

Kerrane, Kevin. *Dollar Sign on the Muscle: The World of Baseball Scouting*. New York: Beaufort Books, 1984. Pp. xii, 307. Pictures. \$15.95

Failure rates in baseball are remarkably high, even among the successful. The player who hits .300 fails seven out of ten trips to the plate. Even greater failure rates are found in the fact of the game that remains to the outsider most mysterious. Most baseball fans know a story of some "great prospect" from their town or neighborhood who was never even drafted by a major league team. Conversely, sportswriters and sportscasters never tire of pointing out that such-and-such major-leaguer was never drafted. Somehow the scouts missed them. Scouting may be the most difficult of all the skills of the game. Only a very few of those players signed will ever contribute to a major league team. Scouts "are wrong 92 percent of the time." (p. 1)

In *Dollar Sign on the Muscle*, a phrase drawn from the Phillies scouting manual, Kevin Kerrane, professor of English and American Studies at the University of Delaware, examines the world of scouting. Kerrane a former semi-pro pitcher, spent the 1981 season among the scouts and has captured the ethos, the folklore and the "science" of scouting. Kerrane interviewed the scouts, traveled with them, and was given access to the inner-workings of the Philadelphia scouting system. The result is a highly readable, enjoyable and informative book on scouts, scouting and baseball.

For the baseball historian the most valuable section of *Dollar Sign on the Muscle* is the brief history of scouting. Kerrane divides the history of scouting into four eras. The first, the Bird Dog Era lasted until the end of World War One. Bird Dogs were those men who offered owners and managers tips on bright young prospects while working on commission. Branch Rickey, as the University of Michigan baseball coach, was one such tipster providing the St. Louis Browns with information on his most promising players. Another was the colorful Sinister Dick Kinsella who worked for John McGraw and entered legend by signing Carl Hubbell for the Giants. From 1919-1946 was the Rickey Era named after the man who invented the farm system and developed the principle "quality out of quantity" (p.9). This was the era of the "hard drivers and hard drinkers" (p.8) when scouting was highly competitive and known as ivory hunting. One of the best of this era was Cy Slapnicka. Then came the Bonus Era (1946-1965) when the scouts were not only judging talent, but were also traveling salesmen. In this era the scouts romanced the players and their families, resorted to deception and even an occasional kidnapping. The expenditures of the highly competitive Bonus Era produced the amateur draft in 1965 as the owners sought the protection from themselves. The open market closed and the world of scouting lost much of its competitive character and color. The new breed of scouts are called "investment analysts" by Kerrane, and have all the markings of a modern technological highly rationalized bureaucracy. It has also produced the centralized Major League Scouting Bureau with its up to date computer printouts.

The central body of the book is a trip through the 1981 scouting and baseball season, featuring extensive monologues from the scouts and their bosses. Here the folklore of scouting is presented in both its contemporary and historical dimensions. In addition the inner workings of the Phillies system and the way in which the draft has reshaped scouting are delineated. But the stars of this book are the individual scouts, a proud and highly varied lot of baseball people. The monologues of Howie Hawk, Leon Hamilton, Jim McLaughlin, Jack Pastore, Brandy Davis, Ellis Clary, Jocko Collins alone make *Dollar Sign on the Muscle* a delightful and engaging experience for students or fans.

In the category of folklore are such scouting truisms as "little righties are no prospects," (p. 58) referring to pitchers. On the other hand little lefties are prospects. Or "Big legs, no range." (p. 69). And above all the scouts of any era looked and are still looking for the player with the "good face." Scouting, as most professions, has its own vocabulary and Kerrane devotes one chapter to it, as well as scattering individual peculiarities such as PHFB throughout the book. The superstitions and phrases seem endless.

Throughout the monologue of the scouts and Kerrane's commentary and observation there looms the figure of Branch Rickey. He emerges from these pages as the most dominant and dominating figure in baseball history. This is not particularly startling news to those familiar with the history of the game, but there are dimensions of Rickey's influence revealed here that have not been fully explicated in previous works. "Branch Rickey wasn't dead at all. He was there as soon as you started talking with anyone who knew anything about scouting or teaching . . . (p. 63)

Kerrane also offers new perspectives on many facets of the game. For historians who labor in the classroom with college freshmen, a familiar complaint is that the students coming from high school know so little history because they are too often taught by the local coaches. For the Scout, Brandy Davis, there is a related complaint that high school baseball players do not get good baseball instruction because "In half the high schools it's the social studies teacher," (p. 147) who is the coach. Too few historians have the "good face."

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