

Monday, November 22, 2004

Recent reading

As you can see from the left sidebar, I've been reading baseball books lately.

The Fiction

A Ticket for a Seamstitch was odd, to say the least. Mark Harris believes strongly (as he points out in an essay at the beginning of the book) in unflowery writing, apparently putting his faith entirely in a well-constructed story to carry a reader along. He has a point, in that too many writers do try to spice up their writing, and in particular their descriptions of dialogue, and fail miserably, making the writing weird and unnatural, rather than compelling and beautiful.

The Tell All

Ball Four was everything I'd hoped it would be and more. Jim Bouton has a way with words and is really very funny. Even thirty-plus years later, while some of the details are no longer so shocking (drunkards in baseball!), the larger points (the meddlesome, backward nature of coaches, for instance) are almost certainly still true (see Ozzie Guillen). It was really one of the most enjoyable books I've read in a while.

The History

Alan Schwarz's book was, surprisingly, informative and interesting. I figured it'd be interesting, but I didn't necessarily think I'd learn anything terribly new. My knowledge of the backgrounds and contributions of Bill James, Tom Tippett, Craig Wright, and others of that generation was already fairly complete, though the little tidbits and anecdotes that Schwarz throws in kept me interested even in that part: for example, Wright, once famous for having "sabermetrician" on his business card, now lives in the Monterey Bay area (home!) and focuses on his Christian Scientist-ness. The incomplete section of my knowledge, like for many of the readers of the book, I assume, goes back before James and the rest, to Seymour Siwoff, the Elias brothers, George Lindsay, and others, and this book filled that hole admirably.

The Textbook

Unfortunately, I didn't realize that Saving the Pitcher was so much a textbook when I picked it up. I thought it would be more of a general-interest book with all the background a fan needs to understand how pitchers are treated and how they ought to be treated. Instead, it's a book that is really necessary reading for trainers, coaches, doctors, and pitchers, but rather unnecessary for general fans. I'm not sorry I read it, but I wouldn't necessarily have bought it straight away had I taken the time to research the nature of the book beforehand. One of the more unfortunate aspects of the book was the number of errors: there were far too many simple typographical mistakes for me to take the publisher (Ivan R. Dee) too seriously. Hopefully these will be fixed for the paperback.

The Oddball

I have to comment on Liar's Poker as long as I'm talking about books. Michael Lewis (now of Moneyball fame) made his name with his account of working as a bond salesman for Saloman Brothers in the mid- to late-'80's. Paired with Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho, which was set in the cultural life of people like Lewis (though Lewis was in London, not New York), we can get something of a full picture of the comings and goings of investment banking types in that period.

Posted by jason in Baseball, Reading at 21:51