
LITTLEWOOD, MARY L. *Women's Fastpitch Softball—The Path To The Gold: An Historical Look at Women's Fastpitch in the United States*. Columbia, MO: National Fastpitch Coaches Association, 1998. Pp. i + 274. Illustrated. Appendices. \$42.95 cb.

Very soon after I began playing organized softball, as a junior high student in the mid-1970s, the International Women's Professional Softball Association (IWPSA) made its debut in ten cities across the United States. Fortunately, my hometown of Buffalo, New York sponsored a team in the association, so I had an opportunity to watch strong, gifted female athletes in the professional league's infancy. Mary Littlewood speaks to the activities of the IWPSA, and much more, as she chronicles fastpitch history from the 1880s through the U.S.'s gold medal at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia. The first six chapters of the book detail fastpitch softball history from the late nineteenth century to the present. The remaining four chapters are thematically organized, devoting attention to international play, pitching styles, American Softball Association (ASA) rules, and college softball history.

On one level the largely descriptive narrative satisfies Littlewood's purpose to provide the reader with a better understanding of "the events and happenings that were landmarks along the path to the Olympic gold medal" (preface). Some of softball's rich history is described through the use of numerous photographs and colorful inserts. For example, one insert includes portions of a daily log written by a member of the Phoenix Ramblers in 1938 as the team traveled east to New York. This brief account provides readers with a unique opportunity to glimpse the experiences of elite fastpitch softball players of the period (17). In addition, the short biographical sketches of ASA Hall of Fame inductees in the appendices are informative, mainly because the narratives contain a fair amount of oral history material from a number of athletes.

Unfortunately, while the "coffee table book" approach to history is visually appealing, it fails to thoroughly engage important cultural issues surrounding women's involvement in softball. Most notable is the author's scant attention to the continual tension concerning femininity and athleticism that permeated attitudes towards female softball participants throughout much of the twentieth century. In a brief section entitled "[T]he Feminine Issue," Littlewood alludes to the "great ugliness" of the 1940s-60s which equated female softball players with lesbianism. She concludes that the "lifestyle of these women should have been incidental, but instead it became a major issue that caused many problems for a lot of people" (28). In addition to clearly understating the enormity of homophobia's impact on softball for women—both straight and gay—we are left believing that with the end of the decade of the 1960s came an end to homophobic rhetoric and practice.

Just as issues pertaining to sexuality are pushed to the margins of the book's content, so too is race and softball's place beyond the white community. Interestingly, given the game's popularity among Asian American and African American women during the middle decades of the twentieth century, including this aspect of softball's history would have underscored the grandness of a game that stretched across race, class, and region. Regretta-

bly, there is no mention of the individuals or teams who played, and worked to promote, fastpitch softball in racially marginalized communities.

Littlewood's efforts to pay tribute to Billie Harris's early career in the late 1940s and early 1950s reflects the author's inability to move beyond a perception of softball as a white woman's game to one into which African American women occasionally ventured. Littlewood notes that Harris, the first African American woman inducted into the ASA Hall of Fame, joined the all-white Phoenix Ramblers after coaches saw her great athleticism while she played for an all-black squad in Tucson. According to the author, "[e]ven though there were some all-black women's softball teams in the country... there were few if any black women playing on a predominately white team" (53-54). While the latter half of the statement reflects historical accuracy, the former portion discounts the vast scope of women's softball within the segregated African American community during the period.

Littlewood's efforts to pay homage to female softball athletes whose careers predated the experiences of the 1996 gold medal winning team is clearly an outgrowth of her own lifetime passion and commitment to the game. Such an endeavor is a worthy task, given the exclusion of female athletes from history's mainstream. However, Littlewood may have better served and paid tribute to past heroines of the diamond had she delved more deeply into the obstacles encountered by these women as they attempted to play a sport they loved.

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ROSSI, JOHN P. *The National Game: Baseball and American Culture*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000. Pp. ix + 243 pp. Illustrated. Index, bibliography. \$25.00 cb.

Americans have a long and well-chronicled love affair with baseball, a relationship John Rossi seeks to explain in this synthetic overview. His intent is to explore the connections between baseball and American history with the idea that "you can learn a lot of American history through baseball" (ix). The result is a highly readable, compact history of the game placed in the context of American development.

The book is organized into ten chapters, covering baseball from its origins to the present day, with some speculations on the game's future. The chapters follow a similar pattern. Each opens with a brief survey of American society and history for the period under study, followed by a discussion of the state of major league baseball in the era, then an account of the major developments in the game during each respective period.

Rossi provides a very concise history of professional baseball. After tracing its origins before the Civil War, he details the rise of the game in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Baseball had no real rivals, and the professionalization and commercialization of the sport during this period mirrored post-Civil War industrial development. By the end of the century, it was a sport widely enjoyed by the middle and working classes, and it became a vehicle of integration for immigrants. In the twentieth century, Rossi describes the ups and downs of the major leagues. Baseball benefited from the rise of radio