

Given the widespread popularity of basketball in black communities by the late 1920s and early 1930s, this exclusion by Christgau is significant.

Although Christgau acknowledges that any discussion of activities on the basketball floor is rendered meaningless “as long as it is divorced from lives and history” (xii), he does not explore the impact of events such as the Depression or World War II on the history and direction of basketball and the people who were involved in the game. The storytelling style of the book and corresponding preoccupation with play-by-play detail gives the impression that basketball existed in a cultural vacuum. While that perspective can make for a readable and engaging narrative, it ultimately lacks the critical lens demanded by sport history scholars.

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Riess, Steven A. *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (rev. ed.). Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999. Pp. vii + 308. Illustrated. Notes, appendix, index. \$49.95 cb, \$18.95 pb.

In his introduction to the revised edition of *Touching Base*, Steven Riess reviews the status of sport history within the general field of history in the U.S. He notes that until the late 1960s, sport history was practically invisible. Many academics sneered at the idea of such a discipline. University of Kentucky historian Carl Cone suppressed his writings in sport history at the beginning of his career (c. 1940s) because “they might have counted against me as indicative of a young assistant professor who was not seriously engaged with the discipline of history” (2). Riess discusses some notable advances in sport history since Cone made the above statement in 1979, but also points out that to date no history department in the U.S. has advertised a position in the area of sport history.

Published in 1980, the original edition of *Touching Base* was one of the pioneering works in integrating sport history into the mainstream of American history. It was one of the first monographs to successfully examine sport (baseball) in the larger context of social and cultural history (the Progressive Era). Riess studied the game by focusing on its central elements, spectators, owners, and players, in the cities of Atlanta, Chicago, and New York. Since Riess completed his research for the original edition, the number of quality books and articles in sport history (with baseball in the forefront) has exploded.

The first chapter of the revised edition, “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” is a comprehensive narrative and historiography on baseball from the Civil War period through the early 1920s, with particular emphasis on the themes Riess analyzes in the remaining four chapters. It brings together for the reader the important research and interpretations concerning baseball over the last twenty years. As is the case throughout the book, Riess successfully blends together theory, historiography, and narrative on specific teams and individuals to hold the reader’s attention. The introductory chapter is a gem in that it concisely lays out for the reader the early history of the game and its relationship with

trends and movements in the larger society. Here, Riess effectively highlights the role—or lack thereof—of minorities in the national game, something he did not fully address in the earlier edition. “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” could well stand alone as a guide for anyone contemplating a serious study of baseball.

In the main body of the book, Riess examines a number of myths associated with Progressive Era baseball. Skillfully utilizing recent research to augment his own extensive work, Riess depicts professional baseball as basically an urban game, with a middle class audience and the majority of ballplayers from the same social rank. The game was widely perceived, however, as a pastoral pastime evoking America’s simpler agrarian history and as the people’s game. While promoters of baseball pointed to its democratic merits and uplifting effect on people and society, the fact was that club owners were often allied with the machine politicians who were targets of Progressive reform. Riess also refutes the common assumption that baseball acted as a melting pot and aided immigrants in the process of assimilation. At least in the Progressive Era, most immigrants had neither the free time to watch baseball games nor the opportunity to learn and play the game well.

There is little not to like about *Touching Base*. Riess impressively blends his major arguments from the first edition and his ongoing research with the substantial literature on baseball that has appeared since 1980. The materials are so well integrated that one would have to carefully study the documentation to discern that the revised edition was based on an earlier work. However, Riess does not fully address why he selected the three cities under consideration. Why examine the New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers, two teams from the same city? One suspects that the availability of sources may have played a role, but Riess gives no explanation. In addition, Riess provides only minimal discussion of the various interpretations of Progressives and the Progressive Era. The reader might have benefitted from a short overview of the differing interpretations concerning this fascinating era. These points aside, Riess and the University of Illinois Press have provided sport historians with a valuable volume.

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