

Rader, Benjamin G. *Baseball: A History of America's Game*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Pp. xvii, 231. Notes, photographs, tables, bibliographical essay, index. \$24.95.

The summer of 1994 has been a particularly dark one for professional baseball. In the short space of a few weeks, the game-business received two blows from which it will be a long time recovering. In August, small-market major league owners succeeded in forcing a players' strike and crowned their triumph in mid-September by cancelling the world series, losing millions of dollars, and profoundly alienating millions of fans in pursuit of a "salary cap" on player earnings. A few days later, the Public Broadcasting Service unleashed "Ken Burns' Baseball" on the viewing public, accompanied by cassettes, a \$60 "book" (in reality the show's script), and a numbing publicity campaign. Burns' product featured a good deal of fine photography, but otherwise was glacial in pacing, directionless in any sense except chronological, filled with sentimental stereotyping, and dominated by celebrities pontificating on the "meaning" of the game. It provided Americans with the best argument in 70 years for a return to silent films.

Watching the owners and Burns fumble left the distinct impression that neither had the dimmest idea of how baseball got to the crisis that has enveloped it since the 1960s. This is all the more remarkable given the plethora of books and essays, scholarly and journalistic, that have pinpointed the causes of baseball's economic and labor woes. It is not too late for the owners, and players, too, to get a little perspective and a good starting place would be Benjamin Rader's *Baseball*. This short, nicely paced volume mixes analysis with entertaining anecdote, and provides an up-to-date look at the evolution of the sport since the 1840s.

Books of the sort Rader has written are heavily dependent on the work that goes before them. As a state-of-research update, the Rader volume points out the strengths of scholarly research and also points out some amazing gaps in previous baseball research. Sports historians, primarily those from the social history side of the house, have done an effective job with the origins of the sport and its development to the Progressive Era. Economists and historians with an interest in political economy have made some useful contributions to our understanding of the post-World War II game. In the middle, baseball's silver and golden eras, the biographers have tended to hold sway with less impressive results. No matter how remarkable the athletes, their lives rarely lend themselves to effective investigation of the era or to the business side of the baseball of the era. Biographies of owners and executives appear to be a more secure path to understanding the inner workings of the game. Team histories remain another path that has been little explored. Nor has anyone yet had the courage to assay a study of the formal management structure of baseball. An exception is Bruce Kuklick's ingenious history of Shibe Park (*To Everthing a Season*, Princeton 1991), an appealing approach

to the study of the relationship of club and host city that merits follow up.

As befits a book appearing in the post-Marvin Miller era, Rader's volume devotes a large amount of coverage to issues of business and labor-management relations. His comments are judicious and the coverage of labor-management issues is steady, enabling the reader to understand the evolution of the "reserve system," the impact of legal action, and the causes of postwar unionism's successes. Work on race relations is one of the brighter spots in the historiography of baseball, and Rader displays a sure mastery of these important issues. Radio and television exposure, an area of Rader's particular expertise and significant factors in the success of baseball, also receive convincing coverage in Rader's work.

The author might have considered modifying the book's title from *Baseball* to *Major League Baseball* since this accurately reflects his concentration. The minor leagues receive little coverage in this volume, nor do scouting or amateur ball enter significantly into his discussion. Given the limits of existing historiography, Rader could not have dealt as effectively with them, but they do constitute important elements of "America's game."

Lively, balanced, and mercifully brief, *Baseball* offers readers a speedy introduction to the complexities of major league history that is free of the maudlin. It should find a wide readership among both academics and that part of baseball fandom that likes to read about (as well as watch) our endangered national pastime. The book is a successful example of the careful use of sports historiography.

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