

July 2010 (10—3)

©2009 Society for American Baseball Research

Opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect the position or official policy of SABR or its Bibliography Committee.
Editor: Ron Kaplan (23 Dodd Street, Montclair, NJ 07042, 973-509-8162, Ronk232@comcast.net)

Comments from the Chair

Andy McCue

Riverside, CA

A short letter in the midst of a long summer.

I'm hoping to see you all in Atlanta soon at what promises to be another exciting SABR convention.

Our committee meeting will be Friday, Aug. 6, at 2 pm in Georgia Rooms 10-12 of the Sheraton Atlanta Hotel.

I'll be giving a full report of the convention and the meeting afterwards.



Reviews

Big Sticks: The Batting Revolution of the Twenties, by William Curran. William Morrow, 1990.

William Curran's *Big Sticks* is still, after twenty years, a happy read. Written before the apparently performance-enhanced home run circus that began in the nineties and continued into the first years of this century, it is refreshingly free of the angst that accompanies our thoughts of this most recent outburst. In addition, Curran has an engaging humorous style and an eye for the revealing phrase or anecdote. The Twenties (Curran includes both 1920 and 1930 in his decade) were a period in professional baseball when offense seemed everything, and less-successful teams' (as Curran says of the Detroit Tigers) chief problem was that "baseball rules did not permit them to remain at bat in both halves of an inning."

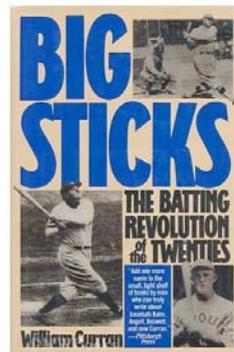
Big Sticks is fun to read. Curran reviews all the leading batters — major and minor league — team by team and year by year. His anecdotes and style make the Twenties especially vivid. The Chicago White Sox of the summer of 1920 are "Enormously talented by suspiciously languid." Curran is always aware of the economic realities of the game. He remarks, "New York's dominance of the game was a depressing illustration of the power of money." Detroit's owner Frank Navin, he finds, "had long ago raised frugality to a minor religion." Babe Ruth, who has a central place in the

proceedings, has "a keen sense of his value at the ticket window." Curran describes the Ruthian pop fly: "The 'sky-pop' became a Ruth trademark. Understandably, such towering flies were hard to catch, especially in the afternoon sunshine, and over the years Ruth and his fans enjoyed many laughs as bewildered fielders staggered about trying to guess the point of reentry."

Ruth was certainly the center of the batting revolution, but, as Curran says, it was "kind to every kind of batter." He deals with the causes of the revolution informally rather than systematically, indicating initially "it was born of a combination of causes." He says, "we can't be absolutely certain" about what its causes were, but he's sure that one of these is not a conspiracy on the part of the owners to make the ball livelier. He spends a whole chapter ("The Power of Myth") on the persistence of this idea. Curran stresses the mysterious nature of the change, though at one point he identifies "the real villain" as "the spitball and its variations." Once these have been banned, hitters don't have to cope with either their "unpredictable flight" or "the discoloration and the unspecified weight" added by the various foreign substances. Later, Curran wonders if "the abolition of the spitball" can be responsible for Zack Wheat's surge to superstar status when he was past thirty-five" (he thinks so).

Babe Ruth himself is presented as a possible cause. Here Curran quotes F.C. Lane, editor of *Baseball* magazine, whom he describes as "conservative" and as "not an unqualified admirer of Babe Ruth." Lane, Curran writes, "identifies the Babe as the cause rather than the effect of the lively ball era." Dismissing the idea of a lively ball, Lane himself says "we are irresistibly impelled ... to see in Babe Ruth the true cause for the amazing advance in home runs." Later in the book, wondering about the upsurge in batting in the minor leagues, Curran makes a list of causes: "The abolition of the spitball, the general shift from forearm hitting to the full swing, following the example of Babe Ruth, and perhaps a slightly livelier, or at least better quality, baseball."

