

significance of what he observed. I never really figured out the title of the book, which might be an ounce too cute. I did not find serenity inside the ring. I would have liked the afterward in the new edition to have returned to some of the themes in the text and reanalyzed the boxers and their world that he had reported on. This is a terrific book, and I strongly recommend it to anyone interested in boxing.

These two books on boxing are about as different as they could possibly be. One lesson to readers of this journal might be that journalists should leave history to the historians, and we historians should leave journalism to the journalists. Writing is a sufficiently difficult task when one is in one's milieu. Stepping outside one's domain is a daunting venture and should be approached with caution.

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THOMAS, HENRY W. *Walter Johnson: Baseball's Big Train*. With a foreword by Shirley Povich. 1995. Reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1998. Pp. xiii + 496. Illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$22.50 pb.

HIGBE, KIRBY WITH MARTIN QUIGLEY. *The High Hard One*. 1967. Reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1998. Pp. 189. Afterward by co-author Martin Quigley. No illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography or index. \$11.00 pb.

Over the past decade and a half, university presses such as Illinois, Nebraska, and Oxford, among others, have seemingly *discovered* sport history and have created series to encourage publication in this area. These three, in particular, have been primary leaders in this genre, and sport scholars have every reason to be grateful for such support. With highly qualified scholar/editors shepherding the respective series, each house has added immeasurably to the literature. While focusing primarily on original work, Nebraska and Illinois have also chosen to produce reprint editions of previously published books deemed to be of merit and of interest for both scholars and the general reading public.

Serious, scholarly biography has become something of a cottage industry within sport history in recent years. Carefully crafted, well-documented studies of major figures within a range of sports include Susan Cayleff's *Babe: The Life and Legend of Babe Didrikson Zabarias* (1995), Charles Fountain's *Sportswriter: The Life and Times of Grantland Rice* (1993), Peter Levine's *A. G. Spalding and the Rise of Baseball: The Promise of American Sport* (1985), and David Zang's *Fleet Walker's Divided Heart: The Life of Baseball's First Black Major Leaguer* (1995). Commercial houses, while traditionally publishing works by professional writers and journalists and eschewing footnotes, endnotes, extensive bibliography and other such *distractions* for the general reader, have recently begun releasing higher quality biographies with varying degrees of documentation. These include Mark Ribowsky, *The Power and the Darkness: The Life of Josh Gibson in the Shadows of the Game* (1996); Charles Alexander, *John McGraw* (1988); Dennis and Jeanne DeValeria, *Honus Wagner: A Biography* (1996); David Pietrusza, *Judge and Jury: The Life and Times of Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis* (1998); and Bryan Di Salvatore, *A Clever Base-Ballist: The Life and Times of John Montgomery Ward* (1999).

Obviously, a number of these biographies have focused upon baseball and include players, administrators, and scribes spanning the period from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth, an era encompassing massive change within sport and American society as a whole. Paralleling the reign of the “robber barons” and the rise of corporate power in the United States, the developing business of baseball found the owners adopting the practices of industry and the players borrowing a page from the fledgling labor movement. While authoritative histories of the game (Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years*, 1960; Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Golden Years*, 1971; David Q. Voight, *American Baseball*, 1983) trace the overall development of the business, biographies of owners, administrators, and managers, such as A. G. Spalding (Levine, 1985), Ban Johnson (Eugene Murdock, *Ban Johnson: Czar of Baseball*, 1982), and John McGraw (Alexander, 1988), as well as player/union founder, John Montgomery Ward (DiSalvatore, 1999), have provided more personal looks at the profit-loss and labor-management aspect of the game. Biographies of players during the same period have given scholars and general readers alike a closer view of the personalities of the game as well as an understanding of the baseball-as-entertainment side of the industry as reflected in the lives of those who played the sport for a living. Studies of the lives of Christy Mathewson (Ray Robinson, *Matty*, 1993), Ty Cobb (Charles Alexander, *Ty Cobb*, 1984), and Honus Wagner (DeValeria & DeValeria, 1996) among others, have provided valuable insights into not only the unique lives of each individual but also into the culture of the game and its place in society during the first half of the twentieth century as baseball stood alone at the top of the American sport world as the “national game.” Two recent works, one original biography and one autobiographical reprint, are the focus of this review essay.

