

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

game, the history behind Sunday baseball, and the disagreements between the National League and the Brotherhood/Players' League.

Despite gathering piles of secondary evidence, however, Thornley is only mildly analytical of some of his primary newspaper and magazine accounts. He does provide a few small anecdotes from oral history, as well as some convincing data in his appendices that juxtaposes the home-run production of Babe Ruth, Willie Mays, and Mel Ott in several different ballparks. This discussion of the peculiar dimensions of the Polo Grounds and their influence on hitters and pitchers is one of the stronger points of Thornley's work; it certainly buttresses his point that all of the Polo Grounds ballparks were structural enigmas. Yet, while this theme is interlaced throughout the text, much of the stronger analysis is allocated to the appendices.

While Thornley provides the most complete and accurate discussion of the Polo Grounds to date, the book has some shortcomings. Thornley neglects any mention of Roy Cohn, the first Jewish Major League ballplayer, who was employed by the Giants. Cohn was brought in to stimulate Jewish interest in New York, and was an important and fascinating element of Polo Ground lore. When discussing the catastrophic fire that destroyed Polo Grounds III, Thornley passes too quickly on the idea that there may have been foul play involved. Further, when touching upon the experiences of African American mascots of professional baseball clubs, he does not give careful-enough attention to the racial construction of these roles. Finally, Thornley provides little insightful discussion on the impact of the Giants franchise moving to San Francisco. If his primary purpose was to write a history of the Polo Grounds, and the fundamental component of the Polo Grounds was the Giants, there certainly exists the need to discuss the social implications of the team leaving New York.

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