the other great pitching performances, including those of Johnny Podres, who led Brooklyn to its only world's championship against the Yankees in 1955, Johnny Vander Meer's consecutive no-hitters in 1938, and Harvey Haddix' 12 innings of hitless ball against the Milwaukee Braves in 1959, a game that was eventually lost in the unlucky 13th.

Larsen's tale may not be flawless in the telling, but as a whole *The Perfect Yankee* is a highly entertaining glimpse at a very special, perhaps unreproducible event, in the annals of a sport rich with dramatic, seemingly miraculous, moments.

Book Review

Ted Hathaway

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DICTIONARY OF LITERARY BIOGRAPHY, Volume 171:

Twentieth-Century American Sportswriters

Richard Orodnenker, ed. Detroit: Gale Research, 1996. 439p. ISBN 0-8103-9934-2. \$25

This is the latest addition to Gale Research's whopping long encyclopedia of biographies of authors and journalists around the world. Volume 171 is the first in the series to address authors of sports literature. While that may seem a bit broad for this newsletter, I should add that all but a few of the authors covered wrote about baseball, if some only occasionally. It also contains considerable bibliographic data.

From A to Z, the baseball writers included are: Roger Angell, Furman Bisher, Bob Broeg, Heywood Broun, Bozeman Bulger, Si Burick, Jimmy Cannon, Gordon Cobbledick, Robert W. Creamer, Arthur Daley, Allison Danzig, Charles Dryden, Hugh Fullerton, Paul Gallico, W.C. Heinz, Roger Kahn, Hugh Edmund Keough, John Kieran, Sam Lacy, John Lardner, Ring Lardner, Fred Lieb, W.O. McGeehan, Tom Meany, Westbrook Pegler, Shirley Povich, Grantland Rice, Damon Runyon, Chet Smith, Red Smith, Wendell Smith, John R. Tunis, Charles E. Van Loan, Herbert Warren Wind, Stanley Woodward, and Dick Young.

Each entry (usually six to eight pages) is written by a different author (some are SABR members, including our own Steve Gietschier and Terry Smith) and lists the author's principal books and a selection of articles. The latter feature is one of this work's greatest strengths and points of interest for SABR members. There are usually some photographs and each entry concludes with references to further biographical information. I only wish there had been an index and a collective biography, as well as further information on other sportswriters who were not included.

This is a useful and entertaining review of the many sports-

writers we have enjoyed (or despised) over the years. I have not encountered any work that covers this topic nearly as well. There are too many profiles for me to cover here individually, so I will discuss some generalities.

I noticed that usually the longer a writer has been dead, the more interesting the biography. This may be due in part to a greater number of resources extant on an author long past, but I believe it is also the result of the much harder life led by these earlier journalists and especially the far more colorful style of writing that was used earlier in this century. Most of us are well acquainted with Ring Lardner's earthy prose, but it was a real treat to read some lines from the turn of the century writer Charles Dryden: "Hoodooed by his own spit ball and the affectionate pitching of Mr. [Eddie] Plank, the oozy [Harry] Howell lost the game he had vowed to win."

Speaking of Lardner, two of the longest and most interesting entries were those on Ring and his son John. It was a revelation to read of the similar patterns of the two men's lives, the success of John despite living in the shadow of his famous father, and how they both lived comparatively brief lives, cut short by excessive drinking and smoking. Indeed, excess is a recurrent theme in the lives of many of these men, possibly the result of the pressures of road life, transient relationships, and the sheer loneliness of their work. Yet, it is evident that here were writers enjoying a far closer relationship with their subjects than writers do today.

An inevitable result of different authors for each entry is uneven quality. A common problem seems to be an uncertainty of focus: are they writing about a person or are they discussing what they wrote? Ideally, these articles should do both. While most of them succeed, others were inadequate. The entry on Sam Lacy discusses his career, but gives virtually no examples of his writing. Dick Young's colorful career is well represented, but again we see little of his sportswriting. I was also hoping to gain some insight into why Roger Angell has written so little in the past few years, but perhaps Gietschier's profile was actually written some time ago.

In building a list of all-time greats, one can dicker endlessly. Nevertheless, the editor's criteria for inclusion could certainly bear some scrutiny. Despite the title, the collection essentially covers only those writers whose formative years as writers predate the 1960s. All but a handful of the authors are dead and none were born after 1927. What I would call the "wise guy" school of sportswriting—characterized by a sarcastic, nonidealized view of athletes and owners, a greater social consciousness, and a spare, almost telegraphed writing style (when good or appropriate, it can be incisive, penetrating, and funny; when not, it is cynical, illiterate, and pompous)—which grew up in the free-agency world of post-Watergate America, goes completely unrepresented. This leaves out writers like Tom Boswell, Dave Anderson, and a host of local writers from Mike Lupica to Pat Reusse.

Another easy beef is "why include So-and-So, but not Whosis?" Indeed, where are Frank Graham, Bob Considine, Jim Murray, Art Spander, George Vecsey, and Jerome Holtzman? Why include A.J. Liebling, a brilliant essayist who wrote principally about politics and only occasionally about sports (mainly boxing)? Why Chet Smith, a strictly local writer in a collection of national writers? And why Hugh Edmund Keough, who was essentially a *nineteenth* century sportswriter (d. 1912)?

Despite these criticisms, this is still a splendid work and valuable both for anyone interested in the lives of sportswriters, plus anyone wanting good bibliographies of their work. Also fortunate is the price—only \$25—a bargain for an encyclopedia volume.