

Lieb, Fred. *Baseball As I Have Known It*. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, Inc., 1977. Pp. 288. Index, pictures. \$9.95.

Books like this one are of limited use to most sport historians. Unless one is conducting research on or teaching a course about sports journalism, particularly baseball journalism, the book is of no use at all. There are no footnotes on the pages; they are in octogenarian author Fred Lieb's head. There is no bibliography; Lieb has spent most his life watching baseball, writing about baseball, and making many friends in and around baseball. Most distressingly, though, there is little editorializing, little discussion of those off-the-field issues like racism, commercialism, and labor relations. But we really shouldn't expect to read about these things in books like this. After all, it is baseball as Fred Lieb has known it. And this is where the book's use lies.

If we believe that peoples' attitudes toward baseball have been shaped by what they have read, and if we recognize that before television, and especially before radio (Lieb began writing in 1911), people relied solely on newspaper accounts for their baseball news and gossip, then Fred Lieb's writings have contributed mightily to the current conceptions of what baseball was, is, and should be.

When we hear and read commentators spouting nostalgic jabberwocky about how baseball used to be—the adjectives are usually something like clean, pure, and untainted by money and other evils—we know that they have grown up reading and nodding while Fred Lieb and others have written the tales. The Heywood Brouns, Grantland Rices, and Damon Runyons of the world wrote nicely and voluminously, but we have to conclude that they, perhaps even more so than their successors, were house men: buddies with the owners, chums with the players, and certainly blood brothers with each other. NASSH's coffers should have a nickel for every story covered up since the turn of the century. The reading public, therefore, consumed biased presentations of the facts over the years. There is nothing exceptionally wrong with this. After all, these matters were not of national importance and had nothing to do with the internal security of the country; however, it is foolish for us to believe that Watergates did not exist in the baseball world. To be sure, we have heard plenty from Lieb and friends about things like how many hotdogs and how much pop Babe Ruth used to consume at train depots, but we have heard precious little about owners' attitudes toward players (and other owners for that matter), owners' attitudes about fans, the reserve clause, minorities, the Mexican League, expansion, the demise of the minor leagues, or the Commissioner's Office. Lieb does tell us that his friend Judge Landis did not like Branch Rickey, but we knew that already.

The shame of it is that young people will read Lieb's book and come away

with a jaundiced view of what baseball has been. For once it would be nice and refreshing to see an old baseball writer let out all, or at least some, of those secrets he has kept under his hat for years and years, though it need not be a Boutonesque expose of who slept with whom, who got high, and who got drunk all the time. Surely men like Fred Lieb have kept our grandfathers and grandmothers in the dark and continue to keep us in the dark about what baseball was really like for long enough. Spare us the diaries that are merely rehashes of old columns and anecdotes.

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