

Miller, James Edward. *The Baseball Business: Pursuing Pennants and Profits in Baltimore*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990. Pp. 382. Notes, bibliography. \$24.95.

It is not difficult to understand why James Miller's *The Baseball Business* was chosen for the 1990 SABR-Macmillan award as the best baseball book of the year. Although the subtitle would suggest that this is a study of the Baltimore Oriole franchise, it is much more than that. It is a thorough and sophisticated analysis of one franchise, as a means of understanding the larger issues and

developments in the sport in the last forty years. As such Miller offers a treatment of such issues as franchise shifts, marketing developments, the uses and impact of television, the struggle of the minor leagues and their relationship to the majors, various facets of the race issue, the success of the Major League Players' Association, community relations, expansion, and legal issues. Throughout there is an emphasis on the economic side of baseball.

The body of the narrative is organized around three phases of the Baltimore Oriole franchise history. The first section on Community Baseball relates the circumstances of the move from St. Louis to Baltimore including the squeezing out of Bill Veeck as owner. The period from 1953 to 1965 saw the growth and development of the organization and the not always successful attempts to create a strong and winning franchise, with substantial support from the people of Baltimore. The relationship between the franchise and the city, county, and state governments, is a tale worth telling which illuminates one of the key issues facing communities all across the nation that dream of becoming a "major league city."

In these years Paul Richards, as manager and general manager, dominated major league operations and the headlines, while Jim McLaughlin quietly built a strong minor league system that produced a winning team for the Orioles by 1960. Ownership went through considerable evolutionary change from multiple ownership, to a franchise dominated by brewing interests. As Richards was wearing out his welcome, Lee MacPhail would move to the position of general manager, and from the end of the 1958 season began to mold this team and franchise into contention for the Sixties.

MacPhail brought to the Orioles a keen understanding of baseball both on and off the field. His improvement of the Oriole's marketing practices alone boosted the franchise, and his revisions of television practices and continued attention to minor league affairs kept the Orioles healthy. His last major act as general manager in late 1965 was the blockbuster trade for Frank Robinson which brought the Orioles their first pennant in 1966 the sweep of the Drysdale-Koufax Dodgers.

Shortly before the trade the Orioles had come under the ownership of Jerold Hoffberger, owner of the National Brewery, and disciple of his friend Bill Veeck, although he did not bring Veeck into Oriole management operations. Hoffberger transferred Frank Cashen from the Brewery operations into baseball, and Cashen was tutored by MacPhail and Harry Dalton in the ways of baseball.

The Hoffberger years from 1965 to 1979 were extremely successful on the field, but this success was not translated into high attendance and profits. These years were also times of tremendous change in labor-management relations, television, racial issues, culminating in the arrival of free agency.

Author Miller chronicles the strategies and achievements of Marvin Miller, who led the players into a transformation of the economics of the baseball business, and changed forever the relationship between labor and management, and one might add, between the players and the fans. All of the collective bargaining issues and the strikes are clearly examined and explained, and the consequences of each new settlement are detailed. How all of these changes affected one franchise and their management strategies makes for an enlighten-

ing presentation. Miller seems much less alarmed by the rising player salaries than seems to be the norm these days among the Baseball Jeremiahs.

The third phase of Oriole history from 1979 to 1988 begins with Edward Bennett Williams' purchase of the franchise from Hoffberger. Williams brought a skill, vision, and energy to the Orioles that led to further success on the field, and the transformation of the Orioles from a Baltimore to a regional franchise. The new owner's understanding of sports marketing and management are detailed by Miller, as are his attempts to bring a voice of reason to management-labor relations, attempts not welcomed by fellow owners.

Williams strengthened the relationship between the Orioles and the City of Baltimore, and skillfully exploited the departure of the Baltimore Colts to convince city and state authorities to finance a new ballpark in downtown Baltimore. Miller raises questions about stadium building as an enterprise for public financing and doubts seriously the benefits accrued to the taxpayers.

James Miller is a specialist in Italian History, and has won major awards for his books in that area. He is current historian for Southern Europe for the Department of State, and Chairman of the Italy Advanced Studies Program of the Foreign Service Institute. It could well be that there are common themes in the history of baseball and modern Italy, but clearly Miller's State Department career positioned him geographically to exploit national, state, and local archives, in ways not done before. These are part of what makes this a significant piece of work.

*The Baseball Business* is not without its shortcomings. Although chronologically organized into three sections, each section is chronologically disjointed, leading to considerable confusion as to specific time and time sequence. One might also have hoped for a bit more color and fire in the discussion of certain personalities such as MacPhail, Veeck, Weaver, Richards, Palmer, et al., but perhaps the economic thrust of the narrative argues against this.

Whatever the case James Miller has produced a piece of baseball history that will endure, and should be a model for those who seek to write about the business side of the game, and those who would write the history of individual franchises. It illuminates all the major issues of the day with a historical context of analytical clarity and precision, and considerable insight.

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