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ANGELL, ROGER. *One More Around the Park: A Baseball Reader*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001. Pp. xii+351. \$16.95 pb.

Of all those who have written on baseball it is unlikely that anyone has written with greater insight and erudition than Roger Angell. For over four decades Angell has been producing thoughtful essays for *The New Yorker*, giving us memorable prose and bringing legitimacy to serious writing about the National Pastime.

In 1991 Angell gathered together his favorites from among the many pieces he had written on the game and its culture over the previous thirty years, and they were published by Ballantine Books. A decade later this wonderful collection is back in print courtesy of Ivan R. Dee Publishers.

In his introduction Angell recounts his first assignment for *The New Yorker* and reflects on his love and appreciation of the game. The pieces included here are not "a best of" collection but were chosen because, he states, they give the author pleasure. They are presented in nearly chronological order but in no way constitute a history of the game. They represent what Angell sees as the natural convergence of baseball and memory, showing how "baseball's slow innings and noisy evenings accrue oddly in mind, and constitute not just an entertainment but an elegant way of marking the years" (p. ix).

The first and shortest selection is "Box Scores" and demonstrates Angell's great skill and insight. It enumerates the value, function and genius of the box score in less than two pages. It also includes a paragraph on the uniqueness and significance of baseball "names," in a passage similar to what Robert Coover wrote on the significance of names in his epic baseball novel, *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc.*

As a *New Yorker* Angell naturally is attracted to the stories of the Mets. In "The 'Go!' Shouters," he surveys the moonscape of the Mets first season, and in "Days and Nights With the Unbored" he analyzes the Miracle Mets of 1969 in the wake of their

World Series victory. He captures both the excitement and wonder of the miracle finish to the season, while offering clear and concise analysis of this improbable victory.

The concluding paragraph shows Angell at his best. It captures the poignancy of the moment, uses one of the oldest baseball clichés as uttered by Earl Weaver, and it makes a significant point about the beauty of the game itself:

Later in his quiet office, Earl Weaver was asked by a reporter if he hadn't thought that the Orioles would hold on to their late lead in the last game and thus bring the Series back to Baltimore and maybe win it there. Weaver took a sip of beer and smiled and said, "No, that's what you can never do in baseball. You can't sit on a lead and run a few plays into the line and just kill the clock. You've got to throw the ball over the goddam plate and give the other man his chance. That's why baseball is the greatest game of them all." (p. 23).

Included in this volume is arguably the best essay Roger Angell ever produced, "Gone For Good." Here Angell tells the story of the mysterious collapse of the career of Steve Blass, the Pirate pitcher and World Series hero in 1971. By mid-1973 his control was gone and early in 1974 Blass was back in the minor leagues. By the end of spring training in 1975 Steve Blass was out of baseball. This piece chronicles the tragedy and examines the mystery of the collapse. Its greatness however is in the portrait of the man and his family, and the triumph of human dignity that Steve Blass exemplified. This may be the best piece that anyone has ever written on baseball or any other sport.

Certainly everyone who has read *The New Yorker* essays over the years has their favorites, and probably they will find it here. Among those others I have treasured most are "Distance," a retrospective on Bob Gibson in retirement. In "La Vida" Angell captures the spirit of spring training before it was corporatized and "Disney-fied." In "The Web of the Game," we sit with Angell and Smokey Joe Wood at a college game pitched by Ron Darling and Frank Viola where we are party to the reminiscences of Wood and the drama of the twelve inning Yale-St. John's battle of two future major leaguers.

The most infamous and famous of Red Sox World Series moments are recounted by Angell. The Carlton Fisk home run is the centerpiece of the 1975 World Series report "Agincourt and After" while the Bill Buckner moment is featured in "Not So, Boston," recounting the 1986 playoffs and World Series.

The account of the Fisk home run has a series of images that cascade across the page with memorable brilliance in three sentences:

I was watching the ball, of course, and so I missed what everybody watching on television saw—Fisk waving wildly, weaving and writhing and gyrating along the first-base line, as he wished the ball fair, *forced* it fair with his entire body. He circled the bases in triumph, in sudden company with several hundred fans, and jumped on home plate with both feet, and John Kiley, the Fenway Park organist, played Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus,' *fortissimo*, and then followed with other appropriate exuberant classical selections, and for the second time that evening I suddenly remembered all my old absent and distant Sox-afflicted friends (and all the other Red Sox fans, all over New England), and I thought of them—in Brookline, Mass., and Brooklin, Maine; in Beverly Farms and Mashpee and Presque Isle and North Conway and Damariscotta; in Pomfret, Connecticut, and Pomfret, Vermont; in Wahland and Providence

and Revere and Nashua, and in both the Concords and all five Manchesters; and in Raymond, New Hampshire (where Carlton Fisk lives), and Bellows Falls, Vermont (where Carlton Fisk was *born*), and I saw all of them dancing and shouting and kissing and leaping about like the fans at Fenway—jumping up and down in their bedrooms and kitchens and living rooms, and bars and trailers, and even in some boats here and there, I suppose, and on back-country roads (a lone driver getting the news over the radio and blowing his horn over and over, and finally pulling up and getting out and leaping up and down on the cold macadam, yelling into the night), and all of them, for once at least, utterly joyful and believing in that joy—alight with it (pp. 82-83).

And there are many more—one highlighting the career and persona of Bart Giamatti, another on the centrality of the catcher in baseball, and still another discussing the merits of baseball films.

In the end Ivan R. Dee Publishers deserve our thanks for once again making this marvelous baseball literature available in an affordable and portable format. For the fan, the neophyte, or the baseball historian they offer insight, history, and great writing, a rare combination and a major treat.

—RICHARD C. CREPEAU  
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