

House, Tom. *The Jock's Itch-The Fast-Track Private World of the Professional Ballplayer*. Chicago: Contemporary Books. No notes. \$17.95.

Tom House, a pitching coach for the Texas Rangers, was a major-league pitcher. In this book he argues that professional baseball players suffer from a terminal adolescent syndrome which he calls "the jock's itch." The chief symptoms are infidelity, drug abuse, alcoholism, bankruptcy and post-career depression. House touches all the bases covered in Jim Bouton's *Ball Four*. While Bouton described the juvenile behavior of professional ball players, House, a Ph.D. in psychology, attempts to analyze it.

From boyhood to the major leagues a gifted athlete is regarded as special. He marches to his own drummer doing things others are not permitted to do. Most men in major league uniforms have never grown up, they are miserable human beings, and when their career is over they do not have the skill or maturity to cope with either their own families or the working world.

The book is based on House's Ph.D. thesis, but House steers clear of tricky jargon. He develops his thesis autobiographically starting at Class A where players indulge in drugs, alcohol, and woman chasing, and after their debaucheries taking "greenies" to get up for the games. The rookie soon learns the structure of his profession. He must know where to sit on the team bus, how to

behave in the clubhouse which is essentially like an animal, and how to establish himself in a group. On each team there are the drinkers, the druggies, the womanizers, the sportsmen, and the Bible toters who are at the bottom of the scale, though there is now less prejudice against athletes who ostentatiously practice Christianity. A player must fit into one of these groups or face ostracism and eventual expulsion from the game. When House, who does not mention names, but admits to most of the afflictions of the “jock’s itch,” stopped drugs he was ostracized from his own group and was too tainted to be accepted by another.

Professional ball players, as House describes them, are horrible creatures. They are more interested in their public persona than their private behavior and indeed have little interest in their own families. Mrs. Garvey’s description of her former husband, “a media prostitute,” seems to apply to many in the profession. Sexual promiscuity, combined with exhibitionism and a gross insensitivity to other human beings, is a way of life even for men who enter the game with strong ethical values.

House had the will, the intelligence and education to cure himself, though not entirely for he craved to get back into the game. The bulk of his colleagues continue to succumb to desire for public exposure, money and drugs which is a new element in old malady. The pressures to behave badly are greater today than they were a generation ago.

While their behavior is reprehensible House suggests others must share in it. Wives overlook their husbands infidelities for the money though they often get rid of their flawed spouses when their playing careers end. Women join a harem merely to associate with a wealthy celebrity. Members of the media will not blow the whistle about drugs, drinking, womanizing and uncivil behavior with the public because they do not wish to lose access to the players. The fans do not care as long as the player produces on the field.

In writing the book House violated the sacred rule of the clubhouse, “what you see here, stays here.” While he has not named names he may have antagonized some people. House admits that he has not told us anything we did not already know, “this is a show-and-tell book. *Ball Four-ish* yes, but introspective and self-helpish too.” While House aims at entertaining the reader he hopes to help his colleagues cope with their profession and lives. It is a good read, but I doubt whether it will help make professional ballplayers more introspective and better human beings.

East Carolina University

Anthony J. Papalas