

Borst, Bill. *Last in the American League: An Informal History of the St. Louis Browns*. St. Louis: Krank Press, 1978. Pp. 124. Tables, illustrations. Paperback. \$4.25.

This book does not pretend to be either an encyclopedic history of the ill-fated

Browns or does it pretend to be a weighty monograph complete with the trappings of formal scholarship. Rather it is a nostalgic look at a "team that is gone and almost forgotten. . . ." The author believes that the plight of the Browns "represents that of the millions of struggling Americans whose quiet aspirations never reach fruition."

The slim volume has some success when Borst shows how the Browns were the worst team ever to play in the major leagues. In 52 years in American League play, they won only 1 pennant, had only 12 first division finishes, and had the all-time lowest winning percentages, .433. When people remember the Browns, they think of Eddie Gaedel, the famous midget whom Bill Veeck used to hype attendance in 1951, of Pete Gray, the one-armed outfielder who played on the pennant winning 1944 team, of Bobo Holloman, who threw a no-hitter in his first major league start only to never complete another game in his career, or of "Der Poss President," the flamboyant Chris Von der Ahe, who owned the Brown Stockings of the American Association in the 1880's and who began active "promotion" to get fans to the park.

The author's view of the frustration which the Browns and millions of Americans had in common makes some sense. The Browns did not fail for lack of effort. Borst finds several hardworking owners and general managers who sought through logic, sound business, and good management to make the team a success, but they all failed. People such as Phil Ball, Branch Rickey, and Bill De Witt, sound baseball men all, could not succeed in St. Louis Browns attire. Even the quality players who toiled for the Browns, such as George Sisler, Ken Williams, and "Baby Doll" Jacobson, could not outdraw the Cardinals. Even Bill Veeck, the proverbial saviour of troubled American League franchises, attempted to salvage this floundering hulk in the 1950's, but the craft was beyond help.

Borst's book chronicles an aspect of sport which is often ignored, the loser. He is successful in attributing reasons for the failure. The better organized, more stable Cardinals, an inability to hold on to good players, and general fan disinterest destroyed this franchise. Though a small coterie of fans hung on to the bitter end, there were never enough to keep the team's ledgers in the black. One has to be frustrated by the book however. More extensive documentation of the logical answers is needed. The book's brevity allows the author to make an assertion about cause and effect relationships without developing the evidence to support the generalization properly. But one must remember, it was not intended as a scholarly treatise, rather as a nostalgic view of an ill-fated team. Given the outline and general understanding which is evident, one can hope that Borst will complete a more thorough study of losing teams in the major leagues in the near future.