

## Book Review Essays

CARUSO, GARY. *The Braves Encyclopedia*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995. Pp. vii, 533. Photographs, color plates. \$59.95 cb.

SCHNEIDER, RUSSELL. *The Cleveland Indians Encyclopedia*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996. Pp. 574. Photographs, color plates. \$59.95 cb.

In October 1995, the Atlanta Braves and Cleveland Indians met to decide the World Series Championship in a classic match-up of the two best teams in baseball, in a strike-shortened seasons. In the World Series, the adage that good pitching beats good hitting proved to be true as the Braves edged the Indians in six games, with Tom Glavine pitching the Braves to a 1-0 victory in the final game.

The 1995 World Series Championship was not the first meeting between two of baseball's most storied franchises. In fact, the outcome was reversed when the two teams met in the 1948 World Series, won by the Indians in six games. Like countless Cleveland fans reawakened to the possibility of postseason play after three decades of futility, I eagerly anticipated the 1996 season and hoped for a World Series rematch between the Indians and Braves. Although both teams won their respective divisions in 1996, the Indians were eliminated by a bolstered Baltimore Orioles team, which proceeded to lose in the American League Championship finals to the New York Yankees, who then prevailed over Atlanta in the 1996 World Series.

Although the 1995 Indian-Braves series was not reprised in 1996, the publication of *The Braves Encyclopedia* by Gary Caruso and *The Cleveland Indians Encyclopedia* by Russell Schneider allowed a comparison of baseball's most popular franchises. The volumes are part of a series that includes *The New Phillies Encyclopedia* and the forthcoming *The White Sox Encyclopedia* and *The Red Sox Encyclopedia*. The two volumes in this review provide comprehensive narrative accounts of how history has shaped the Braves and Indian franchises, as well as how each franchise has contributed uniquely to the rich heritage of professional baseball.

Despite the teams' affiliations with different leagues, these two encyclopedias reveal certain common characteristics. In addition to the obvious fact that both teams have Native American mascots, they have also shared numerous players, managers, and even financial woes. At times, the financial realities of professional baseball have dictated the course of each team. Caruso says of the Braves: "They've jumped from city to city in search of a strong fan base and changed the club's nickname in hope of fostering a better image. They've acquired many of the

biggest names ever to play the game and shuffled hundreds of players and dozens of managers in search of the right chemistry” (p. 317). Similarly, the Indians have changed names, traded countless players, and even traded managers, all the while remaining in Cleveland in spite of rumors that they might move.

Fans who are interested in a comprehensive, detailed account of their favorite teams and players would be the largest group of potential readers and/or purchasers of these two encyclopedias. However, the allusions to historical issues of import would be of interest to baseball analysts and sport historians. For example, Caruso notes that the Braves were among the earliest franchises to abandon one locale and move to another, which they did twice—in 1953 relocating from Boston to Milwaukee, and in 1966 moving to their present home in Atlanta. The Braves management also played an integral role in shaping policies of player acquisition and transfer when team president Arthur Soden implemented the “reserve clause” in 1879. That policy, which limits a player’s obligation to a team, prevailed for nearly a century, until the challenge by Curt Flood eventually resulted in free agency.

Although free agency now accounts for multimillion-dollar salaries and extensive player movement, trading and acquisition of players has been commonplace since the early days of professional baseball. For example, in 1887, when the Boston Braves acquired Chicago’s “King” Kelly for the unheard of price of \$10,000, Boston fans were both shocked and elated. And during his tenure as general manager in Cleveland, Frank “Trader” Lane completed “a total of 59 deals involving 120 players through a period of 39 months, before he was fired in January 1961” (p. 2).

Caruso introduces *The Braves Encyclopedia* as the “story of the oldest continuously operating professional sports franchise in America...not only a story of wins and losses, ball players, managers and stadiums, but also a history of birth and development of baseball from the very inception of professional league play” (p. 1). The author weaves the history of the Braves into the larger framework of professional baseball and brings accomplishments of some of the earliest players into perspective by likening them to contemporary players. For instance, Caruso reminds readers that 1910 Braves pitcher Cliff Curtis was in the news during the 1992-1993 season “when the Mets’ Anthony Young was in the process of losing 27 straight” (p. 35) and breaking Curtis’s record of 18 consecutive losses.

In discussing the Braves’ involvement in professional baseball’s development, the author notes that the team’s earliest manager, Harry Wright, is generally regarded as the “father of professional baseball” for his efforts in organizing the “Cincinnati Red Stockings in 1869 as the game’s first team composed of openly salaried players” (p. 286). Prompted by the success of the touring Red Stocking team, and with Cincinnati backing out of the picture, Boston adopted the Red Stockings to become one of ten charter members of the National Association of Baseball Players in 1871. When that league folded five years later, the National League emerged, with only the Boston entry surviving and continuing to play today as the Atlanta Braves. The Boston franchise first became known as the Braves in 1912, a name based on one partner’s ties with Tammany Hall in New

York. Tammany politicians were often dubbed “braves” because “the Tammany Society was named after a Delaware Indian chief” (p. 37).

