

Time: Baseball as History (2000) [see also review on page 164—ED.], notes that changing cultural patterns and harsh economic conditions provided fertile ground for Rickey's farm system concept to grow in the 1930s. According to Tygiel, Rickey's system met the needs of struggling minor league operations despite its critics. Minor league clubs thus welcomed affiliation with major league clubs willing to subsidize the payroll and other expenses.

Koppett's failure to understand and explore links between baseball and the world beyond the ballpark is evident in his dismissive treatment of Jackie Robinson's entrance into major league baseball as relevant to Rickey's managerial philosophy. Koppett quips that "the Robinson story, as important as it is, has been described in detail in many fine books, available in all libraries. It does not need retelling here" (67). According to Koppett, Rickey's farm system concept is the only area of concern for the purposes of his book. Koppett fails to recognize that as a consummate businessman, Rickey worked to create a large pool of potential players from which exemplary athletes might be drawn. Thus Rickey's interest in Robinson and the rest of the players in the Negro Leagues was as much about the bottom line as eradicating injustice. As Tygiel suggests, Rickey's unwavering commitment to finding and refining talent cannot be divorced from his excitement at having "uncovered a remarkably cheap source of talent" in Jackie Robinson and the Negro Leagues.

Uncritical commentary and sweeping generalizations about the changing structure of managing major league baseball teams permeate this text. For a more mainstream audience the discussion and conclusions may be suitable and even welcomed. The book will be much less appealing to those who desire a more searching look at issues of change and continuity in baseball, and more generally in sport.

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LEVINE, PETER. *The Rabbi of Swat*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999. Pp. 268. \$19.99 cb.

Peter Levine, a noted sports historian whose book *Ellis Island to Ebbets Field* documented the Jewish sports experience in the United States, has written an entertaining novel in *The Rabbi of Swat*. A mixture of baseball history (some of which is intentionally wrong), Jewish immigrant culture, and narrative play, this novel deals with the themes of religious prejudice and fathers and sons. But the "driving force" (2) behind the story, as he calls himself, is Babe Ruth who appears as both character and intrusive narrator and gives the book humor and pizzazz.

The novel concerns Morrie Ginsberg, a new pitcher for John McGraw's New York Giants. His nickname, the Rabbi of Swat, is, of course, a play on one of Babe Ruth's, the Sultan of Swat. Through this character, Levine explores the prejudice against Jews in baseball and their outsider status in the 1920s. Ginsberg, becoming the darling of the Jewish fan base, is befriended by his batterymate, taken to a nightclub, and introduced to Doris, a pretty Rockette. Quickly becoming involved and spending Rosh Hashanah together,

Ginsberg and Doris prove that cultural differences can easily be overcome. The girl's interest in Jewish food (and there is a lot of food in this book) serves to break down any resistance to a Gentile girl on the part of the Ginsbergs. The plot thickens when some smalltime Jewish gangsters conspire to repeat the Black Sox Scandal of 1919 and involve the pitcher in their scheme.

While the plot of the novel is fun, the real appeal of *The Rabbi of Swat* is the presence of Ruth. Within the storyline, Ruth appears as a character, interacting with Ginsberg at the nightclub, hitting 60 home runs, and playing against the Giants in the 1928 World Series (the main alternate history aspect of the novel). The most interesting feature of this book, however, is the way Ruth stands outside the action and comments on it. As he explains, he is up to date on all of twentieth century pop culture, psychological theory, and the Jewish tradition, which makes for very funny asides. At regular intervals, Ruth discusses Levine's storytelling, his errors in baseball history, and the ways he himself has been characterized through the years. He says he has read everything written about himself by all the respected historians—"Creamer, Sobol, Smelser, Crepeau and the like"—and seen all the movies, even *Field of Dreams*, which "had the chutzpah to leave me out of the cornfields and that conveniently forgot to put me on that cockamammy [*sic*] baseball field in the middle of nowhere" (1). In a later soliloquy, he complains, "I mean not one of the books about me even begins to tap the depths of my psyche and soul. At best, in the hands of an occasional skilled historian, I become a hero of excess and curious nostalgia, well-suited to the 1920s. But the others don't even come close to capturing my complexity" (153). Another of Ruth's narrative functions is to puncture the clichés of the baseball novel. Predictable elements like the World Series fix, the big game, the rookie pitcher, and the inevitable father-son theme all work due to the Babe's hooting and ironic comments.

The novel does have a few small problems, especially for baseball historians. Purists might object to the intentional historical errors; on the other hand, they are accounted for and provide material for Ruth's conversations with the reader. However, some errors or omissions seem unintentional. For example, Mel Ott of the Giants is known for having never played in the minor leagues, yet Levine writes about John McGraw: "he had another rookie fresh up from the minors named Ott, who he was eager to try" (19). He also misses an opportunity to mention New York in his passage about the Waner brothers. Levine correctly calls them "Big Poison" and "Little Poison" (17), but neglects to explain the origin of these nicknames and the fact that they parody an exaggerated New York pronunciation of Big and Little "Person." This omission is somewhat surprising, because Levine otherwise mentions New York traditions and names wherever possible.

In fact, this book is a letter to the author's family and old neighborhood. Levine presents the immigrants' anxieties, difficulties with the concept of baseball, and their speech patterns with humor and affection. *The Rabbi of Swat* works—based on an irresistible concept, the outrageous persona of Babe Ruth, it also conveys the author's love of family and place.

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