
PIETRUSZA, DAVID. *Lights On! The Wild Century-Long Saga of Night Baseball*. American Sports History Series. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1997. Pp. ii, 223. Illustrations, index, bibliography. \$39.50 pb.

For baseball fans and detractors, David Pietrusza's *Light On!* is a timely book. The climactic ending of the 1997 World Series cannot easily erase the sight of two fine teams playing anything but fine baseball a couple of nights in frigid, late October Cleveland. The reason, most of us know, is that a great deal of money and prestige was on the line for Major League Baseball and the television networks involved in televising postseason play, as well as important advertisers. Nowadays, the idea of playing World Series day games during the week seems absurdly antiquated when most of the people who apparently will spend money on beer and cars are supposedly at work. Indeed, even the idea of playing World Series day games on weekends disappeared with KC and the Sunshine Band. Apparently, no one with any say in the matter wants to pit World Series games against football for a television audience.

Nevertheless, while many of us might long for World Series games played under the sun, we might also bless the convenience of actually catching at least some of the drama of the World Series before it becomes an ESPN highlight. As a person who generally does not have access to a television or a radio most of the working day, I am willing to put up with a little undermining of baseball tradition. And I don't think I am alone.

In *Lights On!*, David Pietrusza captures the dilemmas underlying the historical development of night baseball. An independent scholar who has written several books about baseball and nonbaseball history, Pietrusza questions the nostalgic cry against night baseball. Yet he writes sympathetically about the misgivings many have had about staging baseball games under the lights. Indeed, one of the highlights of *Lights On!* is a detached analysis of night baseball coming to Chicago's Wrigley Field in 1988.

A past president of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), Pietrusza writes a book revealing the strengths that often emerge from SABR research. Any historian, academic or otherwise, ought to admire SABR's commitment to meticulous research and Pietrusza demonstrates well that commitment. Pietrusza does not explore just the obvious, such as Larry MacPhail's introduction of night baseball to the Major Leagues in the late 1930s and the aforementioned turning the lights on the Cubs and Wrigley Field. He sheds light on earlier endeavors in night baseball among minor league and barnstorming nines such as the Kansas City Monarchs. When possible, his book displays box scores of pioneering night baseball games. Pietrusza even publishes the comparative record of many post-World War II Major Leaguers' performances under the lights. Some readers might protest that this is a bit of typical SABR overkill. However, others will find it interesting that during a period in which Ted Williams batted .356 overall, he hit .403 at night, and that Ted Schoendienst batted .348 at night while hitting .278 overall.

Like much of the SABR work, *Lights On!* includes research nuggets. For example, as someone interested in baseball in California and the participation in baseball of diverse racial and ethnic groups, I found fascinating Pietrusza's reference to a team call the "Sioux Indians of South Dakota," which toured the west coast in 1905. On July 30 of that year, the "Sioux Indians" played an afternoon game and a night game in Fullerton, California, against the local Olinda Oil Wells, which featured the pitching of a young Walter Johnson. Apparently, the "Sioux Indian" nine was no nickel-and-dime outfit. The team traveled in private cars and brought along a canvas fence as an enclosure as well as a portable grandstand. The "Sioux Indians" also, according to Pietrusza, played good baseball. Johnson beat them in the afternoon, but they walloped the Olinda team in the nightcap. Who were these "Sioux Indians"? Were they really Native Americans? Were they Sioux? It is not necessarily Pietrusza's responsibility in this book to answer these questions. But his book challenges readers interested in the social and cultural history of American baseball to delve deeper into many of the issues emerging from *Lights On!*

At the same time, more academic scholars will find the lack of thorough documentation annoying. More serious to some will be the lack of a conceptual framework to analyze the development of night baseball. For example, does baseball's adoption of night games fit Gutmann's modernization thesis or a Marxist perspective?

I suspect one has to love the game of baseball to get the most out of *Lights On!* In any event, David Pietrusza, if he is to succeed, ought to teach us something we didn't know about the crazy quilt experiences of American baseball. In this respect, Pietrusza has provided us with useful documentation of a relatively underemphasized aspect of baseball's history.

—Joel S. Franks
San Jose State University