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*West Virginia Baseball: A History* (review)

Mark S. Myers

West Virginia History: A Journal of Regional Studies, New Series, Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 2007, pp. 107-108 (Review)

Published by West Virginia University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/wvh.2008.0003>



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and outside consultants, many of whom were also involved in a cover-up to conceal the “real story.”

Kruzeski’s analysis is too convoluted to conclusively prove his allegations. He rigidly adheres to a chronological narrative which requires him to repeatedly ask readers to remember details for discussions in later chapters. Kruzeski’s objectivity may also be questioned because he was emotionally invested in many of the events he describes and does not fully explain his involvement. He also too frequently asks readers to read between the lines of extensive quotes and implies misdoing rather than making explicit allegations. Furthermore, the page numbers cited in his endnotes do not match the page numbers in the text. Kruzeski’s analysis would have benefited from listing allegations at the beginning and marshalling evidence to prove them, rather than writing in the style of potboiler, slowly revealing the numerous, confusing details of a convoluted conspiracy.

*WESAP* will be of interest to those who are researching ESOPs, and to those who are already familiar with the individuals involved in the debacle at Weirton Steel. The detailed chronologies at the beginning and end of the book are excellent resources for researching Weirton Steel, and Kruzeski is passionate about communicating the truth to the people of Weirton.

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*West Virginia Baseball: A History.* By William E. Akin. (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland and Company, 2006. Pp. x, 229.)

In this informative and interesting work, William Akin provides a comprehensive history of baseball in West Virginia. More than just an encyclopedic trove of information, Akin’s book attempts to place the history of baseball in the mountain state within the overall social context of the state’s history. Akin argues that, rather than symptomatic of the important events occurring in West Virginia, baseball was a driving force in the social history of the state. Akin further notes that baseball created a unique community based on the social interactions of those who played the game. Through his comparisons of baseball’s development to the major periods in West Virginia’s history, Akin describes how baseball’s fortunes ebbed and flowed with the fortunes of the state.

Overall, *West Virginia Baseball* is an important contribution to the study of the impact of sport on West Virginia. The book also helps to contradict some of the prevalent stereotypes that portray the state in such a negative light. One predominant generalization about the Appalachian

region as a whole is that the region was culturally and physically isolated from the rest of the country. Akin's description of the development of baseball in West Virginia helps to debunk this common view. The spread of the sport throughout the northern region of West Virginia followed the national pattern of organized baseball as an urban endeavor. West Virginia baseball was primarily played in the heavily populated northern areas of the state along the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Ohio River. Further south, people played folk games similar to baseball, but the organization of the sport would not begin in that region until the entry of industry during the late nineteenth century. Akin's description of the development of baseball after World War I is important because it suggests that West Virginia was incorporated into national social patterns, which helps to disprove the common stereotype of West Virginia as an isolated and inherently backward state.

Although Akin does a fine job in connecting baseball to the welfare capitalism prevalent in the coalfields during the industrial period, there is one important weakness in his section on industrialization. At the beginning of the chapter on industrialization in southern West Virginia, Akin argues that the region was "physically, economically, and culturally isolated" before the entrance of the coal companies in the late nineteenth century (108). This is a surprising position, considering his statement that West Virginia is "a land of complexities and paradoxes, a multi-varied state where stereotypes or easy generalizations appear trivial" (1-2). Although the region was somewhat geographically isolated during the nineteenth century, his assumption that it had no connections to the outside world seems to fit into Akin's description of trivial generalization. I would also disagree slightly with his argument that baseball created a unique community throughout the state. Although baseball was an important part of the community, it was the development of industry that created a unique community in many areas of the state. Baseball was symptomatic of the changes taking place in the state, rather than a precipitate.

Despite some of the issues I have with his conception of baseball in the state, I would still recommend the work for those interested in the connection between sport and society in Appalachia. Using extensive newspaper research, Akin does a good job of connecting the history of the sport with the social history of West Virginia. The book also has cross-cultural appeal. It provides a trove of information on the development of professional leagues in West Virginia. As a baseball fan, I enjoyed the work immensely.

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