

The Babe Ruth Stories

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Perhaps there should be two books, Babe Ruth said, about his life's story, "one for the kids and one for the adults." In fact, there have been over two dozen biographies written about Ruth, and Ruth, himself, even wrote two autobiographies. This research examines these biographies and how writers of different time periods have explored this complex personality, incredible athlete and popular culture icon.

For analytical purposes, the biographies are divided into three categories. First, are the biographies written during Ruth's playing career, including *Babe*

Ruth's Own Book of Baseball (1928), and Daniel M. Daniel's *The Real Babe Ruth* (1930). Second, are the books published in the time surrounding Ruth's death, including Tom Meany's *Babe Ruth: The Big Moments of the Big Fellow* (1948) and the autobiography ghostwritten by Bob Considine *The Babe Ruth Story* (1947). Third, are those written when Hank Aaron was threatening Ruth's homerun record including Marshall Smelser's *The Life That Ruth Built: A Biography* (1975), Robert Smith's *Babe Ruth's America* (1974), Kal Wagenheim's *Babe Ruth: His Life and Legend* (1974), and Robert Creamer's *Babe: The Legend Comes to Life* (1974). In Bill James's *Historical Baseball Abstract*, Jim Carothers calls Creamer's book "the best of baseball biographies." This research also briefly considers the two Babe Ruth movies, the 1948 William Bendix *The Babe Ruth Story* and the 1991 John Goodman *Babe*, and the depiction of Ruth by his contemporaries in Lawrence Ritter's *Glory of Their Times*.

This research will establish a picture of the variable nature of the baseball audience, and how the image of Babe Ruth has been constructed over the past sixty years. Ruth is portrayed differently in all the biographies, and I examine how and the reasons why the authors have done this.

None of the biographies is perfect and they should be viewed not individually, but as a whole, they show us much of Ruth's fascinating life, his role in baseball, and the biographies role in baseball. In Virginia Woolf's words, this whole, "will enlarge its scope by hanging up looking glasses at odd comers. And...from all this diversity it will bring out, not a riot of confusion, but a richer unity."