

shares much with other American enterprise: "There is ever increasing bureaucracy, commercialization, hierarchy and quantification; and the bottom line remains the bottom line" (246). But they observe that the essence of baseball as a game with its excitement, daily wins and losses, and team atmosphere create an enthusiasm rare in other lines of employment.

The book should serve as a model for many future studies. Thesis advisors at large universities could profitably direct some of their students to examine the nature of the contemporary university sports business. Similar studies of collegiate football and basketball employees—athletic directors, parking attendants, athletes and academic support personnel—might prove equally compelling. A wide range of similar studies would test and enhance the generalizations laid out by Gmelch and Weiner, and compare working in baseball with other sports.

This book obviously appeals to any serious student of contemporary sports and to those interested in the modern work experience. Anyone interested in baseball at the park will enjoy it, and after reading may adopt the authors' approach: "Now when at the ballpark, we find ourselves paying as much attention to the workers off the playing field and their routines as the play itself" (xii).

—JIM HARPER
Texas Tech University

Koppett, Leonard. *Koppett's Concise History of Major League Baseball*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998. Pp. xiv + 521. Tables, appendices, index. \$34.95 cb.

In a volume with over five hundred pages of text, some in double columns, veteran sportswriter Leonard Koppett produces a thorough, albeit not concise, history of major league baseball. In his preface, Koppett states that his target audience is general readers, particularly younger baseball fans who seem to lack an appreciation for the origins of major league baseball. Accordingly, Koppett's volume will not replace the histories by Charles Alexander, Harold Seymour, David Voigt, and Benjamin Rader upon the scholar's book shelf.

However, serious students of baseball will find much of value in Koppett's work. The short, yet amazingly detailed, summaries of each season, including World Series, All-Star games, and playoffs, furnish the playing field context for the evaluation of more complex changes in American culture and baseball. But Koppett's greatest contribution is his narrative account regarding how the business of baseball has evolved since the 1840s. While this chronology of baseball as an industry may alienate his more general readership, Koppett's insights make the contemporary financial structure of major league baseball understandable as the culmination of a struggle between owners, intent upon controlling the labor supply, and players, seeking the establishment of a countervailing power to monopolistic business practices.

Thus, Koppett observes that the National League was established in 1876 by Albert Goodwill Spalding and William Hulbert in an effort to impose control over the talent

pool and assure profits for owners staging professional contests in which the popular sport of baseball was emerging as the national pastime. After beating back a challenge from the American Association in the mid-1880s the National League created a national agreement with the American League in 1902 under which each league would honor the other's reserve system restricting free agencies, thereby keeping club payrolls low. Salaries increased again temporarily in 1914–1915, before the baseball establishment was able to crush the Federal League insurgency.

Ownership's proclivity to monopolistic control contributed to the frustrations producing baseball's Black Sox scandal and the "fixed" World Series of 1919. According to baseball legend, the sport was saved by Babe Ruth's home run bat and the autocratic powers of baseball commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis. Koppett, hardly a traditionalist of the dead ball era, credits a more lively offense as responsible for baseball's recovery, while the sportswriter finds the legacy of Landis more ambiguous. Noting Landis's racial prejudice which blocked the integration of baseball, Koppett writes that if the judge was alive today, he would be a "highly successful radio talk-show host of the right-wing persuasion" (162). Perhaps of even greater danger to the game is the illusion, furthered by Landis, that the Commissioner, who in reality is an employee of ownership, is an impartial figure who can intervene in labor disputes for the "good of the game."

While the Great Depression and World War II limited baseball's labor wars, the post-war world of franchise transfers (which had remained stable for over fifty years), expansion, threats of antitrust legislation, pension funds, and rising revenues from radio and television led to the formation of the Major League Players Association under the leadership of union representative Marvin Miller. The ensuing confrontation between players and owners altered power relationships, culminating in arbitration, free agency, and the bitter work stoppages of 1972, 1981, and 1994–95. Koppett perceives the triumph of the players union as due to the sound leadership of Miller, heroic sacrifice of Curt Flood, and incompetence of management. Koppett concludes that ownership ignored the labor front for too long, and "reacted to it with uniform impatience, arrogance, underestimation, and blind stubbornness, all of which led to self-inflicted defeat" (310). Thus, baseball management underestimated player solidarity, and during arbitration cases and public labor negotiations, owners denigrated the very athletes upon whom they depended for box office receipts. However, the resiliency of baseball is evident in the sport's popular comeback from the labor wars of the mid-1990s.

