
BALDASSARO, LAWRENCE, ED. *Ted Williams: Reflections on a Splendid Life*. Sportstown Series. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003. Pp. xxv+250. Illustrations. \$20.00

When Ted Williams died on July 5, 2002, he was universally hailed as an American icon, the "Greatest Hitter Who Ever Lived," a war hero, a quiet philanthropist, the prototypical rugged individualist. Such adulation was not always the case, as demonstrated by *Ted Williams: Reflections of a Splendid Life*. The book is a compilation of writings on Williams encompassing a period from 1939 until 2002. It is a revised and updated version of *The Ted Williams Reader*, published in 1991.

Reflections of a Splendid Life contains writings from newspapers, baseball magazines, sport magazines, and general magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*. They chart Williams' career from a shy, self-absorbed rookie to a grizzled veteran into his retirement years. Like him or not, Ted Williams evoked strong emotions and strong writing. Much of the writing is of a high standard. The volume contains John Updike's classic "Hub Fans Bid Adieu," from the *New Yorker*, along with articles from such notables as Red Smith, Arthur Daley, Thomas Boswell, Robert Creamer, and David Halberstam. Even famed biologist Stephen Jay Gould chips in with an examination of Williams' 1941 season, when he batted .406.

Not all of the writings rise to these standards. Ted Williams had the misfortune of playing his career in a city with a hyper-competitive newspaper rivalry. Then as now, outrage sold newspapers and what could be more outrageous than jerking the chain of Boston's best known athlete. Shy and self-absorbed, Williams was more than happy to cooperate. He was never very good with the Boston media and the more they criticized him, the worse he became. He could be charming with the press, but he could just as often be surly and vulgar. He held grudges for decades. Williams refused to tip his hat

to fans. On occasion he spit on fans. All of this became fodder for the Boston media. Thus we get a generous helping of "Ted Williams Blasts Boston," "Why We Pick on Ted Williams," "Handsome Bad Boy of the Red Sox," "Ted Undeserving of Fan's Tribute," and the like. The latter was written in 1952 by Boston columnist Dave Egan, who probably was Williams' most implacable foe. Egan maintains that Williams' persistent refusal to wear a necktie was a direct cause of juvenile delinquency in Boston. *Reflections on a Splendid Life* is as much a primer on sports writing in the middle of the twentieth century as it is on baseball.

Although the Boston writing rarely rose to this level of mean-spiritedness, it is fascinating to see Williams portrayed in such a consistently negative light, even in the twilight of his great career. Of course, it should be noted that Williams' many acts of charity took place behind closed doors and were not noticed by the media or the public they served.

The volume concludes with a number of articles on William's post-baseball career, much of which he spent perfecting that most solitary of pursuits, fishing. John Underwood's *Sports Illustrated* article, "Going Fishing With the Kid," may tell us more about Williams than anything written about his baseball career.

Lawrence Baldassarro is a native of Massachusetts and a lifelong Red Sox fan. He concludes *Reflections of a Splendid Life* with reminiscences of his meetings with Williams late in the latter's life. The volume contains nothing of the sordid events that have surrounded Williams after his death. That is probably a good thing. Baldassarro is also professor of Italian and Comparative Literature at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. *Reflections of a Splendid Life* would seem to be a labor of love. It is not a scholarly work in any technical sense. It does not have footnotes, a bibliography, or detailed analyses of the selected articles. It contains a limited number of photographs. But the well-chosen volume is highly useful to those interested in Ted Williams, Major League Baseball, or the people who write about sports.

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