The first half of the twentieth century was a major transition period for baseball. Efforts on the part of owners and administrators to transform the game into middle-class family entertainment were beginning to bear fruit. While most players continued to come from lower-middle and laboring class backgrounds, and while alcoholism and rowdiness had by no means been eliminated, by the end of the first decade of the century, women were increasingly visible at major league stadiums, umpires were accorded greater control over the conduct of the games, and there were more and more players with high school diplomas and even a few with at least some college work. In the 1880s John Montgomery Ward, while playing for the Giants, completed his undergraduate work, obtaining the Bachelor of Law and Bachelor of Philosophy degrees from Columbia College in the off-seasons. At the turn of the century, Christy Mathewson left Bucknell University after his third year to play professional baseball. Connie Mack, of the fledgling American League Philadelphia Athletics, was particularly fond of signing college players who, he reasoned, were smarter and presented the more refined image baseball was trying to create. Mathewson, in fact, became somewhat of a role model and gentleman “poster boy” for the sport as he progressed through his hall-of-fame career, making few enemies and exhibiting none of the undisciplined, rowdy behavior for which players of the nineteenth century had been known.

While Walter Johnson did not attend college, he did possess a high school diploma, came from a stable middle-class farming family, and ultimately matched “Matty” as a symbol of gentlemanly behavior and sportsmanship. Arriving in Washington, D.C., in

mid-summer of 1907, he made his pitching debut in a six-hit, losing effort against the powerful Detroit Tigers on August 2 to begin a twenty-one-year career with the Senators. He pitched his final game for the Nationals, as the Washington team was also called, in 1927. In between he became the American League's premier pitcher, finishing with a total of 417 wins versus 279 losses and a career earned run average of 2.17. This was a record outstanding enough to gain him acceptance into the first class of Baseball Hall of Fame inductees in 1936—he and Mathewson being the only two pitchers in the group of five which also included Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, and Honus Wagner.

Johnson, whose early career overlapped that of Mathewson, matched the Giants' star not only in pitching prowess but also in carving out a reputation for gentlemanliness, measured by self-control, sobriety, and humility. Raised on a Kansas farm through the first half of his childhood, he moved with his family in his early teens to Southern California where his father found work in the oil fields. Playing baseball on the high school team and for semi-pro teams in the area, he was noted for his fastball, his work ethic, and his behavior. He eventually played for a professional team in the small Idaho mining town of Weiser where word of his pitching exploits attracted the attention of the Senators, who promptly signed him to a contract after calling him to Washington for a tryout.

Upon his return home from his first halfseason in the major leagues, Johnson's humility was noted by the *Anaheim Gazette* when it stated, "He wears the same sized hats" (Thomas, p. 51). Throughout his career opponents came to the realization that Johnson never threw "brush back pitches" or "beanballs" for fear that he would hit and kill a batter with his noted fastball. On the few occasions when he did hit a player, it was noted by opponents that he would become so upset that he was literally finished for the day. Ty Cobb, the controversial star of the Tigers, credited this fear for his eventual success in hitting against Johnson (Thomas, p. 145). Cobb, like most players, was not averse to profiting from an opponent's weakness. Then, as now, Johnson's concern ran counter to the prevailing practices of pitchers battling batters for ownership of the corners of the strike zone. He had the same aversion to entering into fights and brawls on or off the field. Ironically, he and Cobb, perhaps the most notoriously combative (many would say "dirty") player in the major leagues, would become friends. Although he was at the extreme end of the "win-at-all-cost" philosophy of players of the day, Cobb's behavior was far more in keeping with the players' code of the time than was Johnson's. But with the growing middle-class fan base, Johnson and Mathewson were far more loved and respected throughout, and following, their careers.

Henry W. Thomas, author of *Walter Johnson: Baseball's Big Train*, has produced a fine and insightful account of the life and career of the renowned pitcher. As the subject's grandson, Thomas was forced to confront the obvious suspicion that his work might be slanted in favor of his mother's father and that exaggeration born of family pride and loyalty could easily stain his efforts. The result, however, is a biography that is thorough in coverage, extremely well documented, and very well written. An advantage to the writer, of course, was that he had available to him a veritable "mother lode" of written materials, including personal letters and access to family members, friends and associates for interviews. Numbered endnotes by chapter are voluminous, as are the formal bibliography and index. In fact, it is within the endnotes that Thomas provides some of the best discussion of certain inconsistent and conflicting accounts of Johnson's career that he first addresses

in the text and that adds texture to the life of a man who could easily be mythologized. One is sometimes left with a longing that these discussion notes would have been included within the text itself. Three appendices respectively address the following: “Was He the Greatest?” “The Best Games,” and “Numbers” (records). In the first of these, the reader may be excused for some skepticism based upon the nepotism concern. This reader, however, found the arguments so persuasive for Johnson’s superiority as a pitcher over his contemporaries, including Mathewson, that the skepticism was soon dismissed.

