

Jennings, Kenneth M. *Balls and Strikes: The Money Game in Professional Baseball*. New York: Praeger, 1989. Pp. 273. Index, bibliography, notes. \$24.95.

High on the list of unresolved issues of American baseball, the persisting brushfire of player-management strife has flared repeatedly over the six score years since the major league game began. And in recent years the blazing

conflicts that dominate media coverage now claim the interests of historians and other students of the game.

Among the latter Professor Kenneth Jennings offers his insights into this chronic problem in his 1989 book, *Balls and Strikes: The Money Game in Professional Baseball*. In this his first book on a baseball topic Jennings comes armed with long experience as a professor of labor relations and practical work in the field. Thus arrayed, Jennings essays what is purported to be a history of player-management relations, with an emphasis on collective bargaining, in major league baseball from 1869 to 1989.

But *Balls and Strikes* is not a longitudinal history of the subject as the work is poorly grounded in the history of player-management relations. And by omitting important events in the history of the subject, and by committing frequent errors of fact and interpretation, the book is unlikely to impress sports historians.

Structurally *Balls and Strikes* is divided into three parts with three chapters assigned to each part. But this promising chronological format neglects important historical background as the author disproportionately concentrates on the last two decades. As a result vital early trends are repeatedly glossed over in inadequate anecdotal fashion.

This pattern is established in the first chapter (“Early Collective Bargaining Efforts”) wherein only seven pages are allotted to 19th century events and only three to those of the 1900-1945 era. This makes for such stunning omissions as the National Association era of 1871-75 with its precedent of player control, the National League coup with its precedent of empowering owners, and the early history of the reserve clause including challenges by players and by the American Association and Union Association incursions. Among other slights, the 1890 Players League venture is limited to three paragraphs, and the American League incursion of 1901 gets two sentences. Moreover no mention is made of the monopolistic big league of the 1890s or of the National Agreements of 1883, 1892 and 1903. Suffice it to say that all these events are important to an understanding of player-management relations.

As for the present century, the author devotes two pages to the history of player-management relations up to 1946. And a brief discussion of the rival Mexican League of that year makes no mention of the important Gardella suit that emerged from this event; indeed, the demise of the Mexican League is attributed to “serious climate and atmospheric conditions”! And later when the author tackles the emergence of the Major League Players Association under a subhead “After Murphy and Before Miller,” he fails to date the inception of this organization and offers few insights into the Association’s role during its early years.

The remaining chapters of the first section (“Marvin Miller and the MLBPA” and “Collective Bargaining in the 1980s”) survey the six Basic Agreements negotiated between the MLBPA and the owners up to 1989. In this discussion Miller’s role in organizing the players and in negotiating these contracts is curiously downplayed.

The book's second part ("Collective Bargaining Participants") opens with a chapter on "Owners, Commissioners, Media and Agents" which offers little on the historical emergence of these roles. Only owners of recent years are treated and this is done selectively and unsystematically. The significance of the Commissioner's role lacks historical grounding and is distorted by the author's uncritical acceptance of the Landis myth; at one point, indeed, the author states that under Landis "the clubs did receive the right to determine rules regulating the game." An astonishing exaggeration, this is equalled by descriptions of such Landis successors as Chandler who "had the same sweeping powers as Landis, but did not seem to implement them"; or Kuhn, who "had a thorough knowledge of the game"; and Ueberroth who "established that the owners were working for him-not vice versa." As for the significance of the media's role or that of player agents, little is learned from a three page discussion of the former or a two page discourse on the latter.

Like earlier sins of omission, the fifth chapter ("Manager-Player Relations") is thin on historical background. A reader learns almost nothing of the team manager's changing role over the years other than that managers are "not all cut from the same cloth." A promised discussion of managers as teachers of skills and tactics makes no mention of Rickey's important impact. But six pages near the end of the chapter are disproportionately given to a play by play listing of 18 managers fired by George Steinbrenner.

The same inattention to historical perspective undermines the sixth chapter on "Player Pressures and Problems." This omission distorts understanding of the issue of drug and alcohol abuse by players as when the author singles out Reno Bertoia as the "first" publicized player to use drugs. A better grounding in history might have informed a reader that inasmuch as drugs like marijuana and cocaine were legally available to Americans for a longer time period than by any other industrialized nation, it is evident that ballplayers were likely to be counted among consumers.

The final section, entitled "Remaining Player-Management Issues" assumes that the reader is still at hand. Three chapters explore such issues as race and ethnic problems, player mobility and salary arbitration, and salary trends and controversies. The race-ethnic discussion really begins with Jackie Robinson and makes little mention of the segregated history of the game and none at all of the black majors. The chapter on player mobility has the author accepting an anachronistic 1875 source that states before the reserve clause "criminal chaos ensued." And the chapter on salary trends opens with the author accepting a 1900 observer's opinion that players were "too handsomely" paid. That salaries were capped at a maximum of \$2400 from 1892-1900 is a historical fact that belies such a judgment.

In addition to serving up such dollops of misinformation, *Balls and Strikes* is marred by a pedestrian writing style that employs and clumsily introduces strings of quotations culled from articles, biographies and autobiographies. I counted 119 of these and the overall effect is like reading an early draft of a student term paper. Of course, some of the quotes sparkle and a few of these and

also some charts are illuminating. Footnotes to chapter references identify most of these, but such references indicate a heavy reliance on popular articles over scholarly studies. The book's index is limited to two pages. Moreover, the book is studded with errors including misspellings of such names as Reno Bertoia, Ernie Bonham, Cookie Lavagetto, Dave Nightingale, and Clark Griffith who is confused with Calvin Griffith. In another instance the Players League of 1890 is referred to as The National Brotherhood League.

In thumbing out *Balls and Strikes* as a reliable source on the subject of player-management relations, baseball historians can profitably turn to Lupien and Lowenfish's updated study and to recent works by Marvin Miller, Don Warfield, Paul Staudohar and some useful studies by Society for American Baseball Research students.

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