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*Hairs vs. Squares: The Mustache Gang, the Big Red Machine,
and the Tumultuous Summer of '72* by Ed Gruver (review)

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1969 season, Gmelch declined and pursued his studies and a fellow anthropologist, Sharon Bohn, whom he would later marry. The following year, Gmelch returned to Drummondville, but he only stayed a few weeks as his life had moved in new directions.

In writing this memoir, Gmelch expressed few regrets, but he did observe that as a young man his actions were often immature. Similar to the vast majority of athletes who enter the minor leagues, he failed to reach the big leagues, but Gmelch concludes that his baseball experiences, including the failures, provided him with transferable skills that served him well later in life. He does lament, however, that the end of his baseball career marked a decline in the relationship with his father. Gmelch concludes, "Given the clash between my father's conservative, probusiness, staunchly Republican politics, and his commitment to the American suburban, consumerism way of life and my emergent antiwar, antimaterialist, and leftist sympathies, baseball was where we found common ground. My father would never find the same satisfaction in my future academic achievements" (240). For many of us who came of age in the 1960s, these sentiments are all too familiar; allowing the reader, who never had the baseball talent of a George Gmelch, to recall bittersweet memories of baseball, family, and the 1960s. George Gmelch is to be congratulated for the courage it took to write this memorable chronicle of life and baseball in the 1960s.



Ed Gruver. *Hairs vs. Squares: The Mustache Gang, the Big Red Machine, and the Tumultuous Summer of '72.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. pp. 386. Cloth, \$29.95.

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The year 1972 became etched in American history as the U.S. extricated the last of its ground troops from Vietnam, "Hanoi Jane" was christened, and Richard Nixon won a landslide re-election bid for the presidency, with the seeds of his undoing having been planted at the Watergate complex a few months before ballots were cast. NASA's Apollo program concluded late that year, and in the world of sports—so to speak—the American Bobby Fischer prevailed over Boris Spassky of the Soviet Union in what was termed the chess match of the century, a board-game battle in which the eccentric good guy of the west defeated a Russian perceived to represent the evil embodied in communism.

On the Major League Baseball front, a skewed parallel can be drawn between the chess championship participants and the two teams fighting for the World Series crown, the Cincinnati Reds with their trimmed, clean-cut appearance spoke to conservative, patriotic values, and the Oakland Athletics' beards, mustaches, and flowing locks drew quick association with the continuing antiwar movement if not the counterculture of the era. This is the setting of Ed Gruver's work that takes fans on a journey through a most exciting baseball season, culminating in a dramatic fall classic that went the full seven games.

Gruver's light approach is infused in a narrative that will appeal to readers wishing to revisit a thrilling year and those desiring to learn the basics of the game then in just its fourth season of divisional play following the 1969 expansion of both leagues. The text has a sprinkling of puns and is peppered with cultural colloquialisms that speak to the early 1970s, such as "The A's . . . were California dreamin' . ." (321), and John Mayberry's "batting average (.222) [being] the same as the title of a popular TV show at the time, *Room 222*" (161). This gimmickry makes the book a breezy read, and there are some passages which he handles well, such as the formation of the rosters of the World Series combatants and the trying labor dispute that forced games to be cancelled at the onset of the regular season in April.

The ultimate stars of the book—the Athletics and the Reds, a.k.a. the "Hairs" and "Squares", respectively, in the book's title, and as nicknamed according to *The Dickson Baseball Dictionary*—emerge with Series champion Oakland pulling off an upset despite being without the services of injured slugger Reggie Jackson. Gruver provides a good synopsis of the underdogs winning despite the feeling among many observers that either the Reds or their vanquished NLCS opponents, the Pittsburgh Pirates, were really 1972's best baseball teams.

The author's observations and writing technique unfortunately cannot overcome the weaknesses of the book. Although the text follows a chronological timeline in its fifteen chapters and epilogue, the chapters have no title that hints at the content therein, and with no index included, the reader is helpless to search for specific players or topics. In an effort to make game action come alive, Gruver injects transcriptions of radio and TV play-by-play that capture key moments, but he does this so often—dozens of times—that it seems like the book is fully underpinned by the words of Bob Prince, Curt Gowdy, and other broadcasters. The most glaring omission related to those in the booth, and one who was always mentioned by Gowdy, is the name of Alan Roth, whose statistics enhanced NBC coverage in an era when provision of data was informative even if it was primitive by today's standards.

There are also instances in which the author wanders away from the subject

at hand rather than devote complete attention to it, notably at the opening of Game 1 of the World Series. After describing the top of the first inning, Gruver launches a two-page discussion of various umpires, leaving the reader to wonder what happened to the game. Such diversions could have been eliminated in favor of deeper exploration of other topics—appropriately placed in the narrative—that would have provided a richer context to current events: How did Bowie Kuhn come to reinstate Bert Campaneris in time for the Series following his infamous bat-throwing incident in the ALCS? How did American League pitchers fare at the plate in this the final season before the implementation of the DH? What prompted the Pirates to hire their former outfielder, Bill Virdon, for his first managerial job, and what made his debut as a skipper so successful? Readers get no detailed explanations, and with regard to the last question, Virdon just suddenly appears as the “1972 Bucs boss” (234).

Serious fans and historians will also note that the book cries out for fact-checking that cannot be masked by quips like “Finley making more deals than Monty Hall” (163–64) or the Athletics’ left fielder having “a Rudi awakening” (317). To wit, John Kennedy was the first black to play for the Phillies, not Dick Allen; Catfish Hunter did not challenge the reserve clause—he sued for breach of contract when Charlie Finley fell into arrears on premiums to be paid on an annuity for Hunter; Rod Carew admitted that he had issues with his employer, the Minnesota Twins, but the team was hardly “torn apart with racial strife” (198); George Weiss was the New York Yankee general manager, not the team owner; Jim Fregosi was not an All-Star third baseman; and New York’s Mayor’s Trophy Games from 1946 to 1955 would have involved the Giants, not the Mets. A very thin bibliography further weakens a text supported by no footnotes or endnotes, thereby casting a shadow over a story that, because of the author’s casual writing style, impresses as infotainment.

The events and personalities of baseball in 1972 contributed their own uniqueness to the national pastime at the dawn of the designated hitter and as the reserve clause was only a few years away from extinction. Perhaps in the future another book will re-examine this interesting baseball season with a tighter and more serious focus.

