

Adelson, Bruce. *Brushing Back Jim Crow: The Integration of Minor-League Baseball in the American South*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999. Pp. 288. Bibliography, photographs. \$27.95 cb.

Green, Ernest J. *The Diamonds of Dixie: Travels Through the Southern Minor Leagues*. Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1998. Pp. 272. Short bibliography, photographs, index. \$21.95 cb.

For the last fifty years, the South has experienced an on-going transformation of its economic and racial relationships. The ever shifting winds of change have been so unpredictable that had the South been a tree its limbs and trunk would have been bent and twisted. Both Bruce Adelson and Ernest Green have written two significant books that provide readers with fresh insights into the changes that have occurred.

Adelson's *Brushing Back Jim Crow* discusses at length the efforts of young African Americans to integrate minor league baseball in the South. As a sports journalist and a National Public Radio commentator, he argues that the baseball diamond represented a major ingredient in the revolution of southern race relations. Jackie Robinson served as the catalyst for change in 1947 when he broke the barriers to black participation in the major leagues. He became the role model for young black athletes who wanted to play baseball at the highest levels. It took four years, but in March of 1951, J. W. Wingate stepped onto the field in Lamesa, Texas, where the Lobos played in the Class C West Texas-New Mexico League and integrated the South's minor league system. Later, in August, Percy Miller joined the Danville (Virginia) Leafs as the Carolina League's first black ballplayer. Neither graduated to the big leagues, but their determination to play encouraged other black ball players to sign professional contracts.

The 1952 season marked the first time that the South had integrated baseball from April through September. In the months before the beginning of spring practice, Adelson noted, talented black ball players were in demand. Several were signed including Napoleon Daniels (Sooner State League), Charlie Roach (Coastal Plain League), Mickey Stubblefield (Kitty League) and Dave Hoskins (Texas League). Of these, only Hoskins received a promotion to the majors—Cleveland. To their credit, however, these athletes demonstrated that racial preconceptions were a mistake and "it was time to employ blacks on their team" (p. 59). After 1952, the door opened wider and wider enabling some of baseball's greatest players to step through: Hank Aaron, Felipe Alou, Willie Mays, and Billy Williams.

Still, all of these athletes faced numerous trials and tribulations. Many of the minor leaguers discovered that they, could not ride the team bus to the game, and if they did, they had to sit on the back seat. After the game, they ate alone in the bus or in the restaurant kitchen or not at all. When they went home, they were the last to be dropped off, most often, in the segregated portion of town where they lived in vastly inferior housing. On the field, they had to learn to dodge fastballs aimed at their heads. They had to make putouts on the infield without being spiked. They had to listen to fans who were

ever ready to criticize their actions by tossing out an insult, a racial slur or even a rock. Then, when the young black players returned to the bench, they found few words of encouragement. Their teammates ignored them. Many years later, Percy Miller stated, "Ignoring people is sometimes worse than words" (p. 44).

Unlike Jackie Robinson, the black minor leaguers had no Branch Rickey to supervise their "southern experiment." For the most part, they battled alone. In fact, in the early days, the owners who signed a black ballplayer did so not for any humanitarian reason but to make money. The club directors saw the African American community as an untapped revenue source. According to Adelson, the clubs used the black athlete to fill the stands. Interestingly, the more fans that came to the park, the more they discovered the poor facilities afforded to members of their race. At this point, the black community expressed their collective anger at their second class treatment. From Norfolk, Virginia, to Savannah, Georgia, to Greenville, Mississippi, they demanded an end to segregated seating. They demanded a cessation to the separate entrances to the ballpark. They demanded improved facilities within the park and the signing of additional black players. If their demands were ignored, three years before *Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka* and four years before Rosa Parks, they boycotted games. They stayed away from local parks until southern segregationists removed the barriers to the full enjoyment of their rights.

Southern state legislators refused to stand idly by as the walls of segregation collapsed on the baseball diamond. Across the region, legislators passed laws restating their commitment to Jim Crow, especially in the states of Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi. In a chapter entitled "Louisiana's Sinful Ways," Adelson has presented the madness of the massive resistance to change.

Of course, all of this controversy had an impact on the young black athlete who wanted to play professional baseball. He found himself in a small southern town where blacks and whites rarely interacted in a meaningful way, unlike the larger cities where racial tolerance often developed. More often than not, the constant assault by the segregationists stiffened their resolve to succeed. Some were crushed by the challenge, but others accepted it; they kept coming out to the ball park, day after day, no matter what the obstacles. "It was a motivator," claimed Henry Aaron (p. 90). Nonetheless, in 1958 and 1959, the Federal District courts asserted the supremacy of the United States Constitution. The more laws the segregationists passed in their legislatures, the more laws the courts declared unconstitutional. In the end, Adelson concluded, baseball promoted everlasting change in the South. He feels that integration on the diamond had helped to soften racial prejudices and to send powerful tides of empowerment throughout the African American community.

