

2007Books

SCD's annual wrap-up of best baseball books

By Dan Schlossberg

(Editor's Note: Longtime SCD columnist Dan Schlossberg did not include his own book in the article that follows. He was the author of Baseball Gold: Mining Nuggets from Our National Pastime and Making Awards: 60 Years at Mike's Microphone, written with Mike Rosenthal.)

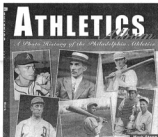
While the number of baseball card companies is shrinking, the competition among baseball book publishers is rising so fast that it must be related to global warming. Good baseball books are guaranteed to keep readers warm all winter – even in cities where snow lingers past Opening Day.

Although dozens of good books surfaced in 2007, ranking them was no easy task. They fall into different categories – from biographies to histories and reference works – and come in various sizes, shapes and price ranges. Some are part of a series, others are annuals. Many are timed to coincide with anniversaries, such as the 60th anniversary of the 1937 Milwaukee Braves and the 60th anniversary of Jackie Robinson's debut.

Only one thing remains the same every year – baseball fans are collectible, savored by both rabid and casual fans. Few can afford them all, but many are excellent buys, worthy of prominent spots in home libraries. How do they rate? Here's one man's opinion:

1. Smithsonian Q&A Baseball: The Ultimate Question and Answer Book (Collins, 218 pages, \$15.95) by David Fischer – Not a typical Smithsonian work, this handsome paperback is packed with color pictures and concise stories that trace the history of baseball, with an eye on the unusual. Its easy-to-read format includes the expected, such as lists of Hall of Famers and MVPs, as well as the unexpected, from turnstiles to terminology and even two-sport stars. There's even a section on the disputed 1910 batting crown of Ty Cobb.

2. The Cubs: The Complete Story of Chicago Cubs Baseball (Houghton Mifflin, 460 pages, \$40) by Glenn Stout; photos edited by Richard A. Johnson – If Cubs fans could play as well as they write, the team would have won a pennant since 1945. But the Cubs have always found a way to fall short, no matter how many trades they make or how much money they spend. About to enter the 100th year of their rebuilding program, the Cubs have to beat a goat course, as well as 15 other NL teams. At least they have a rich history, from Three-Finger Brown to Ernie Banks, that is well documented by a team of writers that includes Penny Marshall and Mike Royko.



3. Athletics Album: A Photo History of the Philadelphia Athletics (Orange Frazer Press, 208 pages, \$39.95) by Mark Stang – One of five photo books devoted to preserving team histories through photography, this oversized hardcover is packed with rare and oversized photos of players, parks and personalities. Because Connie Mack managed the club for nearly its entire Philadelphia sojourn, the passage of time is clearly reflected in the multiple pictures of the respected manager. This is a keeper not only for fans of the Philadelphia A's, but for fans of baseball history.

4. The Year Babe Ruth Hit 104 Home Runs (Carroll & Graf, 413 pages, \$16.95) by Bill Jenkinson – The author attempts to prove that today's smaller ballparks and expansion-diluted pitching, plus the increase from 154 games to 162 games per season and assorted rules changes, would have inflated Babe Ruth's totals to 104 home runs in 1921, a just-as-startling 1,181 in his career and 23 in the World Series. The advent of relief pitching, night ball and coast-to-coast travel might have been counterweights, but that's not part of this equation. This paperback contains notes on every real Ruth homer, including those hit in exhibition games, plus ballpark charts and photographs.

5. The ESPN Baseball Encyclopedia (Sterling Publishing, 1,810 pages, \$24.95) edited by Gary

Gillette and Pete Palmer; foreword by Peter Gammons – If more bang for the buck is top priority, this is the book to buy. It will settle all arguments – beyond players, records and stats, topics include managers, umpires, ballpark, Negro leagues, Caribbean winter ball and even ex post facto awards (MVPs, top rookies and Cy Young Award winners before those honors existed). An All-Star team of writers and editors combined to make this hefty paperback the best encyclopedia ever.

6. Home Run: The Definitive History of Baseball's Ultimate Weapon (Potomac Books, 304 pages, \$26.95) by David Vincent – For fans of the long ball, this hardcover has it all – players who hit four homers in one game, teams that hit four consecutive homers, even stories from the punchless Dead Ball Era, when home runs were hard to come by and usually inside-

the-park. The trivia-loving author, SABR's home run guru, is undoubtedly planning Volume II, since Chase Wright has joined Paul Foytack as the only pitchers to yield four straight homers, and J.D. Drew has become the only man to participate in two of the five times teams did it.



7. Opening Day: The Story of Jackie Robinson's First Season (Simon & Schuster, 323 pages, \$26) by Jonathan Eig – This historic hardcover, timed to coincide with the 60th anniversary of integration in baseball, reveals that the 12-year-old Bud Selig journeyed from Milwaukee to Chicago for Robinson's first game against the Cubs. But it fails to mention that Hank Greenberg, an earlier victim of religious bias, offered to help Robinson during an impromptu conversation at first base. The best part of the book? The three chapters that set the stage for Robinson's big-league bow on April 15, 1947.

8. Crazy '68: How Cost of Cranks, Rogues, Boneheads and Magnates Created the Greatest Year in Baseball History (Smithsonian Books, 368 pages, \$24.95) by Cait Murphy; foreword by Robert W. Creamer – Baseball was different in 1968. The ball was dead, the pitchers worked often and the leagues had eight teams that played day games and sent their champions directly into the World Series. But getting there was hard, especially since it meant beating the likes of Christy Mathewson, Three