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Packaging Baseball: How Marketing Embellishes the Cultural Experience by Mathew J. Bartkowiak and Yuya Kiuchi (review)

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When reviewing books of this nature, it is always quite easy to quibble over what is chosen for inclusion and what is excluded from the book. Certainly there is a case to be made for the inclusion of the cases Thornton examines.

What is quite remarkable, however, is that neither *Federal Baseball Club of Baltimore v. National League* nor *Toolson v. New York Yankees* is treated in separate chapters. The Federal Baseball case is central to the understanding of the antitrust exemption and would seem to be a case that would be featured in a book titled *Legal Decisions That Shaped Modern Baseball*. The Toolson case might be of less importance, but it did move the antitrust issue forward. Both cases were cited in the Flood decision, and of course, *Federal Baseball* was the controlling case for the decision. Thornton does discuss these cases in the context of the Flood case, but a full treatment prior to dealing with the Flood case would seem to have been advisable. It is also somewhat surprising that Danny Gardella's legal battle with baseball is not mentioned in connection with the antitrust issue.

There are times in these chapters that the significance of the cases chosen is not clear. Greater attention to that issue would be helpful. Cases involving stadium injuries, the fight over Barry Bonds's home run ball, and the batting championship of 1910 are interesting and entertaining reading, but their significance seems to be slight.

In the end this is a book that should and will find an audience. The larger baseball public will find many of the cases quite interesting, as indeed they are. Many of the examinations of the judicial decisions are informative, enlightening, and explained clearly. Thornton compensates for the unevenness of the book with some strong chapters and sections, and ultimately *Legal Decisions That Shaped Modern Baseball* does advance our understanding of this important part of baseball history.

Mathew J. Bartkowiak and Yuya Kiuchi. *Packaging Baseball: How Marketing Embellishes the Cultural Experience*. Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2012. 216 pp. Paper, \$39.95.

Roberta Newman

As its title suggests, *Packaging Baseball: How Marketing Embellishes the Cultural Experience* ostensibly deals with marketing the major-league product outside the lines, from bobblehead giveaways to wide-scale globalization, in

relation to the culture of the game. While a vast body of literature has been published scrutinizing the marketing of baseball, most particularly in publications dedicated to the business of sport, there has been surprisingly little work done on the cultural meaning of sports marketing, and much of what has been written tends to focus on the Olympics. *Packaging Baseball*, therefore, should be a welcome addition to the literature. But overall, this work misses the mark.

In a previous work entitled “More Than Just the Crack of the Bat,” published in *Rockin’ RBIS: Popular Music and Baseball* (New York: Praeger, 2012), authors Mathew J. Bartkowiak and Yuya Kiuchi examine walk-on music as part of the “larger sound politics of the ballpark” (11). Treating the ballpark as sacred space, a conceit common to the cultural analysis of baseball, the authors rely upon theories as varied as Emile Durkheim’s notion of “collective effervescence” and what they identify as “Aristotle’s idea on music and leisure” (17) to undergird their argument that, in some vague manner, walk-on music functions as marketing. Indeed, in spite of their discussion of “use values” and the dubious claim that music interrupts the “quiet space” of the ballpark, the authors do little to indicate exactly how player walk-on music works in this regard. Although Bartkowiak and Kiuchi eventually conclude that individual teams use specific walk-up songs to “brand” individual players, their clearest example of this practice is fictional—the use of “Wild Thing” in the film *Major League* to identify pitcher Ricky Vaughn. When the authors reference actual players and their music—citing, for example, Prince Fielder’s preferred walk-on music, the “Theme from *Shaft*”—they do not explore the commercial impact of player music choice. Nor do they expound upon how different players who choose the same music, albeit on different teams, are differentiated from one another in the marketplace.

The authors make some interesting points in this chapter regarding the use of music in ballparks, particularly when not addressing marketing issues. *Packaging Baseball*, however, is considerably less successful when dealing with its stated subject matter. The second chapter, which focuses on the uses of bobbleheads and other ballpark giveaways as marketing tools, has the potential for cogent analysis. But there is very little here. The authors’ research is far from comprehensive. For the most part, they derive their information on fan responses to giveaways—an important feature of any work purporting to scrutinize the ways in which marketing adds to the cultural experience of the game—from postings on a variety of websites. While fan postings may serve as important examples of the impact of giveaways, postings alone provide thin justification for the authors’ conclusions. Responses to *SI.com*’s rankings of ballpark promotions, for example, are certainly entertaining, but they do not

scholarly research make. A fan who resents his team's practice of only giving bobbleheads to children because he prefers not to pay "10-year-olds \$10 to get a bobblehead" (37) and the like hardly serve as sufficient evidence to support arguments both on the success and cultural importance of giveaways.