Big Sticks, appropriately, contains an extended portrait of Ruth himself — both on and off the field. Curran begins



by calling Ruth “the first truly modern ballplayer.” He never elaborates on this but he may simply mean that Ruth’s success with “the full swing” inaugurated the modern era. Curran appreciates Ruth’s celebrity, commenting that although “fewer than 5 million Americans actually *saw* Ruth play in a major-league game,” his name became a household word. At *Baseball* magazine, F. C. Lane was not amused. Curran cites a statement from the July, 1920, issue: “The probability that [Ruth] would ever again make twenty-nine home runs in a single season was remote.” Clearly, Lane had not been attending Yankee games at the Polo Grounds. By the next year, he was taking another tack. According to Curran, “F. C. Lane seemed to delight in deriding Ruth’s ‘gorilla-like strength’ or his application of ‘brute force,’ as though little skill was required to hit a baseball into the center-field bleachers.”

Curran focuses on an element of calculation in Ruth’s character. Punished severely by Judge Landis, Ruth – as Curran points out — “for the remainder of his playing days, ... would continue to defy managers, umpires, and smaller fry, but he never again crossed the commissioner.” Again, Curran reports “when the mood of reform was upon the Babe, no one could *appear* [my emphasis] more contrite and sober.” Curran mentions too the advent of Claire Hodgson and Archie McGovern as influences curbing the Babe’s appetites. Curran finds him “not as much fun as the untrammelled Babe of the early twenties.”

One last dimension of Curran’s book leapt out at this reader. In speaking of the batting revolution, Curran has occasion to discuss major league ballparks and the park factor, particularly in the chapter “The House That Built Ruth,” featuring his first New York home, the Polo Grounds. As the title of the chapter asserts, Curran believes that the Polo Grounds had a quite positive effect on Ruth. It seemed “the ideal home for a left-handed superman like Ruth.” Curran feels that the move from Fenway Park to the Polo Grounds increased his home run production “a lot.” I wonder about this, and I wish Curran had developed this idea more fully. His point seems to be simply that the right field stands in the Polo Grounds were dramatically closer than in Fenway Park, at least at the foul line. Interestingly, late in the book, and speaking of Bill Terry’s 1930 season, Curran quotes Johnny Mize on the subject of the Polo Grounds as a hitters’ park. “My worst day was when I got traded to the Giants,” Mize said, “and I knew I’d have to hit in the Polo Grounds all year, with that five-hundred-foot center field. It was four hundred and twenty-two feet to right-center, where I liked to hit the ball.” Bill Terry, he concludes, would have hit .500 in a more hitter-friendly park.

Mize’s statistics suggest he adjusted well to the Polo Grounds. Though it’s not clear how Curran might reconcile these two views, I fall back on the Babe’s “superhuman” qualities; he would hit lots of home runs in any ballpark. Curran underlines the mystery of the batting revolution of the 1920s, and his book still entertains after twenty years.

Leverett T. Smith, Jr.
Rocky Mount, NC

Anthologies: They do the collecting so you don’t have to

Although I have trouble with the use of words like “best” and “greatest” in titles, when it comes to anthologies, I’m a bit more flexible.

The editors of such collections do a fine job assembling excellent works from magazines, newspapers, etc., saving a pack-rat like me from collecting even more material.

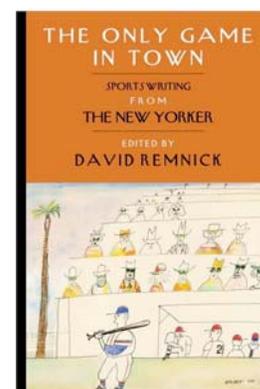
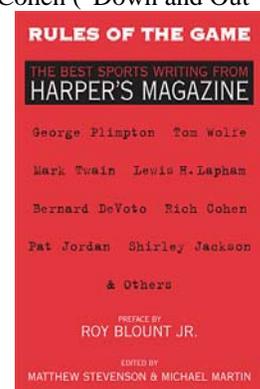
Two new books celebrate exceptional sportswriting: *Rules of the Game: The Best Sports Writing from Harper’s Magazine* and *The Only Game in Town: Sportswriting from The New Yorker*.

