

Lowenfish, Lee and Lupien, Tony. *The Imperfect Diamond: The Story of Baseball's Reserve System and the Men Who Fought to Change It*. New York: Stein and Day, 1980. Pp. 258. Index, bibliographical notes, illustrations. \$12.95.

In an era of million dollar baseball contracts, fans might forget that until recently major league ballplayers were treated like chattel. Writing for a popular audience, Lee Lowenfish reminds us that the players' struggle to free themselves from the reserve clause took nearly one hundred years. With great empathy for the athletes, Lowenfish seeks to explain why the struggle for success took so long and why Organized Baseball was so firmly set against change. In addition, the author identifies the players and their spokesmen who fought to advance their rights.

In the first half of the book, the conflicts between employer and employee in the period from the late 1880's through the regime of Commissioner Landis are discussed. Lowenfish traces the origins of the fight back to the Brotherhood and the Players' League (although the problems dated from even earlier), and also discusses the weak efforts to promote unionization in the early 1900s. The author goes on to explain how the autocratic Landis in his own way sought to protect the interests of professional ballplayers in the 1920s and 1930s. Little in this section is new, and it does not improve on the scholarship

of Seymour and Voigt. Sources were primarily sports periodicals and secondary sources, especially Robert Smith's *Baseball* (1947).

The second half of the book traces the story from the end of World War II to the McNally and Messersmith cases. After the war, for reasons not fully explained, labor attorney Robert Murphy took it upon himself to establish the American Baseball Guild to fight the reserve clause. The movement gathered some momentum, but Lowenfish points out it died out after an abortive strike in Pittsburgh and failure to secure NLRB recognition. Far more important was the Danny Gardella affair. War veteran Gardella decided in 1946 not to sign a contract with the Giants and instead opted for the Mexican League. When he sought to return to the majors in 1947, he was barred from Organized Baseball. He sued for redress and the case was settled out of court in 1949. Commissioner Chandler was afraid to let the courts get involved in matters of baseball law.

Lowenfish argues that the seeds of ultimate success were laid in the early 1950s. The Cellar hearings of 1951 apparently had little direct impact on player-management relations, but two years later the Major League Baseball Players Association was organized to fight for pension rights and improved salaries. Despite minor successes, the association was essentially moribund until 1965 when labor negotiator Marvin Miller was hired as its director. The authors credit Miller with obtaining widespread cooperation for his efforts, although they do not fully explain how this was achieved. Within three years the first Basic Agreement with the owners was adopted. However, the reserve clause remained intact.

In 1969 Curt Flood went to court to fight this restriction on his freedom, but in 1972 the Supreme Court ruled against him in what the authors judge was an embarrassing use of *stare decisis*. Miller continued fighting for the Association, and the Basic Agreement of 1973 provided for salary arbitration. Lowenfish sees this as an important development. However, Charles Finley successfully abused arbitration. He won half of his cases, despite obviously low offers to his stars. Ironically, Finley's breach of agreement with Catfish Hunter in 1974 resulted in arbitrator Peter Seitz awarding the hurler his freedom. The final breach came a year later when Seitz ruled that Messersmith and McNally could not be reserved by their clubs for 1976 since they had not signed a contract for 1975.

While much of this story is generally known, the authors do provide more detail and more on the players' perspectives in the post-World War II period than previous journalists have done. The authors interviewed over thirty-five players, owners, league officials, and players' agents. Co-author Tony Lupien was himself a former major league ballplayer, and his own personal experi-

ences in fighting for his job as a returning soldier adds to the portrayal of the pathetic position of war veterans who tried to return to the majors.

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