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Comments from the Chair

Andy McCue
Riverside, CA

The spring baseball book season has dawned with Opening Day and it looks like a good year. From last year's crop, *1921* by SABR members Lyle Spatz and Steve Steinberg won the Seymour Medal for best book of baseball narrative and it's a terrific read. The award will be presented at the Seymour Medal Conference in Cleveland on May 13-14. The conference will also feature a number of research presentations.

SABR 41, our annual convention is gearing up. It's in Southern California this year and will feature a couple of interesting speakers, including rarely heard from superagent Scott Boras, as well as panel's on medical issues, the future of baseball news, general managers and a look at the changes in baseball over the forty years of SABR's existence. You can register at netforum.avectra.com/eWeb/StartPage.aspx?Site=SABR. As usual, the convention will include numerous research presentation, a vendor's room full of booksellers, and our annual committee meeting.

Speaking of the committee meeting, if anyone has a matter they would like to discuss, please email or call me so we can discuss it and get something on the agenda.

I'd like to welcome two new and one old members to the committee. The new members are Steve West and Matt Kochan and we hope to see them at the committee meeting at the convention and get them involved in the committee's work. The old new member is Greg Rhodes, who's back in SABR and still doing his excellent research on the history of the Cincinnati Reds. I'm sure a number of you have read and enjoyed Greg's books.

The next newsletter will come in July with a report on the committee meeting and more of the fine book reviews Ron keeps putting together.

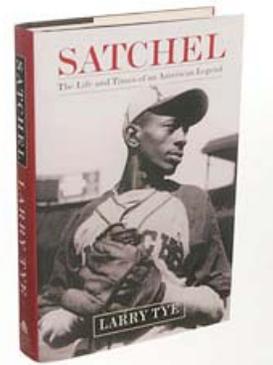


Feature Review

Satchel: The Life and Times of an American Legend, by Larry Tye. (New York: Random House, 2010.)

Satchel won the 2010 Seymour Medal and is a worthy choice. Even those of us who have not yet read the book have probably seen Lee Lowenfisch's review in the Summer 2010 issue of SABR's *Baseball Research Journal*. While Lowenfisch's review seems substantially right on target, I have one or two niggles to add.

Lowenfisch praises Tye's depiction of Paige, the American legend, but he's uneasy about Tye's presentation of Branch Richey and Jackie Robinson. Certainly these three powerful personalities had good reasons not to get along (they certainly disagreed about the value of Negro League baseball), and Tye is right to underline this. He occasionally goes beyond, though. For instance, Tye says that Bill Veeck's "1949 Indians had three blacks, the most in baseball," apparently ignoring the existence in the National League of the Brooklyn Dodgers with their three black stars. Much of Tye's treatment of Robinson could be much more even-handed than it is without damage to his thesis. He also occasionally overpraises Paige unnecessarily. He describes a meeting between



Paige and Henry Aaron as "history's greatest hurler against its greatest hitter." This kind of statement immediately distracts the reader from Tye's point, which was that here we had another "Clash of the Titans." Instead the reader, if he's like this one, begins to review the old arguments about who are the greatest hitter and pitcher. Tye would have kept us on track if he'd just said "one of the greatest" hitters and pitchers.

For the most part Tye avoids this sort of thing. His portrait of Paige is both comprehensive and fair-minded. We get both a public and a private Satchel Paige, warts and all. Perhaps *Satchel*'s greatest achievement is Tye's portrait of the legendary pitcher; we participate in the legend itself even as Tye explains how it was created. He conveys vividly the extraordinariness of Paige's achievement.

The book's organization also needs special mention. Tye succeeds in sorting through Paige's quite various base-

ball exploits, presenting them coherently and making them illustrate Paige's qualities as a person. A barnstormer at heart, Paige made himself — in fact but before the fact in major league baseball — a free agent.

