

Sex in Baseball: Some Reflections of a Changing Taboo

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Baseball's link with American sex ways is encountered regularly in slang expressions such as "getting to first base" and "making out." Beyond verbalisms the game mirrors a century of rapid change in American sex norms, statuses and behaviors. Owing to taboos, however, such behavioral changes have been little explored by social historians and historians of sport. Recently the latest "new social history" movement promises to rectify the oversight, but such explorers as Martin Duberman must first overtake such pioneer British sex-historians as Gordon Rattray-Taylor and Wayland Young. In their works and in those of trail-blazing social scientists the sports historian can find guidelines for exploring the sex and sport connection. Especially useful is Rattray-Taylor's explanatory continuum which shows American sex ways over the past century moving from a repressive patrist style to the present matrist pattern. Included in the latter model are such trends as increasing equality of sex roles, statuses, activities and behaviors. And the essence of matristism is the notion vouchsafed that sex activities are positively good.

Using the matrist standards as a guide, writings by men like Jim Bouton, Bill Veeck, and Bo Belinsky are seen as defenses of the new sexual freedom against reactionary patrist elements in baseball's establishment. Together, with medical experts like Dr. Warren Guild, who denies that sexual intercourse robs athletes of energy, or philosopher Paul Weiss, who argues that no one really knows how to train an athlete, matrist advocates have mounted a crusade on behalf of free expression. In judging works by candid athletes, sports historians carry the awful obligation to understand their own biases. Certainly many in the professional areas of coaching, recreation, physical education carry a heavy burden of patrist convictions.

The question remains, is the matrist sexual revolution a triumphant social movement? In answer, this tentative study of sex in baseball offers only a tentative "perhaps!" This because patrist forces remain entrenched in baseball and in other American institutions. In the political bastion, for example, recent public reaction to Congressman Wayne Hays' adventuring suggests that Americans are hardly ready to accept a full blown matrist sex code for politicians. And if the infant study of sexual history offers any guideline, it is that neither matrist nor patrist sex codes dominated completely in any Western culture. As the conservative mirror of baseball shows in its focus on American sexuality, *Playboy* magazine is an uncertain barometer of the future.