

DiClerico, James M. and Pavelec, Barry J. *The Jersey Game, The History of Modern Baseball From Its Birth to the Big Leagues in the Garden State*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991. Pp. 279. Index, bibliography. \$18.95.

New Jersey has long served as the playground for New York City and Philadelphia, two great metropolises that buttress each end of the state. Although this relationship is most apparent today at the state's Meadowlands Complex which houses the New York Giants and New York Jets along with the NBA's Nets and the NHL's Devils that carry New Jersey monikers, it all began some 150 years ago when organized baseball emerged on the scene. During the 1840s and 50s, New Yorkers and Philadelphians turned to the open spaces of Hoboken and Camden when urban expansion devoured vacant lots suitable for baseball in their respective cities. As the historical playground for its two neighbors as well as for its own citizenry, New Jersey has a rich history of sport in which baseball has played a prominent role. *The Jersey Game* examines that role in depicting the Garden State's contributions to the evolution and development of American baseball.

Co-authors James M. DiClerico and Barry J. Pavelec begin their text with the Knickerbockers' play at Elysian Fields in 1845 (New Jersey's claim to the origin of modern baseball). They then trace the growth of baseball through its amateur

and professional stages, culminating with a chapter on the New Jerseyans who played in the major leagues. They have proclaimed New Jersey as “the crossroads of baseball” (p. 2) on the basis of its geographical location and connection to the game since its inception. Their intent is to inform New Jerseyans (and the world) of their state’s long relationship with baseball which has been omitted or overlooked by baseball historians and overshadowed by the enormous publicity bestowed upon its two neighboring urban giants.

The general reader will find this book somewhat informative if their interest lies in knowing New Jersey’s position in baseball history, for the book provides a broad, though sketchy, description of New Jersey’s role in the growth and development of baseball. In addition to discussing the game’s origin in Hoboken and its transformation to professionalism, it examines New Jersey’s foray into the Majors with its 1915 Newark Peps entry into the Federal League; the Negro League powerhouses, the Newark Eagles and Atlantic City Bacharach’s; the rise and decline of the state’s top minor league teams, most notably the Newark Bears and Trenton Giants; and collegiate and youth-league amateur baseball in the state. The chapters on the Newark Peps and the Negro Leagues are illuminating, for they give the reader a view of baseball not generally known, though in recent years Professor Lawrence Hogan of Union County College (whom the authors justifiably acknowledge) has uncovered a wealth of material on black baseball in New Jersey through his research on black newspapers. We learn about Ray Dandridge, Monte Irvin, and John Henry Lloyd, three Hall of Famers; Jackie Robinson’s first game with the Dodgers’ minor league team, the Montreal Royals, which was played at Jersey City in 1946; Maria Pepe who in 1972 became the first girl to play Little League Baseball; and the involvement of New Jersey business and industry as suppliers of trophies, equipment and other merchandise to the Major Leagues.

For the sport historian, however, the book is frustrating. It is disjointed and poorly organized. Two egregious examples appear on page 54 where the text suddenly changes from Sunday sport to New Jersey resorts hosting spring training for major league teams without warning or transition and on page 58 where the section on the “Dodgers’ and Giants’ New Jersey Roots” discusses the Giants’ connection, but defers the Dodgers to the following chapter. The authors use modern jargon to describe nineteenth century players and events, such as “Superstar” pitcher James Creighton (p. 31), “But the team [Camden Merritt] stunk up the place.” (p. 67), “. . . Trenton went on the beat Sunbury, . . . with ‘in your face’ scores of 18-11 and 5-0” (p. 97).

Organization and syntax aside, the book’s most troublesome aspect is its lack of documentation. The authors acknowledge the standard works on baseball in their preface, and their bibliography is quite extensive, some indication of their knowledge of pertinent source materials. Nevertheless, they short-change the reader when they quote passage after passage without proper attribution. On occasion, they have included the name and date of the newspaper they are quoting within the body of the text. But their use, or perhaps

misuse, of sources also comes into question. They have laid claim to uncovering the first recorded match baseball game played on October 21, 1845, which pre-dates the conventional inauguration of American baseball by eight months (June 19, 1846). They based this claim on an October 21, 1845 *New York Herald* article sent to them by the curator at Stevens Institute which now occupies Elysian Fields. Nine years before they began their research, Melvin Adelman pointed this out in a note to the *Journal of Sport History* (7, No. 3, 1980, pp. 132-135) and subsequently in his *Sporting Time* (1986, p. 122). Some attribution, surely, is due Mr. Adelman.

DiClerico and Pavelec tell the readers "how it [the Jersey Game] came to be" (p. xiii), primarily from the materials they gathered from newspaper accounts and selected secondary works. While description is perhaps the initial stage of historical presentation which can often be helpful, it is unfortunate in this case that the authors chose not to interpret more of what had taken place on the baseball diamonds of New Jersey. Other than cursory glimpses of politicians and civic leaders, they did not examine the political, economic, ideological, or social forces behind the Jersey Game. Nor did they analyze adequately baseball's transformation to the professional game. Apart from a few statements about recruiting the best players with cash in order to win, they do little to address: Why winning had become important in the 1850s and 1860s? How American ideology influenced the direction of baseball at that time? How the players viewed baseball in comparison with their vocations? Warren Goldstein answers those questions superbly in his *Playing for Keeps* (1989) which the authors might have used as a model for their analysis of New Jersey baseball. But, then, Goldstein's work is conspicuously absent from their bibliography. One recent work they did cite was George Kirsch's *Creation of American Team Sports* (1989). Here, too, the authors could have strengthened their examination of the nineteenth-century game had they incorporated more of Kirsch's findings on Newark, Orange, Paterson, and Jersey City in their work.

Inexplicably, the authors omitted New Jersey's effort to bring major league baseball to the state in 1987. In order to compete with cities that already had stadiums, the state had to generate revenue to build one. The state legislature brought the issue of a taxpayer-subsidized stadium before the electorate which the voters defeated handily. By excluding this issue (they mention the referendum in passing on p. 2), the authors missed a golden opportunity to analyze the political, economic, and social ramifications of baseball in the Garden State.

Messrs. DiClerico and Pavelec work in public relations and advertising, respectively. Because they are not sport historians, perhaps it is unfair to criticize them too harshly for their methodology and analysis. Nonetheless, as the authors, they must shoulder the major responsibility, though one would think their editors at Rutgers University Press would have insisted on complete documentation and greater interpretation to produce a more meaningful history of New Jersey baseball. *The Jersey Game*, in spite of its shortcomings, does inform New Jerseyans of their state's role in the development of American baseball. But perhaps, more than anything else, it will stimulate further inquiry

into New Jersey baseball history which, in turn, will produce a clearer and more thorough understanding of the Jersey Game.

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