(So which is it: “sportswriting” or “sports writing”? I’m sure an English major could explain the nuanced difference.)

Rules of the Game has a lot more history behind it — *Harper’s* was founded in 1850 — and features pieces on baseball from such scribes as Rich Cohen (“Down and Out at Wrigley Field,” 2001, and “The Boys of Winter,” 2002); Matthew Stevenson (who also co-edited the book; “It Takes a Stadium” (2004), about Jim Bouton’s efforts to save a minor league ballpark in Pittsfield, Mass.; David James Duncan’s sad and very personal story, “A Mickey Mantle Koan” (1992); Robert H. Zieger (“Winding Up,” 1979); Bill Cardoso (“Time Loves a Haircut” (1987), in which the writer visits former Red Sox and then-hair stylist Bernie Carbo; John Chamberlain’s thoughtful “Brains, Baseball, and Branch Rickey” (1948) and Shirley Jackson’s *Ozzie and Harriet*-ish story about Little league culture (“It’s Only a Game,” 1956) — both charmingly old-fashioned; and Lewis H. Lapham on the Mitchell Report (“Mudville,” 2004).

The Only Game in Town has fewer baseball-related stories but as Spencer Tracy said about Katherine Hepburn in the classic film *Pat and Mike*, “what’s there is cherce.” The collection leads off with Roger Angell’s famous story about a college pitching duel between St. John’s Frank Viola and Yale’s Ron Darling, with a Smokey Joe Wood in attendance offering historical context. Also included is John Updike’s 50-year-old “Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu” (released as a book by the Library of America) as well as essays and stories from Ring Lardner, Charles McGrath, and John Cheever (fiction).

In general, anthologies can be grouped around a particular publication (as these two are), an individual writer, a specific topic, or any combination thereof. Here are a few notables focusing on the national pastime:



- *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers on Baseball*, edited by Elinor Nauen (Faber and Faber, 1995)
- *Baseball: The Writer's Game*, edited by Mike Shannon (Diamond Communications, 1992)
- *Scoring From Second: Writers on Baseball*, edited by Philip Deaver (Bison, 2007)
- *Sports Illustrated: Great Baseball Writing, 1954-2004*, edited by Rob Fleder (2007)
- *Sports Classics: American Writers Choose Their Best*, edited by Howard Siner (Coward McCann, 1983)
- *All Those Mornings...At the Post*, by Shirley Povich (Public Affairs, 2005)
- *The Best Sports Writing of Pat Jordan* (Persea, 2008)
- *Everything They Had: Sports Writing from David Halberstam* (Hyperion, 2008)
- *Farewell to Sport*, by Paul Galico (1938, rereleased 2008, Bison)

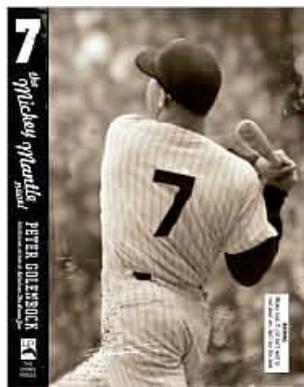
Ron Kaplan



7: *The Mickey Mantle Novel*, by Peter Golenbock.
The Lyons Press, 2007.

When 7 came out a few years ago, many sportswriters — especially in the New York area — considered it a *shande* (shame). How could Golenbock — who had heretofore published only non-fiction — have besmirched the character of the late lamented Mickey Mantle with this trashy, borderline pornographic piece of ... well, you get the idea. (There's even a warning on the book jacket. It's that white rectangle on the lower right: "Mickey says: If y'all don't want to read about sex, don't buy this book.")

At the risk of being presumptuous, I would venture that baby boomer fans of The Mick want their memories pure.