While Koppett is confident that baseball will continue to deliver an interesting product on the playing field, he is convinced that the 1994 strike, which led to the cancellation of the World Series that year, fundamentally altered the complexion of the game. Koppett does not bemoan free agency, which he asserts has enhanced competition. Instead, Koppett argues, "The perception of baseball's romance as distinct from its business operations was permanently tarnished if not totally erased" (446). Nevertheless, Koppett's narrative suggests that the romance of major league baseball was always somewhat of an illusion, especially when the sport's business practices are fully illuminated.

In conclusion, Koppett's "concise" history should be of interest to both scholars and serious fans of baseball. The sportswriter's prose is sometimes pedestrian, but the account is embellished with colorful opinions of baseball leadership, both past and present. Koppett's

lack of formal training as a historian means that the larger social, economic, and political forces promoting change in baseball and American culture are often left unexplored. This history contains neither end notes nor a bibliography, relying instead primarily upon Koppett's in-depth knowledge of baseball gained during his reporting on the sport over the last sixty years. And it is these first-hand observations, along with a sincere love for baseball, which make this book a worthwhile read.

—RON BRILEY
Sandia Preparatory School

Kelley, Brent. *Baseball's Biggest Blunder: The Bonus Rule of 1953–1957*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997. Pp. 232. \$38.50 cb.

What do Don Kaiser and Kenny Kuhn have in common with Sandy Koufax and Harmon Killebrew? Not much beyond the first letter of their last name, it would seem. Oh yes, Kaiser and Koufax were pitchers, two of the minor differences being career strikeout numbers of 108 and 2,396 respectively (en route to 6 and 165 victories respectively). And Kuhn and Killebrew were infielders, two of the minor differences being home run totals of 0 and 573 on at-bats of 81 and 8,147 (need I add respectively?). But one overriding similarity—and two more notes of alliteration—remain. All four were “bonus babies,” making all four co-conspirators in what Brent Kelley deems to have been “baseball’s biggest blunder.”

This was baseball’s *biggest* blunder? In all probability, such was not even the case as of the mid-1950s. And certainly such is not the case as of the late 1990s. Has Kelley (whose vocation is veterinary medicine and whose avocation is baseball history) forgotten the multiple strikes of recent decades and the multiple fiascos surrounding the events, not to mention the canceled events, of the seasons (?) of 1994 and 1995?

In the cases of Messrs. Koufax and Killebrew, the “bonus baby” rule proved to be anything but disastrous. And in the cases of Kaiser and Kuhn it may have given them a taste of the big leagues they might not otherwise have ever experienced. Who knows? In fact, if his history of the bonus rule proves anything, it’s that judging baseball talent is a crapshoot, albeit sometimes a very expensive one.

Injuries, of course, cannot be predicted. Eighteen-year-old Bob (“Hawk”) Taylor was a “can’t miss” catcher signed by the pennant-bound Milwaukee Braves in 1957. Only twice in eleven injury-riddled major league seasons did he have as many as 100 at bats—and most of those as a pinch hitter. In fact, he was playing that role on August 17, 1966, when he earned a brief footnote in baseball history by hitting the first pinch hit grand slam in New York Met history.

Most of the rest of the “bonus babies” played (or did not play) without Taylor’s recurring excuse. Sooner rather than later, they retired—minus even his minor claim to fame. Lacking the talent or the temperament, they took the money and spent the requisite two years somewhere on a big league bench before finding more productive, if more obscure, lines of work. Kelley hints that many of these prospects might have had solid big league