Satchel seems thoroughly researched, with its thirty-eight pages of notes and its 35-page bibliography. In addition, Tye promises "a more complete listing" on his website. He acknowledges help from "a stream of student researchers," mentioning fourteen by name. It's not surprising — with all this — that things occasionally go awry. I was bothered — as Lowenfish was — by a reference early in the book to an article in a 1949 issue of *Sports Illustrated*. This couldn't be, I thought, since *SI* didn't begin publication until the 1954. I duly checked Tye's note, figuring the date had to be a typographical error. The note sent me to *Sports Illustrated* in the bibliography. There I could find no entry — there are five — that might in some way clarify the reference. I wondered about this as I read through the book until in the next-to-last chapter I found the following. On the question of Paige's age, Tye writes "*Sports Illustrated* was not deterred. It published a copy of his birth certificate along with a three-page story in February 1949. 'Satch was born in Mobile on July 7, 1906,' Arthur P. Glass reported. 'So that's that. You can be on it'." Here we go again, I figured, but this time the note referred me to Glass, and there I found another note. "This version of *Sports Illustrated*, published by Dell, is unrelated to the current magazine."

Mystery solved. But Glass should have been mentioned in the earlier reference, either in the text itself or the note. Such suggestions of disorganization shouldn't be allowed to distract from the thoroughness of the research. Tye's *Satchel* will be the place to begin any further research on its subject.

Leverett T. (Terry) Smith

North Carolina Wesleyan College, Rocky Mount, NC



***Joe DiMaggio: The Long Vigil*, by Jerome Charyn.
Yale University Press, 2011.**

This year marks the 70th anniversary of one of those sports records still considered to be unbreakable: Joe DiMaggio's 56-game hitting streak.

While most of the books over the years — especially those written in a long-ago time, when athletes were always heroic rather than mortal like the rest of us — concentrate on the his accomplishments *on* the field, this year's offerings (the other being Kostya Kennedy's *56: Joe DiMaggio and the Last Magic Number in Sports*), take a different and darker approach.

The subtitle *The Long Vigil* can be viewed in more than one way. In one, it represents DiMaggio's need to maintain his status as "The Greatest Living Ballplayer," a title offi-

cially bestowed upon him when baseball celebrated its centennial in 1969.

The dust jacket offers another angle.

Rather than the image of the Yankee Clipper in Yankee pinstripes, the photo — taken by John Vachon for *LOOK* magazine in 1953 — represents the main "accomplishment" of DiMaggio's post-career: his love affair with Marilyn Monroe, which continued long after their divorce and even past the Hollywood icon's death.

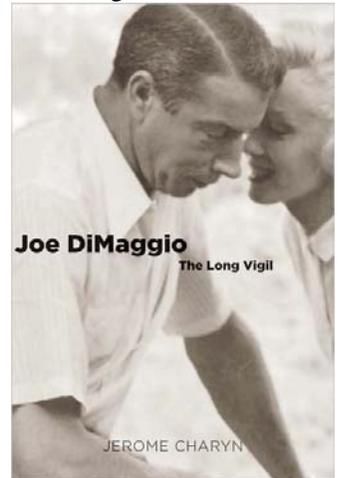
DiMaggio does not look especially happy in the photo, even though Monroe is smiling, perhaps whispering some loving nugget into his ear. There are no other photos in the book, as if Charyn did not want to intrude further on DiMaggio's notorious demands for privacy.

One word is repeated through *The Long Vigil*: "brood." Charyn portrays DiMaggio as a man who was never comfortable in his own skin, always wanting to be the best. He sought the accolades of an adoring public with one hand, but pushed them away with the other. Was that separation born of aloofness or an innate shyness/inferiority complex? Either way, DiMaggio was always thinking about his image and his place in the hierarchy of the game. He spent most of his life observing how the public observed him, both during his playing days and in retirement. On the one hand, he wanted to be left alone, Garbo-like. On the other, he wanted — needed — the adulation and was reluctant to share it with anyone, not Monroe, not Ted Williams (his main source of competition for the headlines in 1941, as the Boston slugger batted .406), not Mickey Mantle (who would replace DiMaggio as the face of the Yankees).

Can contemporary readers imagine what the hitting streak mean to a nation on the brink of war? With no other distractions? Even the chapters that don't focus on DiMaggio's own accomplishments deal with his impact on the culture of the era. A section on Josh Gibson, a fixture of Negro League lore, had delusional conversations with the Yankee. "Josh's sad refrain is perhaps the severest indictment of white baseball we will ever have," writes Charyn. "He could only try and seek solace from its most visible player, Joltin' Joe. But white baseball wouldn't talk to Josh Gibson."