Only in later chapters that deal more specifically with MLB's marketing of the game on a global level, most particularly in Japan, does *Packaging Baseball* begin to approach its stated subject. But where the earlier chapters deal specifically, if not especially effectively, with ideas of cultural embellishment, the globalization sections pay less attention to the fan experience than to MLB's commercial interests. Indeed, the impact of marketing on fan culture takes a backseat to the discussion of the ways in which globalization changes the culture of professional baseball for the players. While this is certainly an interesting topic, it is not the stated focus of this work—to "decode baseball today, and not just the sport itself, but the experience that constitutes Major League Baseball today" (2). Neither are the presumed anti-American bias of the International Olympic Committee or the anemic play of the United States' national team in the World Baseball Classic, topics that receive considerable attention here.

Writing about the effect of MLB's commercial interests in Japan, the authors note, "Although relevant industries in Japan, MLB's Japanese office, and the Japanese professional baseball league try to identify various ways to generate profit through Japanese baseball players in the U.S., they has [sic] not been successful erasing the common idea that the trans-Pacific baseball diplomacy resulted in the loss in Japanese culture and sport" (131). As this passage indicates, *Packaging Baseball* is beset with problems far more serious than its soft and shifting focus on its stated subject matter. Despite its lack of heft, *Packaging Baseball* might have been at the very least a good read, had it, in fact, been well written or well edited. Given the professional background of the authors—Bartkowiak is an associate professor of English at the University of Wisconsin at Marshfield-Wood County and Kiuchi is an assistant professor of writing, rhetoric, and American culture at Michigan State University—it is rather surprising that *Packaging Baseball* is so riddled with awkward syntax, repetition, and lack of clarity. Particularly unfortunate in this regard is the way in which interviews are presented in this text.

Without a doubt, interviews with MLB officials and others intimately involved with the marketing of the game have the potential to serve as important tools in support of the authors' arguments. And Bartkowiak and Kiuchi make frequent use of interviews, most notably in the globalization sections. As such, their interview with Brad Horn, senior director of communications and education at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, certainly

has its place in this text. But while the interview appears to have yielded some interesting information, the way in which it is presented, in the form of an unedited transcript, makes that information difficult to locate and process. A full page-and-a-half anecdote detailing Kiuchi's unfortunate refusal of an offer by the Red Sox to become Daisuke Matsuzaka's translator—as well as how “Mat was in the same office with me and that's when we started talking about ‘you know it's quite interesting to see how some random things happen with the globalization of Major League Baseball’”—precedes any statement by Horn other than, “Oh, okay” (97). Although explaining the genesis of the project to an interviewee may be a good way to commence an interview, it is not germane to this portion of the text, especially when presented in this manner.

Although *Packaging Baseball* attempts to take on a subject much in need of study—a subject which led its authors to say, “Okay, let's write an academic book on this, so we could talk about things that many people, typical baseball fans, were not really talking about” (97)—this work fails. This is particularly unfortunate, as its failure leaves a gap in the literature which it ought to have filled.

Rob Fleder. *Damn Yankees: Twenty-Four Major League Writers on the World's Most Loved (and Hated) Team*. New York: Ecco, 2012. 304 pp. Cloth, \$27.99.

Adi Angel

Rob Fleder invited twenty-four writers to contribute their feelings about the Yankees without devolving into “the never-ending bar-stool chatter that sustains baseball fans,” focusing instead on the “idea of the Yankees” (2). As a result, Fleder brings together the memories and remembrances of many notable contemporary authors (many of whom are familiar names from *The New Yorker* and *Sports Illustrated*), including Jane Leavy, Colum McCann, Pete Dexter, and Roy Blount, Jr. While many of the stories are overwhelmingly friendly to the home team, Fleder has compiled a selection that ranges from the introspective to the genuinely funny, from the historical to the sentimental. The result: a collection that simultaneously seeks to dismantle essentialist conceptions of the Yankees, while casually reifying many of the stereotypes, tales, and glories of Yankee lore and fandom. Accessible, funny, and delight-