Sure, he was flawed, they'll admit, but he was still heroic. Blond, muscular, great smile, five-tool player — everything a young boy could want to be to during the Eisenhower administration. Let us keep our *Ozzie and Harriet* nostalgia.

But, no. Golenbock writes — in explicit detail — about Mantle's sexual exploits, which rival, if not exceed, his accomplishments

on the field. (Of course, if Mantle was playing in these days of TMZ, Radar, and Deadspin, he would be calling Tiger Woods a piker.)

Golenbock — who had previously concentrated on team profiles (*Bums: An Oral History of the Brooklyn*

Dodgers, Dynasty: The New York Yankees, 1949-1964, and similar volumes on the Mets, Cubs, and Cardinals) and biographies (most recently *George: The Poor Little Rich Boy Who Built the Yankee Empire*), as well as collaborating on the autobiographies/memoirs of Davey Johnson, Sparky Lyle, Graig Nettles, and Billy Martin, among others (I found it interesting that on the page in 7 that lists the author's other books, these gentlemen all get *second* billing. I wonder whose idea *that* was?)

In 7, a deceased Mantle finds a Boswell in the late Leonard Schecter, perhaps best known for his work with Jim Bouton on *Ball Four* (a book Mantle supposedly detested for ratting him out for his misanthropic behavior). The book then goes into a more-or-less chronology, Mantle's *mea culpa* that comes across as part on-the-couch therapy (he was sexually abused as a child, but refuses to divulge the details to Schecter until the book's last few pages, leaving readers to speculate as to the nature/perpetrator), part titillating true confessions. The success stories about Mantle and the Yankees have been told many times before, including by Golenbock, so there's not much along those lines to recommend 7.

This is not necessarily a bad book. There's a certain charm about Mantle's baring his soul, especially about his mistreatment of his long-suffering wife, Merlyn, and his deep-seated insecurities. But without the sex scenes, I doubt it would have received as much attention as it did. As they saying goes, I don't care what you say about me, just spell my name right (always a dicey proposition here).

* * * *

Apropos of my review of 7, (which originally appeared on Ron Kaplan's Baseball Bookshelf), Golenbock was kind enough to answer a few questions — on his birthday, no less — about his controversial undertaking.

RK: After all those non-fiction projects, what was it that prompted to venture into a different genre?

PG: I had heard all these stories from Mickey, Billy [Martin], and others, but often they were told in shorthand. And after Mickey and Billy died, there was no way for me to get any more information. I couldn't write this book as non-fiction because I didn't have enough information. So I categorized it as fiction.



RK: Did you find writing a novel easier or more difficult? Is it easier for you to do the research for a non-fiction title or create from scratch, although 7 was "based on" actual events?

PG: Fiction is different from non-fiction. In non-fiction you have to do research and interviews. In fiction you can make up anything you wish, but you have to be inventive and in-

teresting. This book really was a cross between the two. I knew Mickey very well, and my goal was to tell a story that allowed the reader to get to know the real Mickey Mantle. I still contend this book is the closest thing to who he really was than anything that has been written about him. If Mickey had read this book, he certainly would have agreed.

RK: What was your reasoning for including so much sex in the book?

PG: I included a lot of sex, because it was the driving force in Mickey's life. Few men had as much sex as Mickey in their lifetime.

RK: Were you surprised by the amount of negative responses 7 received?

PG: I wasn't surprised.... It just saddened me that they killed the sales of the book. A lot of people who would have enjoyed reading this book didn't.

RK: Do you have plans for another novel, or having had the experience, was once enough?

PG: I don't fancy myself as a novelist, but there are certain larger than life characters in sports whose life story would be best told in novel form, so I'm not ruling out doing another one.

Ron Kaplan



Blockade Billy, by Stephen King. Scribner, 2010

There was plenty of buzz in the mystery/thriller/horror and baseball fiction communities when it was announced that Stephen King would release a novella titled *Blockade Billy*. Online book merchants quickly took pre-orders based on King's reputation and the unique nature of the publication.

