

Smith, Curt. *Voices of the Game: The First Full-Scale Overview of Baseball Broadcasting, 1921 to the Present*. South Bend, Indiana: Diamond Communications, 1987. Pp. 594. Bibliography, index, photographs. \$22.95.

Voices of the Game is a detailed history of baseball broadcasting. It is also very much a book of advocacy on behalf of announcers. It is opinionated, passionate, personal, earthy, at times overwritten, and almost always suffused with admiration for the contributions made by radio and television broadcasters to the growth and development of the National Pastime.

Curt Smith has been a writer, editor, and speechwriter in the Reagan administration. He is the author of *America's Dizzy Dean* and various broadcast columns in baseball magazines. He traces baseball broadcasting from the earliest days of radio and telegraph recreations up to the development of cablevision and superstations. The book contains thirteen chapters in roughly chronological order, further divided into mini-biographies of virtually every baseball broadcaster of consequence. Smith has done his homework and provides illuminating biographical detail of most of his subjects, tracing their apprenticeships from college and minor league broadcasting into the majors. Given Smith's obvious knowledge of baseball history, it is disconcerting, however, to again read that Jackie Robinson was the "first Negro to play major league baseball," (p. 248) ignoring Moses Fleetwood Walker and other nineteenth century black major leaguers.

The core of *Voices of the Game* is Smith's interviews. Although specific bibliographical information on these interviews is not provided, it is apparent

1. Voigt, David Q, "From Chadwick to the Chipmunks," *Journal of American Culture* 7:3 (Fall, 1984): 31-37.

that Smith has interviewed virtually every living broadcaster of consequence, not to mention producers, network executives, advertisers, and other players in the broadcasting game. Conspicuously absent from the list of those interviewed is Howard Cosell, a broadcaster for whom Smith makes his disdain clear. (He refers to Cosell as Howard the Humble, or The Mouth). Smith is particularly good at untangling the Byzantine relationships between sponsors, networks, owners, broadcasters, listeners, and viewers that led to the dismissals of such seemingly untouchable broadcasting icons as Mel Allen, Dizzy Dean, or Bob Prince. Smith's respect, even affection for broadcasters is apparent on almost every page. Nonetheless, the book is no whitewash. His subjects are detailed warts and all-warts including alcoholism, philandering, and rampant egoism.

Although deftly written for the most part, Smith does sometimes let the text get away from him. His writing style is conversational, anecdotal, and occasionally long-winded. Too many sentences just go on and on, including one on page 346 that exceeds 200 words. After reading that 1940s baseball was "unbereft of constancy" (p. 5) or, that Harry Caray possessed a "sonancy not dissimilar to sandpaper seering a veneer," (p. 425), or that "Baseball's murmurous companions flowered despite a labyrinth of lurches" (p. 25), many readers will wish that Smith had reined in his stylistic flourishes. The author's attempts to establish off-the-field context likewise flounder. The all too-frequent lists of elections, hit songs and movies, television shows, and so forth, may be evocative but Smith never establishes their connection with the subject at hand. It's hard to imagine why Richard Nixon should appear fifteen times in a book about baseball broadcasting. The space could be better used to discuss some relatively ignored subjects such as broadcasting in the minor leagues, or the paucity of black and female announcers.

If *Voices of the Game* could have benefitted from a better editing job, it still has undeniable authority on the subject of baseball broadcasting. Some readers will doubtless miss footnotes but all will likely be pleased with the unusually detailed index.

North Carolina Division of Archives and History

Jim Sumner