By the end of Johnson’s career, the number of illiterate or sparsely educated players had greatly diminished, as had those given to drunken, brawling behavior. This is not to imply that such “characters” had disappeared, only that the overall level of middle-class morality and educational achievement had become more evident in the major leagues. This was, perhaps, due to a combination of stricter rule enforcement by management, an increase in the number of players from stable, working middle-class families, the rising rate of high school graduation nationally, and, possibly, a realization that a life of dissipation often resulted in an abbreviated career.

Kirby Higbe, in his autobiography entitled *The High Hard One*, describes, on the other hand, a life as one of the last of the pre-1950s baseball playing “good old boys.” Growing up in the state capital of Columbia, South Carolina, in the period from 1915 to 1934, the son of working-class parents, he recalls discovering an early love for baseball, a gift for pitching, and not much interest in school. Dropping out after one year of junior high school, he works in a succession of manual jobs and plays ball on the local American Legion team that he helps lead to the runner-up position in the national tournament. Signed at seventeen by the Pittsburgh Pirates and assigned to its Tulsa farm club, he is introduced to the adult world of baseball and all of its rough edges. A combination of wildness on the mound and homesickness drives him to return to Columbia and a job as a mill hand in a textile factory in mid-season. Called back to Tulsa the following year, he is ultimately given his unconditional release due to his lack of pitching control. Following another stint at manual labor, he returns to minor league baseball, playing for a succession of teams and finally makes it to the major leagues in the late 1930s where he pitches for several teams over a period of thirteen years.

Higbe’s story, edited by Martin Quigley, and first published in 1967 by Viking Press, provides an inside look at the life of a baseball player of modest accomplishment (118 W-101 L) during the 1930s and 1940s. More specifically, it describes a player much the opposite of Johnson or Mathewson. With little formal education, a taste for liquor, sex, and living for the moment, Higbe gives the reader a glimpse into the life of a player who is, in many respects, a throwback to the earlier years of professional baseball. Higbe acknowledges that the only way he can support himself and a family at more than a near-poverty level is through his one skill, pitching a baseball. But despite major league salaries for more than a decade, when his career is over, he has little of monetary value to show for it. His love of fast living and lack of foresight undoubtedly shortens his career, costs him his marriage, and leads to a post-baseball life of low-paying jobs, and even a stint in the state penitentiary.

The two books taken together provide an interesting and informative picture of a transitional period in the evolution of baseball into a wildly popular mainstream entertainment product. These are two separate, but related, stories—one a carefully crafted,

well-documented biography and the other a personal memoir with no documentation and simplistic structure but with a sense of honesty that captures the reader's attention. Each makes a useful contribution to the literature and sport historians will find much of value in their respective pages.

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RYCZEK, WILLIAM J. *When Johnny Came Sliding Home: The Post-Civil War Baseball Boom, 1865-1870*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1998. Pp x + 313. Appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cb.

William Ryzcek's *When Johnny Came Sliding Home* is a prequel to his *Blackguards and Blue Stockings* (1992), a history of baseball's first professional league in the early 1870s. This book begins with a description of baseball in the year 1860, a landmark year in the history of the sport, when baseball first moved outside of New York in a significant way, when pitcher James Creighton revolutionized his art by developing a much faster pitch by snapping his wrist when he threw the ball, and when the National Association (the organization that passed for a league back then) championship game could not be completed because of rowdiness on the part of the crowd that threatened to erupt into serious violence.

Ryzcek points out that the events of 1860 were precursors to the post-Civil War years, and most of the rest of the book covers the period from 1865 to 1870, when the game changed from a purely amateur, "gentlemen's" game to a largely professional sport, and the gentlemanly behavior often associated with amateur baseball gave way to a more aggressive style of play conditioned by the drive to win, regardless of the cost in social graces. Much of the book's focus is on the 1869 Cincinnati Red Stockings, the hugely successful touring professional team that changed baseball forever. The final eight chapters of the book detail the Red Stockings' conversion after the 1868 season into an openly professional team and its 1869 and 1870 tours. By late 1870, the professionalization of baseball had been accomplished, and while many individual organizations had trouble reinventing themselves as professionals, an attempt to bring back amateur baseball on a national level was a dismal failure.

It is somewhat surprising to note that Ryzcek downplays the impact of the Civil War on baseball, given the evidence that soldiers from both sides played the game and their involvement contributed to its postwar popularity. There is no index entry for the Civil War, and while chapter 1 does present a brief history of the war with some mention of baseball, Ryzcek does not offer a systematic analysis of the role of the war in shaping public perception of and interest in the game. On the other hand, chapters 4, 5, and 11 go beyond the specific theme of the book to offer interesting descriptions of the social nature of baseball. In chapters 4 and 5, Ryzcek tells the reader what the fields and seating arrangements were like, explains the various rule changes, and describes measures taken to attract women as spectators. Chapter 11 treats the status of blacks in the country, their exclusion