

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.

—RITA LIBERTI

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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

and enjoyed its golden age in the 1920s, but later had to cope with challenges such as rival sports, moving franchises, and free agency.

Rossi points out that despite the many crises baseball has faced, it stays afloat because it is so imbedded in the culture. This book is not based on any particular model of culture, and Rossi gives only a few hints as to why baseball has achieved its mythic status. He suggests that part of its appeal has to do with longevity; its popularity rests, in part, on the fact that it has such a long history. Rossi also argues that the sport has changed little over the years. Unlike football or basketball, it is essentially the same sport played by past generations. Rossi also emphasizes the sport's ability to integrate minorities and immigrants and act as a glue for American society.

This book is aimed at a general audience, so hardcore baseball fans may be disappointed by the light treatment of players and games. Many of the tales are familiar, from the on-field exploits of Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth to the off-field influences of Albert Spalding, Kennesaw Mountain Landis, and Branch Rickey. Rossi is clearly a fan of the game, and generally takes a positive view of the game and its players. Despite racial problems, Rossi asserts that baseball has usually been more progressive than the nation as a whole.

Although much of the information about baseball history is not new, Rossi does baseball a service with his smooth synthesis. The strength of the book lies in the author's ability to tell an engaging story and to relate it to American history. He also provides an exceptionally complete and useful overview of baseball's history in the bibliographic essay. By and large, Rossi does prove his point: you can learn a lot of history through baseball.

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THORNLEY, STEW. *Land of the Giants: New York's Polo Grounds*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000. Pp. x + 143. Illustrated. Notes, bibliographic essay, index, appendices. \$32.50 cb.

Stew Thornley commits himself to chronicling the history of the Polo Grounds and succeeds, presenting a changing and complex narrative that lasted nearly three-quarters of a century. He creates rich images of several of the most intriguing personalities and events that have made this history unique. These include John Day, John McGraw, Charlie Faust, "Merkle's Boner," and Bobby Thompson's home run. Thornley also affixes some fascinating personal accounts, including tales from a New York Giant batboy and a groundskeeper who actually lived inside the stadium, and subtly bringing out the differences between the cultures of baseball past and contemporary, while weaving in these raw and greatly entertaining baseball tales. He gives each of the four respective Polo Grounds sites its own identity, and uses highly descriptive prose to create imagery that enhances his text.

The overall organization of the book makes it very readable (save a curious final chapter describing the diversity of events held at the Polo Grounds, one that probably would have been better suited for the opening of the work). Thornley supplies essential background information on the rule variations between the contemporary and pre-twentieth-century