

FROMMER, HARVEY. *New York City Baseball: The Last Golden Age, 1947-1957*. Rev. ed. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004. Pp. 201. Photographs. \$19.95 pb.

Any sport-related book in its third edition has strong legs, as the theory in the book trade goes. *New York City Baseball* continues, twenty-four years after its initial publication, to resonate with readership because Frommer taps themes that communicate effectively not only with those who experienced those years (as I did from Chicago) but also because he clearly articulates to new and/or younger readers what baseball represented in metropolitan New York in a period of its ascendancy in the game. But it also needs to be said that like the “legend of the Kennedy court of Camelot” a lot of the nostalgia for these years is enlarged by the departure of the “Gints” and “de Bums” for the West Coast in the late 1950s.

Less overtly personal in style and intent than Doris Kearns Goodwin’s *Wait Till Next Year* (1997), *New York City Baseball* is filled with both fundamental historical knowledge as well as personal insight. Frommer’s ability to garner personal commentary from Rachael Robinson about the difficulty of integration as well as of Jackie’s gradual emancipation from a Branch Rickey imposed silence to being a more outspoken advocate for the civil rights of the black both in the larger society as well as in baseball is filled with keen insight and pathos, making it one of the more effective contributions of this book. The author also is able to contrast effectively Robinson’s perspective with the experiences of Monte Irvin, Roy Campanella, Henry Thompson, Don Newcombe, and eventually to a lesser degree with Elston Howard, who as the belated first black to play in the Bronx for the Yankees.

Frommer allowed me, not a New York-based or New York-experienced scholar of baseball, to more readily understand the intensity of the baseball commitment based on the string of successful summers of the game. Winning became the norm and the expectation as well as the reward for the faithful. Coming from Chicago, and especially the South Side of Chicago, New York teams were the archenemy, the literal protagonist against whom local commentators, fans and players raged. Frommer provides an insider’s perception to the outsider to be able to see the popularity of the game, the worship of DiMaggio, Reese, Mays, and Robinson, the clarity to see how familial connections were built with Dodger, Giant, and even Yankee victories, to understand the perceived class differences between fans of the three clubs, and that these could be based on winning frequently and consistently.

South Side Chicagoans had to build those loyalties while supporting second or third place teams, while North Side Chicagoans had to do so from lower rungs on the ladder. At least in an almost perverse way, the White Sox and Cubs stayed put and were not “yanked” out of the lives of Chicagoans, as happened in New York to the habitués of the Polo Grounds and Ebbets Field. The abandonment of the boroughs by the National League teams may have mythologized even further the impact of these teams in the Golden Years.

Better than a picture of Joe D. or “Willie, Mickey, and the Duke,” Frommer’s work stands the test of twenty-five years since its initial publication very well. This edition is a

very welcome addition in its new form carrying with it a new forward from Monte Irvin of those Giants as well as a new set of statistics about New York players and teams that are reprinted from the “Big Mac.”

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