

Say It Ain't So, Sam (A Memoir of Baseball, Bigotry, & "Big Daddy")

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Motivated by the 1987 sequence of events surrounding Al Campanis' dismissal from baseball by the Los Angeles Dodgers, following his insensitive remarks on ABC's Nightline about Blacks in baseball, the author examined the roots of his own early awareness of prejudice. In reflecting about the Campanis incident, he remembers his father, a man nicknamed "Big Daddy" by the colored troops he commanded in the deep South in World War II. But it is not "Big Daddy" who is the central figure in this memoir. Rather, it is a twelve year old boy named Sam, a fourth generation son of the American Confederacy, who, if he had lived in the middle of the nineteenth century, could well have been portrayed as an adolescent anti Christ to the most legendary of all American saviors, Huckleberry Finn.

Beyond the invective of Sam's colored view of colored people, the author recalled the disparity of circumstance and opportunity in baseball in the South during the war years. His peripatetic recollection of bigotry on the diamond moved from the sandlots of Louisiana and Mississippi to the more magnificent ballparks of Birmingham, the cradle of the civil rights revolution, and Boston, the cradle of American liberty as well as the city of his birth. Interestingly, there was little room for an angry voice in this memoir that is mostly a mixture of melancholy and whimsical sentiment. Ironically, when the author does raise his voice, it is Boston and his beloved Bosox that provoke his anger and anxiety.