

Goldstein, Warren. *Playing for Keeps: A History of Early Baseball*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989. \$21.95.

Just when you think you've had enough of baseball, another good book is published. Especially coming on the heels of important work by Mel Adelman and George Kirsch, could Warren Goldstein have anything to add about the early days of organized baseball. Yes, indeed he does. To be sure, Goldstein's debt to Adelman (especially) and to Kirsch is enormous. Without their research demonstrating that early baseball players came from artisanal as much as from

bourgeois ranks, Goldstein would have no foundation for his interesting interpretations. But he graciously acknowledges and builds on their fine social histories with his own cultural analysis.

Goldstein looks at both the culture and the structure of early baseball (with an emphasis on New York). He considers its spirit as well as its developing bureaucracy. He traces this dual history in chapters on the early fraternal clubs; their move to an association; their struggles over competition, manliness, sportsmanship, expansion, and commercialism; the emergence of professionalism; and ultimately, the establishment of capital's control in the National League.

Goldstein makes a very interesting point in his preface. He notes that baseball histories (one might also include other sports as well) develop on at least two levels. One relies on personal recollections that stress the emotional and physical "experience" of the game. He places Rogers Kahn and Angell here. The other approach focuses on the major structural developments through which the "game" writ-large is shaped. He cites Adelman in this category. To Goldstein, these approaches represent a larger, more persistent "duality" in the history of sport. This is, says Goldstein, "to recognize that baseball has (at least) two very different kinds of histories: one linear, chronological, and cumulative, the other cyclical, generational, and repetitive." (p. 2)

As Goldstein points out, it is the generational, emotional history to which the average sports boobie is attuned. While historians may know that outrage over "selfish" players is a century-old song, who in the bleachers or the press box knows or cares? To them, players just aren't the same anymore. These consistent tensions and dramas, reenacted for generation after generation *are* part of the history of any sport and we must dig them out and find their roots, just as we must outline the patterns of overall structural change in which the recurring dramas were played out. Goldstein's book is an attempt to explain the background and process of this dual history in American baseball. Ultimately he concludes that the linear history of baseball represented nothing but the proliferation of structures that contained fundamental cultural contradictions (the cyclical history). These continue to vex fans, players, and owners.'

Goldstein is at his best when he looks at the origins of these tensions. For instance, he suggests that early baseball represented something like a cultural bridge between artisanal and bourgeois cultures. As Goldstein effectively argues, baseball attracted many skilled workers who sought to move out of the eroding world of the old volunteer fire companies and into the emerging world of bourgeois social clubs:

The game appealed simultaneously to the culture of the urban streets—a culture that was losing some of its principal institutions by the late 1850s—and to the respectable and newly vigorous culture of middle-class Victorian men. Partici-

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For instance, in his rich and complex chapters on the transitions from amateur *gemeinschaft* to commercial and professional *gesellschaft*, he notes that recurring tensions over player conduct, alcohol, and crowd control reflected this clash of cultures. Workers brought their craftsmanship to the field, but they also brought other sensibilities into the clubhouse and the stands. In his words:

participation in a baseball club or on a baseball nine may have been a conscious expression of the most distinctive qualities of skilled and self-conscious workers: pride in achieved skill and its exhibition, self-directed efforts at discipline and "improvement," participation in the masculine ("manly") world of "respectable" fraternal activities, and a strongly protective feeling about the arena in which these accomplishments could be enjoyed. Yet despite [Henry] Chadwick's dream of well-trained audiences, the game remained intimately involved with the other side of working-class culture. Club followers cared less for the niceties of respectable decorum than for "their" club's victories. As an expression of the brawling, relatively unrepressed, more sensually demanding side of artisan culture, such spectators-and players-played an important part in the spread of baseball's popularity in the 1860s. Their frank and vocal partisanship cemented ties between clubs and neighborhoods and contributed to the excitement of close-fought, high-level competition. That partisanship, and not a higher feeling for the "best interests of the game," drew people into enclosed grounds and subsidized the grounds entrepreneurs in the early 1860s and the professional clubs later in the decade. (79)

Members of the baseball fraternity, especially its conscience, Henry Chadwick, tried to distance and insulate it from the free and rowdy side of this culture. But their efforts to develop the game became nothing but a series of clonings and expansions of structures that contained the same tensions. Goldstein has revealed much about the lure of baseball as well as the frustration that bourgeois protectors like Spalding, Chadwick, and the legion of baseball writers felt in trying to control and disinfect the game. As he demonstrates, all of their efforts to promote manliness, technical proficiency, and high levels of competition made the sport even more prone to player rebellions and partisan fan demonstrations. In short, the "good old days" had a very short life. This analysis is cultural history at its best.

Goldstein's "linear" history, outlining the developing structure of baseball, parallels much of the work already available. Thus his lasting contribution is to build on prior research to provide a rich interpretation of the meaning of baseball to many 19th century Americans. Baseball historians being an opinionated lot, however, I suspect that his interpretations will raise some valuable controversy.

Some criticism will doubtless stem from the narrowness of his source

materials, the vast majority of which are reports from the New York sporting press. While Goldstein pens some brilliant interpretations of the press's role in nurturing contradictions within baseball, he sometimes misses the wider world of sport. For instance, in gleaning from reports the early centrality of a baseball "work ethic," he claims that this was natural since "the concept of play and leisure as a separate sphere of activity was largely a product of the latter half of the century. . ." (p. 24) This is an oversimplification. To begin, Nancy Struna is uncovering significant "accords" among colonial elites about the meaning of sport as leisure and recreation, something different from work. Secondly, there is a vast early 19th-century reform literature arguing the need for sport as an antidote and antithesis to work. Goldstein may be right about New York baseball, but New York baseball may well have been exceptional.

I wish that Goldstein had placed baseball in a wider context at other points as well. In explaining the rapid spread of the game he claims that "more than any other American game, baseball was built on a geographical and psychological sense of localism. . ." (p. 101) In fact, in this regard baseball is not peculiar at all, as the histories of football, basketball, and hockey demonstrate. Boosterism has been fundamental to the development of most competitive sports and athletics. The ancient Greek tyrants knew this as well as Albert Spalding did. Along similar lines, his simply superb interpretation of baseball's "amateurists" (a wonderful term) would have been that much stronger had he connected it to the wider amateur movement in rowing and athletics.

Sometimes his speculations go well beyond his research. In discussing the splintering of clubs between professional and amateur ideologies, he suggests that the fragmentations occurred along class lines (p. 127). Unfortunately, he offers no documentation for this. I suspect the realities were not so tidy, in part because of the lure of bourgeois respectability that he has earlier described so well. Finally, some readers may flinch at his wilder interpretations, such as his "sexual economy" of the fly rule debate.

But make no mistake. This is an important book, written in a vivid style that engages the reader. The interpretations are always thoughtful. The framework of a "dual" history is refreshingly new and worth consideration. If the book is sometimes narrow in context, it is deep and rich. It challenges the reader to rethink the meaning of sport for participants, spectators, and entrepreneurs. It breathes new life into the debate over the struggle of class and culture on the playing fields. It will surely liven those debates for some time.

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