Did DiMaggio falter in his later years as well? Charyn writes about the curious symbiotic relationship between the Clipper and attorney Morris Engelberg. Was he a true fan or just someone trying to take advantage of a lonely man working hard to not be forgotten? I'm still not sure, although the author seems to put Engelberg in a more favorable light than other accounts I've read.

Charyn has included baseball in several of his novels, most notably *The Seventh Babe*. He is obviously a great fan of the game in general and DiMaggio in particular, so this must have been a difficult project for the author. It's never



easy for a fan to grow older and realize the celebrities he or she put on a pedestal are just as flawed as everyone else. And, just as everyone else, ballplayers are dead a lot longer than they're alive, including the "death" of retirement. It's like walking on the moon; what can you do after that of any consequence?

Ron Kaplan
Montclair, NJ

Inaugural issue of baseball card publication 21 features Jewish Major Leaguers

Since I started blogging about baseball literature and collectibles, I've become increasingly enamored with and appreciative of the "art" of the game. Not the way the players perform, but by those who depict those performances through the pencil, the paintbrush, the camera, or any other method.

It's especially rewarding to find unknown" artists (although they might take umbrage with the descriptive, and I mean no disrespect; they certainly were unknown to me, but then again, I'm a cretin).

I don't know exactly when I "discovered" graphic designer Gary Cieradkowski — it was probably during one of my countless Google searches — but he came on the scene via a blog featuring his "Infinite Baseball Card Set" in which he depicted players in out-of-the-ordinary circumstances, that is not their Major League (where applicable) uniforms due to logo issues. Naturally I gravitated to his Sandy Koufax card in his University of Cincinnati uniform, but even that had to be change when the school found out and raised objections.

Not everyone in his set is an all-star or Hall of Famer. The artist likes to give props to the unheralded; in fact, some of these folks never made it to the pros, such as those in the Negro Leagues. But they all make for a good story and a great graphic.

Several of Cieradkowski's images appear in a weekly baseball "e-zine," *The Outsider Baseball Bulletin*, which, according to the publication, is "devoted to baseball history. Each issue features original research, statistics, personal essays, and humor. There will also be stories about baseball-related car crashes, sex scandals, home decorating and....murrnder!!" Fun.

Cieradkowski has branched out, self-publishing his own magazine, *21: Illustrated Journal of Outsider Baseball*. I was honored to receive the first issue, which is devoted to "Jewish Baseball Pioneers & Stars." In addition to the usual suspects, such as Koufax, Hank Greenberg, and Moe Berg, the 18-page glossy card-stock publication features such notables as

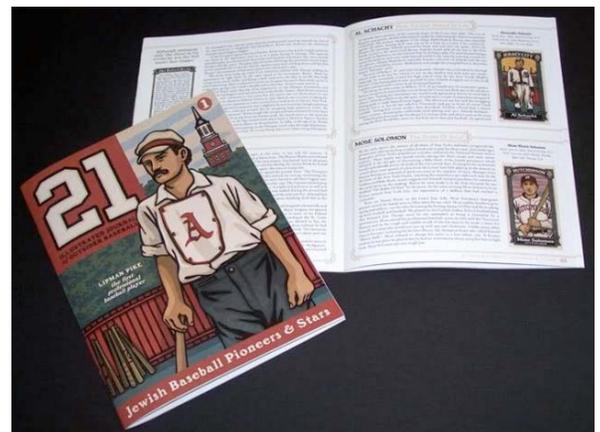
- Lipman Pike, the first Jewish professional baseball player
- Abel Kiviat, more famously known as an Olympic runner in the early 1900s
- Al Schacht, one of the Clown Princes of Baseball
- Mose Solomon, the original "Rabbi of Swat"

- Baseball lifer Jimmy Reese, born James Herman Solomon, who was still in uniform well into his 80s (and once roomed with Babe Ruth)
- "Subway Sam" Nahem, who went on to become a lawyer and union organizer after his playing days
- Mickey Rutner, who had a cup of coffee in the Majors, but gained literary immortality as the inspiration for Eliot Asinof's 1955 novel, *Man on Spikes*
- Guy Zinn, the "Honus Wagner" of Jewish baseball card collectibles
- Jake Atz, who won 1,972 games as a minor league manager, good for 12th all-time
- Harry "Coon" Rosen, softball player extraordinaire
- Moe Franklin, perhaps the only Jewish player to thrown in with the attempted Mexican League "revolution" in the mid 1940s

Cieradkowski — who is not Jewish, by the way — supplements the stylistic cards with a good portion of research to find the out-of-the-ordinary about each player.