In a scant 80 pages, King — using a first-person narrative — relates the story of a struggling baseball team, circa late-1950s, a premise readers of *The Great American Novel* by Philip Roth will recognize. The New Jersey-based Titans are mired in mediocrity until an unheralded rookie comes



out of nowhere to lead by example both at the plate and as a stone wall behind it. No one gets by Billy Blakely (even the name is mid-19th-century Americana), hence the nickname. In this the character mimics Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*. And like Roy Hobbs — Malamud's tragic hero — Billy has a secret. This is also where some of Kinsella's baseball fantasies come to mind.

In fact, King pays a sort of

homage to all three authors within this brief tale, which brings readers up, up, up as they follow the Titans' accomplishments. But since this *is* a King story, we know there's a shoe waiting to drop. The narrator/author telegraphs that impending conflict with phrases such as "there's something not quite right about that boy." (Given the current pop culture, all I will say is, Billy is not a vampire.)

Even the cover of the book brings to mind the Norman Rockwellian America of the Fifties, a la a *Saturday Evening Post* cover. Neither the base runner nor the title character is wearing modern protective gear. Indeed, the catcher looks almost peaceful, his face serene, confident in his ability, although his right hand, extended upwards, is tense, claw-like, with fingers poised to ... what? Is the author — through the artwork of Glen Orbik — trying to tell us something?

Whether readers will be satisfied with the outcome of *Blockade Billy* — originally published in limited edition by Cemetery Dance Press — is pure conjecture.

Included in the book is a bonus story, "Morality," which is more of a philosophical inquiry. What would you do if someone offered you a substantial sum of money in return for perpetrating a (relatively) minor crime in which no one was (seriously, physically) injured and in which you would (ostensibly) never be caught? Unlike the film *The Box*, which involves a much more nefarious act for a much higher payoff, "Morality" concentrates on the before and after effects of the wife and husband team that ponders the situation.

Again, the theme is not especially new, but it is a King product and thus worthy of consideration.

Ron Kaplan



Thanks, but no thanks

Believe it or not, I wouldn't want this one, even if someone made me a present of it.



According to a recent *NY Times*' piece by sports media writer Richard Sandomir, "the leather-bound book, *The Official Major League Baseball Opus*, will come out in a limited edition (1,000 copies), packaged in a silk-covered clamshell case. The huge volume is aimed at teams, corporations, wealthy fans, museums and collectors.

You would think that the thought of “75-pound . . . tome that traces the game’s history through 110,000 words and more than 1,000 photographs and illustrations” would be something to drool over. But the \$3,000 price tag, that kills it. Even if I could afford, it this “conspicuous consumption” angle leaves me cold. Baseball is supposed to be a game of the people, but this edition, produced by Major league Baseball, is just another gimmick.

But the good news (?): There’s a smaller, lighter, cheaper version, a bargain at “only” \$295. I guess, relatively speaking, that’s a great deal.

“I think we’ll sell 1,000 fairly quickly,” said Don Hintze, the vice president for publishing for Major League Baseball. “We think the smaller version, *which is more for the masses* [emphasis added], will do extremely well. We’ve gotten a lot of interest from clubs on the smaller book that they can sell to season-ticket holders, or give as gifts.”

I don’t know. Maybe I’m too sensitive, but I dislike the term “the masses.” It smacks of elitism, which, one would have to allow, is what this full-priced version is all about.

Another reason I wouldn’t want it: Throughout the book, there are profiles of numerous players — Hall of Famers like Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth, and current superstars like Alex Rodriguez and Albert Pujols. But the absence from this roster of Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens, who have both been accused of using performance-enhancing drugs, is noticeable, if not glaring.

“There was no big conversation about it,” Skelly said. Their omission, he added, “might have been subliminal; Major League Baseball is very conservative and I didn’t think I’d be missing anything if they weren’t profiled.”

No conversation? Subliminal? Not missed? One would think a great deal of conversation would go into the planning of a book that *you’re selling for \$3,000*.

