
HONIG, DONALD, ed. *The October Heroes: Great World Series Games Remembered by the Men Who Played Them*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. Pp. 278. Photographs, index. \$15.00 pb.

The October Heroes, originally published in 1979, is an attractive volume of reminiscences gathered by Donald Honig regarding baseball's crown jewel, the World Series. Like other baseball oral histories compiled by Honig, which are also available from the University of Nebraska Press, *The October Heroes* is well illustrated with photographs of great players and contains some fine stories, but there is little analysis or organization to the 15 interviews, which appear randomly spaced. For example, the sections dealing with how the Yankees' Tommy Byrne and Dodgers' Johnny Podres perceived the seventh game of the 1955 fall classic are contained in chapters 2 and 12, respectively.

In his effort not to impose himself upon the material, Honig allows his subjects to speak in their own voice. What emerges are some rambling interviews in which we sometimes lose sight of the World Series. But we retain the sound of authenticity from these former players. While the historical spectrum in the book covers the years from 1908 to 1972, most of the interviewees were active during what many perceive as the golden age of baseball, between 1920 and 1960. In fact, only Tom Seaver and Gene Tenace represent the 1960s and 1970s.

Several themes emerge from a close reading of these interviews. While never bitter, these former players remember an America in which fathers played catch with sons, baseball was the national pastime with its own deities, and the American dream of social mobility was fulfilled by young men from modest means, who, through natural talent and hard work, attained the pinnacle of success, the World Series. Thus, Lloyd Waner gave credit for his career to the encouragement of his father and "best pal," brother Paul. Ed Lopat recalled cutting high school classes so that he could listen to the World Series on the radio. Lopat concluded, "You've got to do that at one time or another, I suppose, just to prove you're a good red-blooded American boy" (p. 151). Baseball icons, such as Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Walter Johnson, Rogers Hornsby, Joe DiMaggio, and Ty Cobb, are described in reverential terms, although some acknowledgment is made of the alcohol problems of such stars as Grover Cleveland Alexander. Perhaps the tone of these reminiscences is best exemplified by a quote from Les Bell, who played in the 1926 Series for the St. Louis Cardinals and was the son of a railway worker. Bell,

considering himself fortunate to have had a baseball career, explained, "I loved playing in the big leagues. Boy, I just loved it. It was everything I dreamed it would be and then some. What a way to make a living! I even enjoyed those long train rides, swinging back and forth across the country" (p. 89).

What will the modern reader make of these nostalgic reminiscences. Baseball fans will, of course, love them. And for many, this volume will recall images from a time in which baseball and America were better. In his introduction, written before the cancelation of the 1994 World Series, Honig asserts, "It is safe to say that no cynic has ever played in a World Series" (p. 13). It would be difficult to make such a statement today in postmodern America.

But were things really so much better in the golden age of baseball? There is no mention of race relations in these recollections, which contain the story of only one African American player, Monte Irvin of the New York Giants, and completely overlook Latino contributions to the sport. While baseball did provide some opportunity for white male social mobility, it is well to remember the lucrative share of World Series revenues received by ownership. So the critical reader must keep in mind that the good ole days were not necessarily so great for all Americans. As we continue to address issues of inequality with gender and racial discrimination in our society, these memories by yesteryear's stars must be read with somewhat of a jaundiced eye. We may still celebrate the athletic achievements, while acknowledging the limitations of these insights into history through nostalgia.

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