Ernest Green has written a thought provoking and complimentary volume to Adelson's *Brushing Back Jim Crow*. In 1953, the Maryland sociologist criss-crossed the south in a 1973 Chevrolet pickup decked out with a camper top and a sign on his windshield warning: "Beware of Dog." The author traveled over 15,000 miles from Florida to the Carolinas, from Georgia to Tennessee, and from Louisiana to Texas. Along the way he visited thirty-three baseball parks and attended ninety games. At almost each of the parks, he provided the reader with a history of the site, the measurements from homeplate to the outfield wall, and at least one or two introductions to members of the local front office.

Why did Professor Green make this trip? He was influenced by David Lamb's travel account entitled *Stolen Season*. Lamb had recorded his thoughts on the minor leagues while traveling across the United States, but Green decided to focus on the South. He had taught for twenty-seven years, and what better way to face retirement and a life without class preparations? However, Green failed to shed his academic background: the trip became a journey of discovery. Even though he brought his fishing pole with him, he fixed his mind on answering two questions. In the first place, he sought to find out whether or not the traditional South continued to exist. Secondly, he wanted to discover if minor league baseball in the South had retained its popularity, or had the penetration of major league teams pre-empted the enthusiasm for the local teams?

Beneath the glitz and economic development of the past fifty years, Green found the Old South of myth and lore. On the less traveled roads, he discovered that Southerners still used the southern drawl to communicate with each other and that the humorist Lewis Grizzard's books were selling in bookstores. He also noted that fast food chains included southern dishes on their menus. Moreover, he experienced the region's predisposition for xenophobia while visiting Ty Cobb's hometown of Royston, Georgia. In less than one hour, the police tagged Green as an outsider and subjected him to their scrutiny on at least two occasions. The visit, Green noted, provided him with a better understanding of the tempestuous Cobb.

These visits to the blue line communities saddened Green and prompted him to speak out against the character of economic progress. He found that southern main streets were no longer crowded with shoppers or rambling teenagers. Instead, he saw vacant main streets, too few shoppers, and boarded-up commercial establishments. The life blood of southern communities had been sucked out by the development of commercial strips, that lacked planning and were "spewed pell mell over automobile-driven stretches" (p. 198). Now, the traffic on the streets led to the outskirts of town where the Wal-marts operated as a nerve center of commercial activity that placed a premium on the automobile and fostered a separation from family and friends. The automobile clashed with southern individualism and became in Green's opinion a "Solitary Cocoon."

Southern minor league franchises were affected by the collapse of the inner city, Green concluded. Fans lost interest in attending games. They no longer identified with their local team or players. In some instances, such as the Carolina Mudcats, the owners attempted to repair this neutering by building a "fan-friendly" park. In other instances, however, the owners developed a new attitude toward the game. They viewed it as entertainment, and clubs focused on selling concessions rather than tickets. "Concessions! Concessions!" chanted Bill Valentine, General Manager of the Little Rock Travelers. "Get'em into the park! The bottom line is how much money you make, not how many people pay for a ticket. We aren't selling baseball. We're selling entertainment. G-rated family entertainment" (p. 188). Clubs used promotional gimmicks to keep the game interesting. They sponsored tap dancing on the tops of dugouts or the dizzy bat contest. Giveaway nights were more frequent than nights without promotions.

Still, Green pointed out, the actual purpose of the leagues remained the same. They developed players for the major leagues and the scouts, according to Wally Moon, judged prospects on their "Bat speed, control of the bat, ability to hit to all fields, and the ability

to select pitches" (p. 35). Initially, as Green reminded his readers, the minor leagues developed to find talent so that the clubs could sell contracts to teams with a higher classification. Over the years, the major leagues had taken over most of these franchises owning, at one time, entire leagues. But, in 1995, Green indicated, every major league club owned five farm teams.

Interestingly, he provided an insight into the game and its standing among the African American community. He found out that blacks were conspicuously absent from southern minor league parks. There existed a general consensus that nonwhite, ethnic, inner-city youth were "no more interested in baseball than polo" (p. 128). When asked, African American fans complained about the high cost of attending the games; the tickets and the concession charges were beyond their means. At almost every ballpark, Green asked club officials about this situation. As a rule, the general managers lacked an understanding of the problem even though each official expressed their concern about its existence. The Memphis Chicks proved to be the exception. Under the leadership of Tom Stocker, the team's Director of Broadcasting, the club had adopted a program inaugurated by the majors entitled Return Baseball to the Inner Cities (RBI). The Chicks were committed to providing equipment, advice and supervision to inner-city youths in hope of rekindling the game's acceptance by the Tennessee river city. Why? The black community constituted 35 percent of the population, yet only 1 percent came to the Chicks' games.

Both Adelson and Green have produced well researched and well written works that add significantly to our understanding of sports and the southern experience. For the serious researcher who wants to go beyond the authors' paragraphs, there will be disappointment. Adelson exhibited too much of the sportswriter and not enough of the sports historian. He fails to provide a discussion of the historical basis of segregation and an appreciation of the complimentary activities of the civil rights revolution. Moreover, neither author provided footnotes to their many sources nor did they include any information on the numerous interviews they conducted. To his credit, Adelson has provided a lengthy bibliography, but he also placed a burden on the reader by not including an index. Nonetheless, readers will find both volumes most helpful in unraveling the role of minor league baseball and the South during the last fifty years.

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