Ron Kaplan



***Steinbrenner: The Last Lion of Baseball*, by Bill Madden. Harper, 2010.**

Just a few generations back, many professional teams were family-run operations that were in business for the long haul. Now there is just one (at least in baseball), and the end of an era is in sight, according to *Steinbrenner: The Last Lion of Baseball*, by award-winning sports columnist Bill Madden.

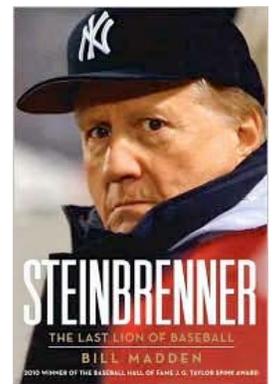
There are many adjectives used to describe George Michael Steinbrenner III, principal owner and chair of the New

York Yankees, and most are not complimentary. Since he took over the team in the early 1970s, there has been no shortage of fodder for the local press, including Madden, who has followed the game for the *Daily News* and *New York Post*. “Der Boss” (one of Steinbrenner’s many nicknames) was famous for a fiery temper; prior to Joe Torre’s lengthy stay as skipper, the Bronx Bombers went through 20 managerial changes between 1973 and 1995, including many repeat performances, most notably by the late Billy Martin. And that doesn’t even take into account the front office. He would order his underlings to handle a task or acquire a certain player, often disregarding the objections of those far more knowledgeable in such matters, and then explode when things didn’t work out the way he desired (and his staff expected). He would fire, then rehire, at the drop of a pin, often excusing the hasty behavior with “I didn’t really mean it” or “I’ll let it go, this time.”

Yankees fans and haters are well aware of Steinbrenner’s mercurial nature. His apologists point to his success; his enemies note the distractions and bad feelings among the team’s personnel. Forget the infamous quote from Reggie Jackson about being “the straw that stirs the drink”: that sobriquet should go to Steinbrenner. In fact, one has to wonder: does such drama like this occur on other teams (the husband-and-wife owners of the Dodgers are going through a nasty divorce, for example), or do we hear more about Steinbrenner’s antics because his team plays in the media capital of the world?

Does Steinbrenner’s megalomania come from some deep-rooted desire to both win the approval of his father — a strict, hardworking and successful businessman — and yet prove himself as his own man? Hard to say, although Madden certainly pushes the reader in that direction, albeit without the psychological profiling. Citing one example after another, he chronicles the Yankees chief as a bully and a liar, who could be incalculably mean and cruel, then turn around and create a foundation to make sure the orphans of New York City police and firefighters could go to college, or drop everything at the news of a friend in trouble. Madden includes the praise as well as the lash, but the former is far-between or generally underreported throughout the years; for all his penchant for being the center of attention, Steinbrenner didn’t go after the press to note his good deeds.

Madden — who was recently named winner of the Baseball Hall of Fame’s annual Spink Award for outstanding career accomplishments as a writer — strives to be even-handed. His role for the New York papers put him in a position to write a first-hand account, but he uses that relationship with a light hand, relying on his skills as a journalist rather than employing his personal observations. While dutifully covering Steinbrenner’s rightful banishment from the game in the 1970s because of his illegal campaign contributions to Richard Nixon’s presidential campaign, Madden goes to great lengths to show that his subject was un-



fairly treated by Commissioner Fay Vincent, who kicked him out of the game in 1990 for giving \$40,000 to Howard Spira, a hustler and gambler, for his role in digging up dirt on Yankees outfielder Dave Winfield, with whom Steinbrenner was feuding over financial matters. Baseball, it seems, is not a law unto itself, and even Steinbrenner has rights of due process.

Sadly, the last few years have not been kind to the Yankees' leader. Ill health has rendered him a shell of his larger-than-life persona. Madden reports this with a mix of professional objectivity and personal sadness (after all, the two had had a working relationship and had even been fairly close at one point).

