

Forker, Dom. *The Men of Autumn: An Oral History of the 1943-53 World Champion New York Yankees*. Dallas: Taylor Books, 1989. Pp. 228. Pictures. \$18.95.

Dom Forker's baseball writing includes a regular column for *Baseball Digest* and books such as *Almost Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Baseball*

and *The Ultimate Baseball Quiz Book*. His affection for the home team of what the jacket calls "his beloved Yankee Stadium" is obvious from page one. *Men of Autumn* presents twenty-three interviews with former New York Yankees from the championship years of mid-century. Included are Hall of Famers Johnny Mize and Yogi Berra, stars such as Allie Reynolds, Phil Rizzuto, Eddie Lopat, and Vick Raschi, and role-players such as John Ostrowski and Tom Ferrick. Introducing the book is a foreword from the voice of the Yankees, Mel Allen. Missing are interviews with Mickey Mantle and Whitey Ford, and Forker had apparently no more success in talking with Joe Dimaggio than did David Halberstam.

A serviceable volume for light reading the book breathes adulation, nostalgia, and innocence. Too many players are great or the greatest; and the pleasantly written, short interviews radiate a tone of happiness and contentment, best typified by Irv Noren: "My biggest thrills in baseball were putting on a major league uniform, playing in a World Series, and having my father with me at that time." (p. 131). Negatives are few and far between, chiefly regrets like Tommy Byrne's that he might have done more with his talent, Hank Bauer's and Gene Woodling's dislike of Casey Stengel's platooning, and Gil McDougald's assessment that "The best coaches don't stay in baseball. The guys who are there belong to a mutual admiration society. The manager fills his staff with buddies. That's sad." (p. 158). Forker's major complaint is that the Hall of Fame lacks plaques for Rizzuto and a combined one honoring the great years Raschi Reynolds, and Lopat.

Although Forker seeks to draw no broad themes, two emerge from his compilation. First, is the enormous respect that all held for Joe Dimaggio. The young Mantle might awe veterans with his enormous power, and Tommy Henrich impressed them with his dedication as a team player, but all of the Yankee Clipper's teammates recall "Joe D." with an awe worthy of Ernest Hemingway. As time fades and in young minds Dimaggio becomes more identified with coffee than baseball, such esteem from his peers refreshes the reader's judgment. More importantly, Forker unhappily passed up a chance to compare the Yankees with Dodgers as far as their post-playing lives. Yet, the raw material in his interviews suggests that his Men of Autumn who so often beat the Dodgers in the World Series were also much more successful after baseball than the tragedy-plagued heroes of Roger Kahn's *Boys of Summer*. With only a few exceptions, Yankees like Bobby Brown, a successful heart specialist and currently President of the American League, Wake Forrest, North Carolina's mayor Tommy Byrne, broadcaster Phil Rizzuto, and successful landowner Gene Woodling remained winners after baseball and avoided the tragedies that befell Roy Campanella, Jackie Robinson, Clem Labine, Carl Furillo, and Bobby Cox. Philosophers, psychologists, historians, and even sports commentators might wish to speculate on the reasons that these Yankees continued to win.

This book should entertain fans, and happily it includes an index adding to its value for historians. The 16 pages of photographs (promised in the contents after

page 44, but appearing in this reviewer's copy after page 108) enhance its appeal. As a book of interviews, *Men of Autumn* lacks the sense of time and place and the broad perspective conveyed by Lawrence Ritter's *Glory of Their Times*, nor does it attempt the depth and sensitivity of *The Boys of Summer*. Even Peter Golenbock's *Dynasty* and Robert Creamer's, *Stengel* give us a more complete view of the Yankees of the era, and Forker's information generally supports those journalists' explanations of Yankee success. Unfortunately for Forker his *Men of Autumn* appeared in the same year as David Halberstam's best selling and widely acclaimed *Summer of 1949* and comparisons inevitably will be made. As a piece of history illuminating the impact of baseball, and recreating the fabric and mood of the past *Men of Autumn* pales next to Halberstam's majestic work. Indeed one could use the book to contrast workmanlike and enjoyable baseball nostalgia with the deeper, more insightful baseball history that Halberstam has given us.

Still, fans will enjoy what Forker presents and future historians may find some raw material here.

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