

**R. A. R. Edwards.** *Deaf Players in Major League Baseball.* Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2020. 215 pp. \$39.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4766-7017-1.



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**Commissioned by** Iain C. Hutchison (University of Glasgow)

This book gives profiles of the lives and careers of several deaf baseball players in America from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, together with one example each from the 1940s and 1990s. The author seeks to place each individual in the wider contexts of baseball's place in American society and how each instance reflected contemporary attitudes toward deafness and deaf people without speech. Not all the arguments put forward are fully convincing, as evidence of how these deaf individuals were supposedly challenging stereotypical attitudes and responses is not as strong or as extensive as the author suggests.

Having deaf and hearing players on the same team might be considered integration on a physical level, but this does not necessarily mean acceptance. William "Dummy" Hoy insisting that his teammates use sign language seems to have been successful, but there is no consideration of how his colleagues' attitudes might have been influenced by his value to the team. Similarly, claims that there were close similarities with the situation faced by Black players are valid, but the level of

discussion and analysis of these is not followed through to any great extent. Comparisons between Hoy's situation and that of Jackie Robinson (the first Black player in Major League Baseball) founder to some extent due to a lack of information about Robinson or any analysis of their respective experiences.

There are two main drawbacks in this book that contribute to its weaknesses on an academic level. First, for those without an intimate knowledge of baseball's rules, tactics, and statistics (such as myself), much of the information about each player's achievements in the sport means little. Terms such as *balls* and *strikes* are familiar, if their determination is not, but the various percentages given and technical terms used do nothing to draw in the casual reader. The second weakness is the structure of the book, which seems to be based around a collection of individual essays. This itself is not problematic, but more assiduous editing of the material was required. There is constant repetition of detail, incidents, and claims throughout the book and even within chapters that

makes the text tedious to read at times. It is not necessary to constantly remind even complete newcomers to baseball how the signaling system for balls and strikes works. The same is true of the claim that this system originated with Hoy, which appears several times in the book, giving the impression that if this argument is repeated enough times, the reader will become convinced. Devoting a whole chapter of twenty-three pages to someone who only had a very brief career in baseball seems to be justified on the grounds that he was a class warrior for all deaf people. This is framed within the context of Dick Sipek's use of sign language and this particular argument has the benefit of drawing on quotes from Sipek himself, although there is little further evidence to support the debate.

The author clearly has a passion for this subject, but it appears that passion has overtaken any detached analysis and discussion of the subject or the individuals. After reading this book, there is very little that sticks in the mind. "Dummy" Hoy is well known and some readers may find out a little more about his career and life from this book, but the regular claims of his iconic status within the deaf community are accepted rather than challenged or assessed. The others mentioned in the book have much lower profiles so it would have been interesting to see some discussion of why this should be so, given their supposedly pioneering work in challenging misconceptions and acting as role models for other deaf people. This book may be of some interest to those interested in baseball and the role of deaf people in mainstream sport, but there is more missing from this collection than is offered.

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