

Langford, Jim. *The Game is Never Over: An Appreciative History of the Chicago Cubs*. South Bend, IN: Icarus Press, 1980, 1982. Pp. 264. Index, appendices, pictures. \$7.95.

Jim Langford, a Cub fan of long standing, indeterminate origins, and unquenchable optimism, has written a chronicle of the frustrations Cub fans have endured over the last thirty-four seasons and has managed to deliver it in a remarkably upbeat manner. Leading off with a letter to his sons, an imaginary conversation with his psychiatrist, and an equally (apparently) imaginary series of letters addressed to Philip and William Wrigley and to the new owners of the team, all on the topic of what it is to be a Cub fan, Langford then gives the reader brief chapters on the history of Wrigley Field and of the pre-1948 Cubs, when they were an ordinary winning team.

The main part of the book is a season-by-season description of the Cubs' futility since 1948. Opening day's lineups remind us of heroes and goats who wore Cub uniforms each year, and several pages of text spotlight the high and low (usually the latter) points of each season. Langford briefly mentions such peripheral matters as attendance and important off-season personnel changes, but spares us any substantial analysis of these changes or of anything else which went wrong. Readers may miss this kind of analysis, but since so much has gone wrong, it does serve to make the book much shorter.

At the end of the book, Langford presents more detailed descriptions of sixteen "games to remember" (fourteen were Cub victories), lists the season statistics for the most prominent players each year, highlights actual and presumptive all-stars, and includes a complete index of Cub players between 1948 and 1981.

The strength of the book is the spirit with which Langford describes the antics of the Cubs over thirty-four years. Since Cub fans stubbornly refuse to recognize the worst about the organization—that the front office (at least prior to 1982) has not cared much about quality, that the field managing has ranged from comical to arrogant, that the players have often not played up to their abilities—Langford's generally uncritical tone should strike a sympathetic chord in his collective Cub fan readership.

But because the book is more nostalgic than critical, more descriptive than analytical, it has scant value for non-Cub fans. Langford's statistics can be found in the basic baseball encyclopedias and his descriptions are derived from newspaper accounts. Since one does not learn a great deal about why Cub fans *are* Cub fans, nor why the team has done so poorly for so many years, *The Game Is Never Over* has little claim to a niche among the Great Works of Sport History. In this respect it invites comparison with the equally

appreciative *Boston Red Sox-75th Anniversary History, 1901-1975*, by Ellery Clark [reviewed in *JSH*, III, 1 (Spring, 1976), pp. 104-105], surpassing that book from the standpoints of organization, consistency and writing, if not affection for subject. On the other hand, *The Game Is Never Over* complements nicely two other Cub histories: *The Chicago Cubs* (1946), an anecdotal history by journalist Warren Brown, and *Chicago Cubs* (1975) by Jim Enright, a part of the *Baseballs' Great Teams* series, a largely pictorial history.

There is no evidence that Langford wrote his book "for the ages," so to speak. It's best taken by us Cub fans as it is, without presumptions or searches for deeper meanings. At that level, it's an enjoyable volume. And, as Langford suggests to his psychiatrist, what other team could teach us more about the thrill of victory and (especially) the agony of defeat?

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