Are there elements in here that might embarrass Steinbrenner and his family? Perhaps. But as Madden relates in the introduction, he undertook the project at their suggestion. And judging by all accounts, he seems to have done a fair and balanced job.

Ron Kaplan



The Life and Thunderous Career of Baseball's Mr. October, by Dayn Perry. Morrow 2010.

Whatever words are used to describe Reginald Martinez Jackson, the Hall of Fame outfielder for the Oakland Athletics and New York Yankees (with less effectual stints on the Angels and Orioles), "complex" has to be among them. And that's "complex" as in "difficult to fathom" and the psychological term for "a group of related, often repressed ideas and impulses that compel characteristic or habitual patterns of thought, feelings, and behavior." Both meanings are applicable in Perry's bewildering biography.

Perry — identified on the book jacket as a "Foxsports.com columnist" — presents Jackson (and indeed most of the main characters in the book) as mainly mean-spirited, egotistical, and insecure, among other adjectives. One wonders exactly when those attributes

took hold, since the author describes Jackson as a fairly decent fellow early on (although towards the middle of the book Perry depicts Jackson as something of a high school thug and a bully).

Jackson, the product of a mixed marriage between an Hispanic father and African-American mother, grew up in an ethnically-mixed neighborhood in Pennsylvania, so it's not surprising that Jackson was unprepared for the racism

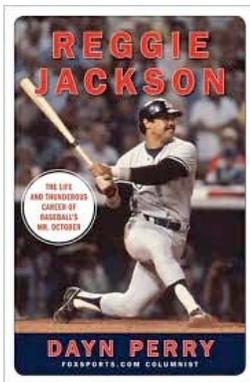
he encountered during his minor league years in the deep south. Much of this molds him into the suspicious, belligerent, yet racially-ambivalent adult he becomes, chastised by black and white teammates.

Throughout the book, Perry portrays Jackson as a man unsure of his place in baseball and society at large. Was his legendary ego and self-aggrandizement part of a protection mechanism, a means to puff himself up through money, power, and sexual conquests? With so many "bad guys" in *Jackson*, it's difficult to know who really is at fault when it comes to the many altercations — physical, attitudinal, and other — involving the temperamental ballplayer. Perry parses Jackson's every move and utterance, as if looking for a justification of his behavior. More often than not, according to the author, Jackson believed it had to do with race. Was Jackson the victim of a white America that didn't want to see a black man succeed? Or is this just so much melodrama? That's for the reader to decide, but Perry's arguments are, frankly, unconvincing.

There are several problems with this book, not the least of which is the lack of documentation on many of claims Perry makes or incidents on which he reports. In his "Notes on Sources," Perry writes that he had tried twice — unsuccessfully — to secure Jackson's support for the project (compare this with James S. Hirsch's near-decade courtship of another Hall of Famer for *Willie Mays: The Life, The Legend*). "At certain points in the book," Perry says, "I enter Reggie's head and presume to communicate through his thoughts. I do so in the service of the narrative, and any thoughts I relay, while ultimately assumptions of what I believe he may have felt at certain times, are informed by the facts and by what I came to learn of Reggie's inner workings." This is, understandably, very dangerous territory. Since he wrote the book without Jackson's cooperation or those of the many former teammates who declined to participate in Perry's project, one wonders where he *did* get that information — other than previously printed materials — and how reliable that data might be.

Some of Perry's assertions border on the bizarre, as when he writes that Charles O. Finley, the mercurial and penurious owner of Jackson's first team, "hired...an eleven-year-old team vice president (a young Stanley Burrell, later known as MC Hammer)." There is no citation for this. Burrell was, indeed, an employee with the team — as a batboy — and Finley might have remarked in jest about promoting him, but does anyone seriously believe, despite anecdotal information by the attention-grabbing owner, that Burrell served in an administrative capacity with the team? In another instance, Perry reports on a particularly ugly racist incident that occurred in a southern restaurant when Jackson was in the minors, with the waiter employing a racial epithet towards the ballplayer, but, again, there is no sense mention of it in the "Sources" section to serve as confirmation.

