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Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com
criterionejournal@gmail.com

Right Off the Bat: Baseball, Cricket, Literature & Life

Evander Lomke & Martin Rowe

Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2011

Pp. x+ 194

Reviewed by Pramod Kumar Das

Ph.D Scholar, Department of English Literature

The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India.

&

Narayan Jena

Ph.D Scholar, Department of Liberal Arts

IIT Hyderabad, India.

In recent years there has been a steady increase in the popularity of cricket, soccer and other sports as different forms of entertainment. *Right Off the Bat* rightly aims to bring about the various facts and facets of cricket and baseball, their similarities and differences in many ways. Each chapter of the book describes a particular aspect of both the games providing ample examples to strengthen the discussion. The chapters demonstrate considerable similarities and variations of both these popular forms of entertainment that has acquired strength from time to time across the globe.

Right Off the Bat explores finely gained similarities and distinctions in baseball and cricket offering a glimpse of the deeper rhythm of these two sports. One of the most important issues this book provides is the presentation of the manifold ways in which time moves through baseball and cricket. The book gives a comprehensive introduction to both these games having temporal references at many parts of the discussion. In the beginning, the authors have given an account of the game played between England and Australia on July, 12, 2009 while giving the introduction of the book. As the pages move on slowly the readers are introduced to many other examples of this kind while flipping through the pages.

Interestingly the chapters of the book are named as different innings including an extra innings. Innings one is introductory in nature. Innings two takes the readers to a different plane by providing the basic outline of the two games: baseball and cricket. Innings three of the book introduces the readers to 'The Ashes and the Close Shave'. The multi-dimensionality of time is discussed prominently in innings four where as the notion of the 'long Run' is explored in innings five. Innings six of the book provides an access to the readers to know how issues of race, class and money play roles in both the sports. The authors have given an opportunity to the readers to take a break for the 'seventh innings stretch and the tea interval'. Innings eight offers the readers a discussion about the global nature of the two games while innings nine constitutes 'the merger' followed by an extra innings-'baseball and cricket on the page and screen'.

Lomke and Rowe provide an account of Sachin Tendulkar's extraordinary calibre as a batsman. As we see:

Today, no one has more control at the crease than Tendulkar, whose height (five feet five inches tall) masks his incredible dominance over bowlers. Tendulkar's ability to work the ball into the gaps in the field and pick up runs almost at will is a testament to the precision with which he decides what to do when the ball is near him. His approach is so fluid and undemonstrative that he seems to acquire runs almost invisibly. (*Right Off the Bat*, p, 70)

Similarly, there is a mention of the outstanding talent of Ted Williams and Darryl Strawberry from South California as baseball players.

There is a reference to William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* in the book in order to enliven the discussion. As we notice:

In their own way, baseball and cricket can gather what William Wordsworth in *The Prelude* calls "spots of time"- moments that enliven the imagination and invest with meaning the transition of hours into days, days into months, and months into years that take us inevitably, from Ashes to ashes." (*Right Off the Bat*, p, 85)

As we proceed further we see that the authors claim that Muthaiya Murlitharan is the highest wicket taker in Test cricket. Australian spinner Shane Warne is next in the list who took 708 wickets in 145 tests at an average of 25.41 runs per wicket. Next record goes to spinner Anil Kumble of India who bagged 619 wickets in 132 tests at 29.65 runs per wicket. Credit goes to Murali as he captured his 800th wicket in only his 133rd Test match at an average of 22.72 runs per wicket; such is his magnificent talent. Between 1980 and 1990 cricket world witnessed three best cricketers of the world. They are Murlitharan, Mahela Jayawardene and Sanat Jaysuriya. The book also talks about the history of Indian Premiere League (IPL) and its pros and cons which was started under the auspices of Lalit Modi who is basically a businessman. The authors strongly believe that the face of the cricket is India now. As they mention:

The face of cricket now belongs to the Indian superstar-whether Sachin Tendulkar, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Virender Sehwag, or whoever will move up the ranks next- whose visage appears on billboards and television screens, in newspaper advertisements and gossip columns. These men are the pulse of the game today, and they command the attention of millions...Even the world-class spinner Harbhajan Singh is appreciated as much for his ability to make the ball talk. India is no longer content with a draw! (P, 152-153)

Towards the end of the book there is a reference to Bernard Malamud's eccentric novel, *The Natural* (1952), Rama Chandra Guha's *A Corner of a Foreign Field: An Indian History of a British Sport*, C.L.R. James's *Beyond a Boundary*, William Boyd's *Good and Bad at Games* (1983), Bollywood extravaganza *Lagaan*, *The Naughty Nineties* (1945) etc. to update the readers on the books written and films made on baseball and cricket.

The book provides a significant contribution within the emergence of literature of sports and will be of interest to researchers working on this emerging field. The book is also ideally suited to sports lovers as it presents many hidden facts of both cricket and baseball in exploring the multi-dimensionality of both these games from within the lived experiences

since the beginning of the game. A special feature of the book is that it is packed with numerous live and exciting examples to support the argument discussed.

As mentioned, this book will serve as a valuable reference and a source of inspiration for scholars and others interested in literature of sports including the lovers of literature as the book contains some of the quotable quotes mentioned rightly at the right places so as to fit into the context which in fact makes the book more interesting and exciting. As we see in the introduction: “As the Friar says to the Wife of Bath in *The Canterbury Tales* , on a pilgrimage to the House that God built, This is a long preamble to a tale”. So without more ado, ‘play ball’”. (Right *Off the Bat*, p, 22)
