

Mead, William B. *Even the Browns*. Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1978. Pp. xii, 241. Index, pictures. Paper, \$4.95.

Baseball more than any other sport in the United States has attracted a magnitude of nostalgia which abounds in trivial detail and “mythical” events. *Even the Browns* tightropes the line between well developed nostalgia and sound historical analysis. Nostalgia buffs may delight in the excessive use of oral testimony from the rag tag bunch who played, managed, and described the game during World War II. They also will relish the description of the St. Louis Browns’ surprising win of the American League pennant in 1944 featuring legendary players like Sig Jakucki. However, the sport historian also

may appreciate the analysis of how baseball managed to convince policy makers and the American public that the game was an essential industry which must be carried on despite the war effort.

Baseball survived efforts to close it down through the skillful manipulation of policy makers, largely in Washington. Daniel Daniels, of the New York World-Telegram, Clark Griffith, owner of the Washington Senators, and Albert B. "Happy" Chandler, Senator from Kentucky, led the baseball brigade which sold the public on the idea that the game must remain, because it contributed so much to morale.

While the game continued through the war, the quality of play obviously suffered. By early 1944, 340 major league players and over 3000 from organized baseball served the nation. The best teams in the country were at Norfolk and Great Lakes naval bases. Many aged and semi-professional players dotted major league rosters. General managers attempted to stock their rosters with 4-F's in order to guarantee some continuity through the year.

Traditionally strong teams no longer dominated the game. The leveling out process made Washington quite competitive in the American League and allowed even the lowly St. Louis Browns to win a pennant. The Browns generally were considered the worst franchise in baseball. Its roster in 1944 had the largest number of 4-F's in the American League. It was dotted with alcoholics, rejects, and retreads. A St. Louis journalist noted in retrospect that Luke Sewell, the manager, had "some real cutthroats to handle." Though they won the pennant, they failed to win the series, losing to their in-town rival, the Cardinals, in six games.

Mead's mixture of nostalgia and history makes for easy reading, which has a surprising substance. Baseball worked hard during the war to keep its pure image. Stars such as Greenberg, Feller, and DiMaggio willingly volunteered or were drafted without complaint. The odd players often featured in analyses of this era—the fifteen-year-old pitcher, the one-armed outfielder, and the deaf outfielder—were rarities, not common. But baseball did tend to be played by older players, many of whom had deferments because of physical infirmity. Thus the quality of play may have lagged, but fan interest remained committed to the national game as well as to the war effort.

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