

Levine, Peter, ed. *Baseball History: An Annual of Original Research*. Westport, CT: Meckler Books, 1989. Pp. vii, 166. \$22.50

For the past several years, Meckler Books has published a quarterly journal of baseball research under the editorship of Peter Levine. Beginning in the fall of 1989, *Baseball History* became an annual bringing together scholarly essays, interviews, commentary, and other features previously spread out over four installments. Levine, an experienced sports historian, has selected twelve major pieces ranging from interviews and personal reminiscences to scholarly articles and a review of current baseball literature. In some respects, *Baseball History* is similar to the *Baseball Research Journal* published by the Society of American Baseball Research. The main difference is that the scholarly articles in *Baseball History* are longer and endnotes are provided at the end of the selection. In addition, Levine includes a section of book reviews written by specialists of important works at the end, which is customary in scholarly journals.

The quality of the seven scholarly essays varies, but overall is quite good. Jim Sumner's piece on baseball at the Confederate Salisbury prison camp sheds some new light on baseball during the Civil War. Bill Rabinowitz provides a useful commentary of how baseball survived the Great Depression and Ron Briley examines the troubled times for major league baseball during the turbulent 1968 season. The most insightful essay in terms of breaking new ground is Clark Nardinelli's analysis of Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis as baseball's cartel enforcer during the interwar years. Nardinelli challenges older interpretations of "Czar" Landis by viewing his sometimes contradictory decisions from the perspective of trying to maintain a monopsony within organized baseball. Most of the other scholarly essays, although interesting, either reex-

amine familiar topics and/or fail to provide much in the way of interpretation or a challenging viewpoint.

The five selections that are based fully or primarily on oral interviews also vary in quality. Some of the interviews such as Larry Gerlach's discussion of baseball labor problems with National League umpire Augie Donatelli provide insights into the evolution of the national pastime. Other interviews offer nuggets of interesting information from oldtime ball players, but often the interviewer fails to pose exacting and challenging questions. The most charming and insightful selection based on oral interviews is Merritt Clifton's piece on Whiskey Jack Bishop. One of countless local heroes who played on town teams around the turn of the century, Bishop became an enduring legend in Richford, Vermont. Clifton cleverly explains Bishop's longstanding prominence in the small New England community by examining his career within the framework of changing social, religious, and economic trends in the Vermont town.

The concluding section of the book contains a selection of personal reminiscences of days gone by with two pieces devoted to the time-worn theme of the Dodgers move out of Brooklyn.

These vignettes are followed by book reviews surveying the most recent offering of baseball monographs. The books selected for review raise some troubling questions about *Baseball History*. Included in the section, for example, are reviews of *The Sporting News Baseball Trivia 2* and *Ask Dale Murphy*. While the inclusion of these books might be justified by the editor's effort to provide comprehensive coverage of baseball literature, one is struck by the absence of more substantial recent works such as Charles Alexander's biography of John McGraw and Michael Seidel's analysis of Joe DiMaggio's fifty-six game hitting streak.

Baseball history, like a lot of sports history, is not woven out of one fabric. Some baseball history is simply not worthy of the name. A number of books and short pieces on baseball topics lack theme, interpretation, and analysis. Probably the worst offenders are the "as told to" books which flood the market. *Baseball History* is a blend of what one might call "popular baseball history" and a more rigorous scholarly examination of the national pastime. One can only applaud Peter Levine and his associates for attempting to provide the baseball reading public with high quality literature based on solid research. The challenge lies, of course, in selecting thoroughly researched and provocative articles that will at the same time appeal to a general audience and further our understanding of the national pastime. In general terms, Levine has succeeded in establishing a good balance between popular baseball history and essays of high academic quality in *Baseball History*. Some of the articles are so thoroughly thought out and researched and ably written as to obliterate the line between popular and academic baseball history. One hopes to see more of these kinds of essays in future editions of *Baseball History*.