All in all, the inaugural issue of *21* is a great first effort and I hope he continues on his labor-of-love plans for future issues.

For more information, including examples and how to order, navigate to infinitecardset.blogspot.com/p/how-to-buy-21-illustrated-journal-of.html.



Ron Kaplan

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A different '30-in-30'

Tom Hoffarth of the *Los Angeles Daily News* continued his excellent series of 30 book reviews of 2011 baseball titles in 30 days. You can read them at insidesocal.com/tomhoffarth. Unfortunately, you'll have to scroll to find them; he doesn't have all the reviews collected in one spot.



Baseball Digest, Then and Now

I was at my local Barnes and Noble recently and noticed the new March/April edition of *Baseball Digest* on the rack. Shows how long it's been since I last picked up a copy. The design had changed from the standard "digest" size to a regular magazine. Boo! One of the nice, nostalgic things about the old *BD* was that it fit so nicely in a jacket pocket.

For me, the March and April issues — back when they published every month — were the best. March was



when the rookie "Scouting Reports" came out. As you can see from the 1968 edition, Johnny Bench made the front cover, along with lesser players (although Stan Bahnsen was pretty good for a brief while). Jerry Koosman was the most marquee player on the back, with no real names on the inside. (And then you have to ask: these were

the best they could come up with?)

Among the veteran sportswriters who contributed articles to the above issue were George Vass and Bob Broeg, although to be fair, the other gentlemen might have been



celebrities in their local markets.

Player profiles included Steve Barber, Skip Lockwood, George Scott and Mickey Lolich. There was also a piece about the economics of the game: "Cardinals' 1968 Salaries Total Record \$800,000!"

The April issues were devoted to the "Lat-est! Most Complete!" information — the *BD* version of the baseball annual, including page after page of statistics and

40-man rosters. Of course, by the time these hit the newsstands, the actually rosters had changed dramatically. Fifty-cents! What a bargain.

It's also a hoot to go back and look at the advertisements. A set of Topps cards for that year sold for \$13.95

Amazingly, the interior look of the magazine remains pretty true to its roots. The paper has the same grainy newsprint feel, as opposed to glossy. There are still lots of tables and factoids to fill space. Still a section devoted to rules and odd plays. And still a "Baseball Quick Quiz" and "The Fans Speak out"/letters to the editor, which has forever been a place for thoughtful Q&As.

There must have been some reason for the size switch-over. Perhaps it just wasn't economical to produce the

smaller page trim. Whatever. I just know I miss the "comfort food" that was the little, now old, *Baseball Digest*.

By the way, you can read many back issues via Google books.

Ron Kaplan



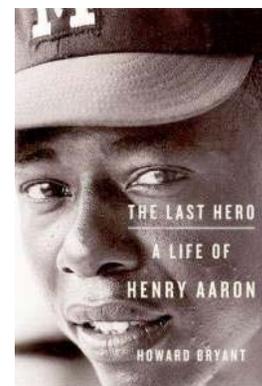
Howard Bryant's Aaron bio wins Casey Award

Howard Bryant was named recipient of *Spitball Magazine's* 2010 Casey Award for Best Baseball Book of the Year for *The Last Hero: A Life of Henry Aaron*.

The Last Hero received two first place votes and one sixth place vote from the three-judge panel to handily win the 28th Casey.

Judge Annie Hess praised Bryant for his research and insight into his subject's character, saying that while "his career was over before many of today's players were born, Aaron stands as a role model for how to conduct yourself on and off the field, with hard work, determination, and dedication. In a line of work where the majority of the stars are known for their mouth as much as their accomplishments, Henry Aaron allowed his work to speak for itself, and this is in part why the author deemed him 'the last hero.'"

Bryant becomes the first author to win the award twice. He was recognized in 2002 for *Shut Out: A Story of Race and Baseball in Boston*.



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