

Murdock, Eugene. *Baseball Between the Wars: Memories of the Game by the Men Who Played It*. Westport, CT: Meckler Publishing, 1993. Pp. viii. 277. Index. photographs. \$39.50.

From 1973 to 1987, Gene Murdock, who was introduced to the then-new field of oral history while studying with Allen Nevins at Columbia University, traveled about the United States to interview some 75 baseball players whose major league careers fell between 1910 and 1940. Twenty-three interviews were the basis for *Baseball Players and Their Times: Oral Histories of the Game, 1920-1940* (Meckler, 1991), while several others were published in various periodicals devoted to baseball history. Nine of the best remaining interviews constitute *Baseball Between the Wars*. (In the Introduction, Murdock states that the book comprises 11 interviews including one with Bibb Falk, but the published volume contains only nine and Falk's is not among them.)

The book is vintage Murdock as the interviews reflect exacting research into each subject's career, perceptive questioning which probes or elicits as appropriate, genuine interest in the interviewee both as a person and as a performer, and a scholar's commitment to assessing the baseball players broadly by obtaining the views of marginal as well as great players. Here we

have the reminiscences of two Hall of Famers (Edd Roush and Waite Hoyt), two above-average performers (Roger Peckinpaugh and Riggs Stevenson), one journeyman who spent almost his entire career in the minor leagues (Eddie Onslow), and four mediocre-to-average players (Ray Hayworth, Carmen Hill, Walter Miller, and Ed Wells). The interviews are uniformly of high quality, with those from Hoyt, Peckinpaugh and Roush being especially good because their unabashed candor contrasts sharply with the usual sentimental recollections of performers and performances. Still, plays and personalities dominate the interviews: readers will not learn much from this lineup of old-timers about the economic, social, and cultural aspects of professional baseball's Golden Age. We have, perhaps, reached the point of diminishing returns in collecting oral histories of pre-1950s ballplayers.

While something of a companion to Murdock's earlier volume, *Baseball Between the Wars* is a very different example of the oral history genre. In *Baseball Players and Their Times*, Murdock blended the interview with his own material to produce a comprehensive portrait of each player's career. Here he goes to the opposite extreme of simply offering verbatim transcripts of interviews. The result is valuable as a primary source, but appreciably less satisfying as oral history. The editorial apparatus is minimal but apposite: sprightly written paragraphs to introduce the interviewee, ellipses to represent deleted questions, and bracketed material to clarify or correct faulty remembrances. Regrettably, Murdock compromised the reliability of the material by, unwisely allowing "a few errors" to remain without comment "where there is a good story" and merely admonishing the reader to "be on guard and see if he can track down any such instances." I was and couldn't.

Of Gene Murdock's numerous contributions to the history of baseball, which include the standard life of Byron "Ban" Johnson, the most enduring may well be his final two books—oral histories that preserve the perceptions, personalities, and experiences of "oldtime ballplayers." Biographies and monographs are transitory, but first-person testimony is the stuff of history. (Murdock died shortly after the publication of *Baseball Between the Wars*; perhaps poor health more than personal preference determined the book's format.)

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