While name and ownership changes were not uncommon in the early days of professional baseball, franchise moves were unknown. Caruso points out that it came as a shock in 1953 when Braves ownership relocated the Boston franchise to Milwaukee. During over a decade of residence in Milwaukee County Stadium, the team enjoyed some of its greatest success, including its capture of the 1957 World Series Championship and career seasons by future Hall of Famers Hank Aaron and Warren Spahn. As the oldest continuous sports franchise in America, the Braves can boast that more than one fifth of the Hall of Fame inductees (46) wore a Braves uniform at one time or another as a player, coach, or manager, including such notable names as Babe Ruth, Cy Young, Satchel Paige, Johnny Sain, Dale Murphy, and Phil Niekro. However, with attendance dropping off in 1964, the Braves organization received an offer to move to Atlanta. The state of Wisconsin’s appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court was unsuccessful, and the Braves began their 1966 season in Atlanta.

The Cleveland franchise got its current name in 1915, when Cleveland baseball writers chose the name Indians in honor of Louis Sockalexis, a Penobscot Indian who “was the first great player to perform in Cleveland and was believed to be the first native Indian to play major league baseball” (p. 23). Unlike the traveling Braves franchise, the Indians have remained in Cleveland throughout their history, although that is not to suggest that they were without financial difficulties. Schneider acknowledges that the “Indians were beset with severe financial problems and were on the brink of bankruptcy several times” (p. 23). Ironically, Schneider cites another Cleveland professional team owner, Art Modell of the Browns (now Baltimore Ravens), as saying that “when a franchise—any kind of a sports franchise whether it be baseball, football, basketball, hockey, or what have you—is in trouble as the Indians were for so long, the quickest way to cure the trouble is to move it” (p. 335). The Braves franchise took that route twice, yet the Indians remained in Cleveland and found other ways to deal with their financial woes. Schneider documents how the Indians made severe cuts in their farm system and traded away players who made high salary demands. However, since 1986, the Jacobs Brothers’ ownership of the franchise is attributed with marking the “beginning of a new period of stability” (p. 338).

The compilation of these two new encyclopedias was surely a labor of love for the sportswriters and researchers who contributed to them. Although an admitted Indians fan, I was intrigued to see how the paths of the Indians and Braves have diverged and intersected at various junctures in their histories. The same basic format is used in both encyclopedias, and I would make only minor suggestions for improving future editions. The chapters on “Player Profiles” include 150 of 1500 Braves players and 200 of 1400 Cleveland players. In both volumes, this section includes photographs, narratives, and summaries of each player’s career statistics. In the Indians “Profiles” section, there are no photographs for 37 players. In addition, although *The Braves Encyclopedia* was published a year earlier, their “Player Profiles” include the stars of the 1995 season, while *The*

*Cleveland Indians Encyclopedia* describes the results of the 1995 postseason play but includes no “Player Profiles” of the stars of that magical season. My final suggestion pertains to the 16-page color photograph gallery featured in the center of each encyclopedia. Both volumes contain collections of memorabilia; in *The Cleveland Indians Encyclopedia*, they are not labeled. Although the identification of some items appears self-evident, the labels certainly enhanced my perusal of the Braves color gallery, which identified such items as Hank Aaron’s jersey and bat and various World Series programs.

Although the intent of an encyclopedia is not to critique social practices related to sport, this review would be incomplete without addressing two issues raised by practices of the Atlanta Braves and/or Cleveland Indians franchises: mascots and franchise moves. When it became apparent in 1995 that the World Series would be contested between the Braves and Indians, it appeared that the political correctness of using Native American mascots might be addressed. Two of the arguments for maintaining the Braves and Indians nicknames are that they are part of the tradition of those franchises and they are meant to honor Native Americans. What is clear from my reading of these two encyclopedias is that “Braves” and “Indians” were not the original names of either franchise. In fact, were we to hold strictly to tradition, the teams would still be referred to as the Atlanta Red Stockings and the Cleveland Bluebirds. If the present nicknames are truly intended to honor Native Americans, the opinions and permission of those being so honored ought to be considered.

Finally, the practice of moving financially challenged franchises to more economically favorable climates has become increasingly popular with today’s professional sports franchises. It is certainly understandable for team owners to want to locate where they can optimize their income. However, that is the same motive of transnational corporations (such as Nike) that are accused of exploiting laborers in Third World Countries, where labor costs are lower, in order to maximize profits. There seems to be several problems with using the profit motive as the sole basis for deciding on the locale of a professional sports franchise. If the interests of capital are foremost, what becomes of the loyalty of fans? When capital accumulation becomes the central focus, the struggle between owners and players tends to leave fans out of the equation.

In summary, I strongly recommend these encyclopedias and commend the authors and researchers of both volumes for their in-depth compilations.

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