

Warfield, Don. *The Roaring Redhead: Larry MacPhail-Baseball's Great Innovator*. South Bend, Indiana: Diamond Communications, Inc., 1987. Pp. 266.

Larry MacPhail was one of the great baseball promoters and innovators in the Twentieth Century. From his first baseball executive position in Columbus,

Ohio, to his last with the New York Yankees, he was a dominating presence in the sport and the business of baseball. In addition he was as colorful a personality as ever moved across the public stage of sport in America. He embodies the essence of the "promoter," and may even be said to have created the mold for baseball. Certainly he left baseball a much different business than when he entered it. It is with great expectations then that one approaches Don Warfield's biography of Leland Stanford MacPhail.

Don Warfield is a retired businessman, a White Sox fan and an obvious admirer of Larry MacPhail. In addition Warfield's mother-in-law dated Larry at Beloit College. This is Warfield's first book, written, he tells us, for the general baseball buff, and therefore is published without the scholarly citations. Fair enough.

This is essentially the story of MacPhail's public life. Outside of a few comments on Larry's collegiate days, there is little information on MacPhail's formative years, major influences or seminal events that might have formed his complex personality. Larry received a law degree in 1910, married the same year, and entered law practice. Some success in corporate law led him to the presidency of a Nashville department store in 1915 where he made an immediate impact as an innovative promoter by catering to the needs of his customers. He demonstrated an ability to take a struggling business and turn it into a profitable enterprise. This set a pattern for his baseball career.

Warfield's treatment takes us through all of the familiar ground of MacPhail's turbulent career. Included are his military careers in World War I and II; his highly successful executive leadership in baseball at Columbus, Cincinnati, Brooklyn and New York; his innovations and promotional techniques. MacPhail seemed to understand well in advance of his competitors that ensuring the comfort of the fan, and that the fans have fun at the ball park, were just as important as a competitive team, to build a successful sports franchise. Everywhere he went these were Larry MacPhail's first priorities.

Warfield also provides a recounting of the major events and controversies of MacPhail's career. The legendary attempt to kidnap the Kaiser is recounted in detail, and there is a photograph of the Kaiser's ashtray that adorned MacPhail's desk. The story of Larry's relationship with his manager and adversary, Leo Durocher, is treated thoroughly, including MacPhail's role in the banning of Durocher from baseball in 1947. MacPhail's relationship with Branch Rickey gets considerable treatment, but largely to the detriment of Rickey. Larry's success as cattle-breeder and horse-breeder in his post-Yankee days are covered. Through it all there is a picture of a brilliant and volatile personality, occasionally out of control, and often difficult in his personal and professional relations. Through it all Warfield dismisses the flaws, covers the blemishes, and assures us that Larry MacPhail was really a wonderful person.

In addition to this tendency to hagiography the book has a number of other problems, some stemming from these tendencies and others from the author and his sources. Warfield tells us that his sources included members of the MacPhail family, and several baseball figures who were interviewed or who

corresponded with the author. Notable by their absence are any persons who would be expected to be critical of MacPhail. There is no indication that Warfield had access to any of Larry's personal correspondence or personal papers, although there are some public documents and speeches reproduced in the text. There is also no indication that Warfield is familiar with any of the standard literature on the history of baseball. The author is not obliged to cite sources, but he is obliged to consult them.

This deficiency leads to several questionable evaluations and judgments. The most serious involves MacPhail's involvement in the desegregation of baseball. At that time MacPhail was with the Yankees, a major force in baseball executive circles, and the chairman of a committee that was looking into several baseball issues, including the race question. In treating these events Warfield does his best to denigrate Branch Rickey's motives and actions while absolving MacPhail from all charges of racism. In dealing with a MacPhail authored report, and its section on the race issue, Warfield writes: "The actual existence of this portion of the document seems never to have been entirely substantiated." (p. 207) A reading of Voigt's *American Baseball*. vol. III, or Tygiel's *Baseball's Great Experiment* negates this claim, and identifies MacPhail as one of the leaders of the forces opposing the desegregation of the National Pastime. Even baseball buffs deserve better than this.

Warfield has a tendency to quote documents and speeches by MacPhail at length, often running to several pages of text. He also has a tendency to jump from subject to subject and back again, which at times can be both irritating and baffling.

In the end *The Roaring Redhead* is uneven and not up to its subject. It offers a few interesting stories not available elsewhere, as well as many told more skillfully by others. There is too little insight into the personality of Leland Stanford MacPhail. In the end the definitive biography of this major figure in American sport remains to be written.

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