
DANIEL, W. HARRISON. *Jimmie Foxx: The Life and Times of a Baseball Hall of Famer, 1907-1967*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 1996. Pp. 237. Notes, bibliography, index, illustrations. \$28.50 cb.

As America began the 20th century, Major League Baseball gamed increasing popularity in large American cities. But the professional game was still relatively unseen by small-town inhabitants who could only read about it in the newspaper, or catch an occasional exhibition game as Major League teams traveled across the country. What was popular for rural America was “town ball”: fierce competitions between local teams. It was from this environment that Jimmie Foxx, one of Major League Baseball’s most talented players, began his journey toward the majors.

A product of rural Sudlersville, Maryland, Jimmie Foxx was one of the greatest power hitters in Major League history, frequently referred to in baseball circles as the “right-handed Babe Ruth.” Unfortunately, this circle is small and perhaps shrinking with each baseball generation. W. Harrison Daniel’s biography of Foxx attempts to curb the shrinkage and bring to light not only the story of a baseball Hall of Famer, but of his almost tragic roller coaster life outside of baseball.

The focus of Daniel’s effort is three-pronged: to relate Foxx’s career to developmental changes in Major League Baseball from the 1920s to 1945; the

events in American society during those years which had a significant impact on baseball—specifically the Great Depression and World War II; and Foxx's life following baseball. But despite the use of a traditional biographical model to portray his character, Foxx's life and career sometimes appears outside the author's focus. Further, events and characteristics of American culture oftentimes appear as a separate entity with historic detail, but do not always offer a related analysis of Foxx, his career, or baseball.

James Emory "Jimmie" Foxx appears as the all-American boy from an early age. The son of a tenant farmer with exceptional athletic prowess by age 12, Foxx envisioned himself a sprinter following in the footsteps of his first athletic hero, Olympian Charles W. Paddock. At age 13, Jimmie won state track events and, at 15, was named Maryland's outstanding high school athlete. Between his sophomore and junior years, he played semiprofessional baseball, earning \$20 a week with professional scouts ready to sign him. Such reference to Foxx, the athlete and ballplayer, resounds throughout the book with in-depth emphasis on statistics and records. Little reference, however, or detailed analysis of his early life outside of sport is evident.

Jimmie developed his physical strength and maturity from chores and work with his father, Samuel Dell Foxx. Yet there is little mention of the influence of his father, a better-than-average "town team" catcher, beyond his teaching Jimmie how to throw, catch, and hit a baseball. The influence of his mother's rearing is summed up in a short paragraph that assures the reader that "she did a good job and that his Methodist faith would protect him from the pitfalls and temptations of the world" (p. 15). Jimmie's brother, Sammy Dell, is also omitted from the story of family and home life. Though eight years younger, Sammy Dell emerges in Jimmie's life after baseball when the two brothers return to their hometown of Sudlersville. Later, at his brother's home, Jimmie chokes on a piece of meat during dinner and dies.

It is difficult to clearly define strengths and weaknesses in the book, although both exist. It may, however, be that they cancel one another. Daniel's work exhibits accurate baseball history, much of which spans parts of two centuries. We learn of Alfred J. Reach and Ty Cobb, the first World Series, the first radio broadcast of Major League play-by-play, the Spalding Commission on the origin of baseball, the first Major League night game, and on and on. While these brief accounts are significant to the national pastime, Foxx disappears from events that are often unrelated to him and his career.

Further, in 1924, while Foxx was playing for Easton in the Eastern Shore League, two larger-than-life baseball figures, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis and Connie Mack, attended a home game. Over the next six pages, the reader learns virtually every aspect of the 1919 Black Sox scandal that spawned Landis's position as baseball commissioner. We also learn the detailed circumstances of Connie Mack's presence, a minibiography of Mack's career, as well as a history of the Eastern Shore and Blue Ridge Leagues. Ultimately, Mack signs the 16-year-old Foxx and immediately becomes the guiding force in his life. When Jimmie returns to Sudlersville for his senior year of high school, Mack, concerned for possible

injury to his newly acquired baseball jewel, forbids him to participate in soccer and basketball. In February 1925, against his mother's wishes, Jimmie leaves school for spring training with the Athletics, never to receive his high school diploma.

Connie Mack was a key figure in Foxx's life, but is the minibiography necessary? As for Commissioner Landis, we never learn the purpose of his attendance. Connie Mack liked Jimmie, particularly his baseball talent. To the innocent and naive Foxx, Connie Mack was like a second father, and Jimmie respected him as such, never questioning Mack's decisions. In 1930, Mack signed Foxx to a three-year \$50,000 contract, or \$16,666 per season. Jimmie expressed his appreciation in the Philadelphia papers, ignorant that Mack paid teammates Al Simmons, Lefty Grove, and Mickey Cochrane \$30,000 annually. In 1935, Mack convinced Jimmie it was in his best interests when he sold him to the Boston Red Sox for the cash necessary to acquire younger players.

The book does contain baseball; Jimmie Foxx and baseball; the Philadelphia Athletics and baseball; the Boston Red Sox and baseball. But the games, the seasons, and Foxx's statistics become repetitious, almost routine. Foxx's life off the field also seems routine at times, with limited analysis. The off-season distractions of temporary jobs, hunting, and speaking engagements at high schools—ironically on the importance of an education—travel, going to spring training, swimming, golfing, and getting in shape offered a means to escape the alcohol, depression, and nagging illnesses that gradually became a larger part of his life. Very little becomes evident about his wives and family. His first wife, Helen, was reserved, a homebody, while Jimmie was always on the go with his buddies. His second wife, Dorothy, was more suited to Jimmie's lifestyle. But their extravagant spending quickly exhausted his bank account, and a change in values from Jimmie's Methodist faith that would have protected him from ever-increasing pitfalls and temptations of the world did him no good.

By 1936, with his diminishing athletic prowess, Foxx experienced increasing health problems. He wanted desperately to manage in the majors, but settled for minor league and college jobs, and the All-American Girls' Professional Baseball League's Fort Wayne Daisies in 1951-1952, long after the league's World War II heyday. During his career, he was everybody's pal and gave generously and probably irresponsibly of his time and money. But in retirement few people in or out of baseball came to his aid, and in 1961, Jimmie Foxx filed for bankruptcy.

By 1962, after countless attempts to gain employment in baseball, Foxx expressed his disillusion with the game. In the May issue of *Baseball Monthly* magazine, Foxx's article entitled "I'm Through with Baseball Forever" responded to a frequently asked question, "Why aren't you in baseball as a coach or manager?" Foxx replied, "Baseball doesn't want guys like me . . . Baseball has no room for fellows who built up a lot of prestige as ballplayers. What management wants today is the young executive-type manager. Baseball managing and coaching is a young man's field and old-timers might as well accept the fact. General managers don't want to be bothered by old men, regardless of their earlier contributions to the game as players" (p. 211). Jimmie Foxx was an excellent athlete whose time had passed: a nice guy, a soft touch, and baseball and friends took full advantage.

The research relies heavily on newspaper accounts, while personal interviews appear limited to family members. The accounts of events in baseball history and American society are accurately placed, but sometimes leave the reader to ponder their relationship to Foxx's life and career. Daniel's work provides an interesting read, and we learn for the first time much about a Hall of Fame player from the "Golden Age" of baseball.

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