

## Book Reviews

KORR, CHARLES P. *The End of Baseball As We Knew It: The Players Union, 1960-1981*. Foreword by Bob Costas. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002. Pp xviii+336. Notes, sources and further reading, index. \$34.95 cb.

Publication of this book brings to fruition more than a decade of research, much of it conducted, with special permission, in the records of the Major League Baseball Players Association, the "Players Union" of the title. Korr enjoyed unprecedented entrée to these materials, and he supplemented this work with several dozen interviews, the first ones conducted in 1987. The result of this protracted effort, though long in coming, is worth the wait.

Danger lurks when a historian gets to muck about in records still held by the institution that created them. Peril arises if the historian gains privileges unavailable to others and allows this cozy status to distort scholarly detachment. Korr asserts that the union placed no restrictions on his use of its records, and it is clear that his head was not turned by the favors extended uniquely to him. His book is balanced, clear-headed, and chock full of new information. Korr has made the most of his opportunity, and baseball history is much richer for it.

At the association's offices in New York, Korr pored over a wealth of records series: correspondence, drafts of reports, minutes, meeting transcripts, negotiating notes, and notes for legal proceedings. He worked in the papers of arbitrator Peter Seitz housed at Cornell University. He interviewed, mostly in person, the key players and officials, some now deceased, who helped transform their organization from a repressed company union into what some have called the most powerful labor organization in the United States. On the other side, absent access to complementary archival materials belonging to Major League Baseball (MLB) or its negotiating arm, the Player Relations Committee, Korr relied on published sources and on interviews with baseball executives central to this history and with the late John Gaherin, MLB's chief bargainer from 1967 through the 1976 negotiations. Gaherin told Korr, "Nobody ever wants to get our side of the story" (p. xvii). No longer.

Still, Korr has not written a blow-by-blow account of each of the work stoppages that disrupted spring training or the regular season in 1972, 1973, 1976, 1980, and 1981. Instead, he has produced an extended and careful analysis of this central question: how is it "that the 'revolution' that actually transformed a major sport and the structure of all professional sports and changed the attitudes and rhetoric of participants and fans was carried out by baseball players acting through a union" (p. 231)? To lay responsibility or blame for all this at the feet of Marvin Miller, executive director of the association from 1966 through 1982, simply begs the question. Why did the association hire Miller away from the United Steelworkers of America in the first place, and, once the membership had elected him, why did these conservative and affluent men, participants in what Korr calls "the most individualistic of team sports" (p. 231), march with him to assert their rights and, as Paul Richards, then the general manager of the Atlanta Braves, bemoaned, effect "the end of baseball, as we knew it" (p. 1)?

If this book accomplishes nothing else, it should bury in a permanent grave two misconceptions as durable as any of baseball's hallowed myths. The first, perhaps most romantically articulated by A. Bartlett Giamatti before he became commissioner of baseball, is that the owners had always treated their sport not as a business but as a public trust, safeguarding the welfare of the players as an essential part of their stewardship. The union has exposed the speciousness of this idea, and now owners and players jointly define the "good of the game." Second is the accusation, too often expressed by newspaper reporters who should have taken the time to know better, that Miller, a skilled and experienced trade unionist, led the players down a belligerent path that they had no intention of pursuing and still do not fully understand. Korr presents persuasive evidence showing clearly that the players, albeit with Miller as their teacher, have always made their own decisions and have, when necessary, channeled their competitive moxie to achieve goals they themselves defined as important and necessary.

Time and time again, Korr's research enables him to flesh out parts of the union's history in ways heretofore only surmised by journalists. Moreover, though Korr concludes his analysis with the 1981 strike, by now ancient history to some, he has also written an epilogue that covers more recent events in brief and makes some comparisons between baseball and European football, another of his other academic fortes.

This book, fine as it is, should not stand as the last historical word on the Players Association. Rather, it should be the first. Korr should make sure to deposit his interviews in an archival repository. Likewise, the union should see the wisdom of transferring its historical records to an institution such as the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University. Similarly, Major League Baseball should pay homage to Bart Giamatti, its one academic commissioner, by rounding up its historical records and finding a suitable archival home for them. Baseball may not be a public trust, but it is too significant a cultural and economic institution for this negligence to continue.

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