

The End of Baseball As We Knew It: The Players' Union, 1960–81. By *Charles Korr*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002. xviii + 336 pp. Index, notes, photographs. Cloth, \$34.95. ISBN 0-252-02752-3.

Reviewed by Andrew Zimbalist.

There was a revolution in baseball in 1977. That year, after living under the reserve system since 1879, major league baseball players were granted free agency. Baseball became the first team sport in the United States to introduce open, competitive bidding among teams for veteran players, but it did not do so without a struggle.

Prior to 1977, each player was the property of one team. Unable either to receive competing offers or to choose where they could play, players had little bargaining power. The story of Mickey Mantle, a charismatic twenty-five-year-old center fielder and winner of the 1956 Triple Crown (he led the league in home runs, runs batted in, and batting average), provides one example. Unhappy with a salary of less than \$80,000, he asked for a substantial raise, and was told not only that he was too young but also that, if he continued to pursue increased wages, the owner might have to show his wife a private detective's report about his active night life.

Ewing Kauffman, owner of the Kansas City Royals, had this to say about baseball's days before the introduction of free agency: "The owners did not give in on anything. . . . In 1972, owners had the whip hand. Players were chattel. I didn't know of any industry as archaic as baseball was then . . ." (p. 113).

With the advent of free agency, players who had six years of major league experience could offer their skills on the open market and decide for whom they wanted to play. Average player salaries shot up from \$44,676 in 1975 to \$113,558 in 1979 and continued their upward spiral thereafter (the average salary in 2002 was \$2.38 million). Baseball's labor market thus experienced an upheaval. Charles Korr, in *The End of Baseball As We Knew It*, tells the story of how this happened and demonstrates its significance.

Korr's treatment can be distinguished from several other competent histories of baseball's labor relations in his access to the union's archives—including letters to and from the Major League Baseball Players Association during its early years in the 1950s through 1981 (when Korr's narrative stops), the union's written summaries of bargaining sessions, and the union leaders' analyses of events. Korr uses this material cleverly and economically, weaving in interviews with many of the key actors and incorporating journalistic accounts from each period.

What emerges is a lively and poignant history of what is often described as America's most powerful and successful union. Korr attributes the union's success to the brilliance of Marvin Miller's leadership—both his tactical genius and his insistence on ongoing, open communications with the players—and to the repeated blunders made by the owners and their chief negotiators.

Korr argues that there were three defining moments in the union's history. The first occurred in the mid-1960s, when players like Robin Roberts and Jim Bunning led the transformation of the Players Association's approach by deciding to challenge the owners' presumed right to dictate how the game was organized. This led, in 1966, to the hiring of Miller, who immediately instilled a new attitude, described as follows by the young Red Sox outfielder Reggie Smith: "Marvin was there to help players learn how to think for themselves" (p. 40).

The second event was the signing of the 1968 basic collective-bargaining agreement (baseball's first), which included the establishment of a grievance procedure. Korr writes: "The grievance procedure was the foundation for the gains made by the association. It enabled the players to deal on an equal basis with their employers, broadened their horizons about what might be accomplished, and provided the mechanism that led to free agency."

Korr's third defining moment was the fourteen-day players' strike in 1972. Although the strike primarily was over a rather small issue—funding for the pension fund—the players prevailed, establishing credibility for the union and bolstering their self-confidence.

Korr's narrative and his interpretation of the union's evolution are persuasive. His ability to set each of the union's struggles in a larger context and to focus on the key events is probably his strongest contribution.

The book's only weakness is the same one that inevitably afflicts Marvin Miller's wonderful autobiography and baseball-union history, *A Whole Different Ball Game*. Although Korr works hard to maintain a balance, his book is skewed to the players' side of the story. Part of this is ineluctable—it is the players' archives to which Korr had access—but part of the bias in treatment stems from Korr's own predilection. He interviews all the relevant actors on the union side, including scores of players, but only a handful on the owners' side. There is, for instance, no interview with either former owner-negotiator Rey Grebey or Commissioner Bowie Kuhn. If Korr tried to talk to them, we are not told of the attempt.

Korr, however, is writing a history of the union, and it may well be that there is little compelling defense for the owners' positions over time. A crucial component of baseball's collective-bargaining history was the degree of divisiveness that existed among the owners. Unable to develop a cohesive plan for the game's future, baseball's barons arrive at the

bargaining table in agreement on only on one goal: weakening the union. In contrast, the players were unified. Korr's well-written account illuminates the story of their unity. However, the owners' side of baseball's collective-bargaining history remains to be told.

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