Throughout Jackson's career, Perry depicts him as fighting against self-perceived indignities. Some are borne out of jealousy by his teammates and managers; others, the author implies, were racially motivated. When Jackson had his number retired by the Yankees, Perry writes, "Bob Shepard recited the names of the honored Yankees over the public address system ... save for one: the deceased Billy Martin. Those who watched at home saw a slow pan across all the retired numbers, but before the camera reached Martin's number, the telecast faded to commercial." Perry offers an explanation, leaving it to the reader to infer that Jackson



had something to do with it, one last poke in the eye to his former manager and adversary.

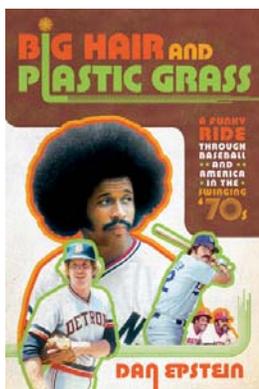
Perry also makes a number of factual errors. At one point, he claims the two-million-plus home attendance the Yankees achieved in 1977 was the first such occurrence since 1949. In fact, the Yankees reached that mark in 1976, and had previously hit that figure in 1950. Elsewhere he writes that 1981 featured “baseball’s first-ever three-tiered play-off.” First of all, this is only true if you include the Fall Classic as a “play-off” series. Second, while technically true, it’s a one-shot deal necessitated by a mid-season the players’ strike that divided the season into two parts. The current format of *two* rounds leading into the World Series did not begin until 1995. He also has Mickey Rivers somehow ranging over 400 feet to make a catch. Individually, these might seem like trivial, but taken as a whole, it represents something more sinister, if done purposefully, or merely careless. I realize the tight budgets that publishing houses have to deal with these days, but it doesn’t seem that someone looked at this very hard (not to proofreader/copy editor: “bullpen” is one word with regard to baseball.)

After all is written, the reader is still confused as to exactly who Reggie Jackson is. But that’s only fitting. If this book is indeed reasonably accurate, it seems Jackson isn’t too sure either.

Ron Kaplan



Big Hair and Plastic Grass: A Funky Ride Through Baseball and America in the Swinging '70s, by Dan Epstein. Thomas Dunne, 2010.



For many fans of a certain age, the 70s are too quickly becoming “the good old days.”

Man, that sounds strange. But as the fan base changes in demographics, books like *Big Hair and Plastic Grass* will probably become the rage, cashing in on the new nostalgia.

Dan Epstein captures the spirit of this strange, transitional decade in this quirky chronicle with a mix of humor and cynicism. He employs a year-by-year

approach, highlighting the personalities and events that moved baseball from a “slave mentality” through the “what hath God wrought” of the nascent free agency years.

The country as a whole was going through some heavy changes: youth and racial rebellion against the Establishment is mirrored in *Big Hair*. Tune in, turn on (talkin’ to you here, Dock Ellis), and drop out (maybe not that so much, although fans *have* been “dropping out” over the past several years). In between the time-capsule reportage, Eps-

tein comments as irreverently as one would expect on the “who thought this was a good idea” quirks of polyester uniforms, cookie cutter stadiums, and artificial turf, as well as the introduction of the designated hitter, the explosion of facial hair (now there’s an image), and the myriad little milestones and millstones that helped the decade stand out from the boring flannel of previous generations.

Enjoy the seventies, friends; the eighties were one big snoozefest by comparison.

Ron Kaplan



Visit The Bookshelf

For news, interviews, reviews, and previews, visit

Ron Kaplan’s Baseball Bookshelf
(RonKaplansBaseballBookshelf.com)

Recent audio interviews — now available as podcasts on iTunes — include Andy Wasif (*Red Sox Fans Are From Mars. Yankee Fans Are From Uranus*), Will Leitch (*Are We Winning? Fathers and Sons in the New Golden Age of Baseball*), and Doug Glanville (*The Game From Where I Stand*).

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.

